

THE GOLDEN QUEST

Maxwell Grant

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THE GOLDEN QUEST

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CHAPTER I. THE HEIR RETURNS

REX BRODFORD smiled as he stared from the window of his cab. Broadway lights were glimmering with early evening brilliance. Times Square presented a kaleidoscopic luster of ever-changing illumination.

Hurrying throngs beneath the vari-hued glow. Raucous horns; shrill whistles; the surflike roar of traffic – all formed a symphony that symbolized New York. The medley was music to Rex Brodford. He was back in the metropolis after years of absence.

Broadway's glare showed Rex Brodford as a young man of less than thirty. His features were large, yet well molded. His heavy eyebrows were set beneath a broad forehead that was matched by the squareness of his chin. Smooth-shaven, his cheeks were dark with tropical tan.

Rex Brodford looked like a man who had returned from some foreign clime. The maturity of his sun-dyed face was evidence of the ten years that he had spent in Central America. Even his smile betokened him as a

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man who had overcome hazards. For Rex Brodford's lips bore only the slightest upward curve.

Ten years in the tropics. Rex Brodford was reviewing the past decade as the cab shot away from the thickness of the Times Square traffic. While he watched the approaching glimmer of Columbus Circle, the young man found himself unconsciously thinking of his own affairs.

He had not expected to come back to New York. Not until he had received that cablegram from Cyrus Witherby, his uncle's lawyer. Ten days ago, Rex had found the message awaiting him at the American Club in Tegucigalpa. It had announced the death of old Ezra Brodford, and had added that Rex was the sole heir to his uncle's estate.

Uncle Ezra. To Rex, the old man had been no more than a name. He had never met his father's eldest brother. He had never expected to be remembered in Uncle Ezra's will. Thus the news had come from an unclouded sky. Chance – fate – whatever it might be – had decreed that Rex Brodford should return to New York.

The cab had passed Columbus Circle. It was veering left, twisting through a puzzling maze of byways. The glitter of an avenue; then the darkness of a side street. Another avenue; a short run down a narrow thoroughfare that was lined with old brownstone buildings. The cab came to a stop.

Rex Brodford alighted. He looked up toward a dully lighted transom above a heavy door at the top of brownstone steps. He saw the number that he had given the driver. He had arrived at the home of his deceased uncle.

TAXI paid, Rex ascended the steps and rang a bell. A faraway clang answered. The door popped open; Rex Brodford faced a dry-faced servant, who viewed him with an air of semi-suspicion. Rex announced his name.

"Ah! Mr. Brodford!" The servant bowed in menial fashion, as he stepped back into the vestibule. "Step right in, sir. I had not expected you so soon."

"Your name is Firth?" questioned Rex, as he stepped into the house.

"Yes, sir," acknowledged the servant, his voice a trifle wheezy. "Your uncle's servant, Mr. Brodford."

"So I understand," stated Rex. He extended his hand. "I am glad to meet you, Firth. Tell me, is Mr. Witherby here?"

"Yes, sir," wheezed Firth, "and also Mr. Laspar. Mr. Cortland Laspar, an old friend of your uncle's. Step right this way, Mr. Brodford."

Firth conducted Rex toward the rear of a long hall. They came to a doorway where light glimmered from beyond heavy curtains. Firth drew one drapery aside.

Rex Brodford entered the room. He found himself in a book-walled library, where two men were engaged in conversation.

Both rose to greet the newcomer. One man stalked forward. Tall, stoop-shouldered, he thrust forward a long, clawlike hand and displayed a smile upon a lean face that was topped by a glistening bald head. Rex Brodford knew that this must be Cyrus Witherby, his uncle's lawyer.

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Witherby cackled his own introduction. Then the lawyer turned to indicate the other man. Rex Brodford shook hands with a round-faced, gray-haired gentleman who wore a quiet, friendly smile.

"This is Mr. Laspar," introduced Witherby. "Mr. Cortland Laspar, who has lumber interests in Michigan. An old friend of your Uncle Ezra. One of the last to see your uncle before he died."

Witherby's tone had struck a note of solemnity. The lawyer motioned Rex to a chair. The young man sat down and the others followed suit. Witherby reached beside his chair and drew up a portfolio.

"Let us come to business first," decided the lawyer. "Mr. Laspar is leaving New York tonight; and I want him to know the details of your uncle's will before his departure. You see" – Witherby paused to adjust a pair of pince-nez spectacles to his nose – "your uncle named administrators in case you did not claim the estate. Mr. Laspar is one of them."

"One of those who will not be called upon," inserted Laspar, with a genial chuckle. "Your arrival, Rex, lets half a dozen of your uncle's friends avoid the duty of giving funds to charity. As the will now stands, all of your uncle's estate goes to you."

"Unless Rex should refuse it," added Witherby. "That is why Mr. Laspar and the other administrators should know the details of the legacy."

"I understand," declared Rex, with a smile. "But since the estate was intended for me, I choose to accept it."

"Quite naturally," agreed Witherby. He was referring to the papers that he had taken from the portfolio. "Here is everything for your inspection. If you wish, I can give you a brief resume of the items concerned."

"All right," nodded Rex.

"CONSERVATIVELY totaled," obliged Witherby, in a dry cackle, "the estate will bring a trifle upward of fifty thousand dollars. That includes real estate and salable securities. Less mortgages and inheritance tax."

"Fifty thousand dollars," mused Rex. "Quite a considerable sum, Mr. Witherby. Less, though, than I supposed my uncle's estate would be."

"Quite right," agreed Witherby. "And this sheet explains the answer. Your uncle, Rex, was very unfortunate in his investments. He tossed away nearly half a million dollars in worthless projects.

"For instance" – the lawyer leaned over and pointed to items on the list – "he invested fifty thousand dollars in Montana Shale. That company went bankrupt. Here is an item of forty thousand dollars. Calgary Oil. Another defunct corporation.

"These stock certificates, you understand, will be delivered to you. But I have investigated all of them and I can assure you that they are worthless. Here" – the lawyer ran his finger down the list – "is the most unfortunate of the lot. An item of two hundred thousand dollars. The controlling interest in the Quest Gold Mine."

"Another dead company?" inquired Rex.

"Yes," replied Witherby. "Just one more of your uncle's unfortunate mistakes. Of course, Rex, I shall expect you to look into these investments for yourself. It is only right that you should assure yourself of their worthlessness. I hope that you will not be too critical of your uncle's mistakes."

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"Why should I be?" returned Rex promptly. "It was Uncle Ezra's money. He had the right to invest it as he chose. I always understood, though, that my uncle was a keen old chap. This one item, in particular, interests me: the Quest Gold Mine. Even the name savors of adventure: You say that this company also failed?"

"Not exactly," replied Witherby. "It still exists – on paper. But I can assure you that the Quest Gold Mine offers no possibilities, despite the fact that your uncle had hopes for it up until the very day of his death."

Rex Brodford raised his eyebrows questioningly. Before Cyrus Witherby could reply, Cortland Laspar leaned forward in his chair.

"I can tell you about the Quest Gold Mine," volunteered the gray-haired man. "I, too, invested in it. Twenty-five thousand dollars, some thirty years ago, when it appeared to be a good gamble.

"Then funds failed" – Laspar paused reminiscently – "and the Quest mine was abandoned. Ten years – twelve years – passed. The mine was forgotten. The company needed funds, in order to exist as a corporation. Your uncle prevailed upon me to supply them."

"You bought more stock?" queried Rex, in surprise.

"No," replied Laspar, "I simply purchased the timber rights to the land on which the Quest mine is located. The tract borders on Lake Chalice, in Michigan. I bought some acreage on the opposite side of the lake and started a lumber camp there. I have been paying for the timber rights to the Quest mine tract; but as yet, I have not begun to clear it."

"Then the mine might be worked again?"

"Not a chance of it! The very site of the shaft is gone. My foresters, surveying the ground less than a year ago, could find no trace of it. Somewhere, lost in an area of several hundred acres, is the forgotten shaft of the closed mine."

Witherby nodded in corroboration of Laspar's statement. Rex Brodford was about to speak when Laspar forestalled him.

"I KNOW what you are thinking," remarked the lumber magnate, with a smile. "It would still be possible to excavate in hope of striking the old shaft. But that would be a costly process; and furthermore, recent events would prove it useless."

"Recent events?" queried Rex.

"Yes," nodded Laspar. "A few years ago, a new company purchased a large acreage adjoining the property of the Quest mine. This new concern – called the Chalice Gold Mine – has spent a fortune digging a shaft of its own. No results were gained, and the mine fell into the hands of shrewd swindlers who have been selling worthless stock.

"One man" – Laspar shook his head sadly at the thought – "even came to me with his worthless proposition. This fellow was a rascal named Jubal. He was calling on the old purchasers of Quest stock, trying to sell them shares in the Chalice mine. He had the nerve to think that people who had been foolish once would be foolish always."

"Suckers often bite twice," cackled Witherby.

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"Thank you," chuckled Laspar blandly. "I was one who did not. I practically threw this swindler Jubal out of my office. He never returned after that one visit. As for the Chalice mine, it is on the edge of failure. The company burrowed shaft after shaft without digging up a lump of pay dirt."

"Which proves," suggested Rex, "that the territory about Lake Chalice has no gold."

"No," said Laspar, "not entirely. Some worthwhile ore was mined in the old Quest mine during the early days of its operation. Yet the mine failed. Cold facts prove the inadvisability of new attempts in that district."

As he finished speaking, Laspar glanced at his watch. He replaced the timepiece in his pocket and stepped to a corner where his hat and coat were lying.

"Almost train time," the gray-haired man commented. He extended his hand to Rex Brodford. "I am leaving; but I hope to see you again in the near future. Should you find opportunity to come out to Michigan, visit me at my lodge on Lake Chalice."

"And look over the Quest mine land?" laughed Rex.

"Yes," responded Laspar. "The surface of it, at least, is under my jurisdiction. You will be free to roam the timber land as you please."

Laspar shook hands with Witherby. Rex and the lawyer accompanied the lumber magnate to the door. Firth appeared and started ahead, stating that he would call a cab. Laspar shook his head, remarking that he would have sufficient time to walk to the avenue.

WITH Laspar gone, Rex and Witherby returned to the library. The attorney began to go over the items in the lists of the estate. He noticed that Rex was not attending. Witherby spoke sharply, almost querulously.

"Perhaps we should leave these matters until later," was his sour comment. The lawyer arose as he spoke and shoved the papers back into the portfolio. "Come to my office, after I have talked with the other administrators. I can then supply you with funds from the estate."

"Sorry, Mr. Witherby," returned Rex, following the lawyer through the curtained door. "I was thinking of a matter that we had mentioned. It occupied my full thoughts."

"The Quest Gold Mine?" Witherby's sharp query came when they had reached the hall.

"Yes," admitted Rex. "Mr. Witherby, I have a hunch that my uncle was right concerning that investment. It is worth investigating."

Witherby was picking up hat and coat; his garments had been left on the hall table.

"Folly runs in your family," cackled the old lawyer. "The fortune you have gained is a slender one. Yet I presume you will be ready to waste it in following your uncle's hopeless schemes."

"The scheme may not be so hopeless," Rex said slowly. "It is my feeling that I may be following a well-laid plan of my uncle's."

Firth had entered the hallway. The dry-faced servant was standing by the curtained door to the library. Neither Rex nor Witherby noted his watching.

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"I intend to go to Michigan," decided Rex. "Unless I decide to change my plans, I shall leave late tomorrow night."

"No funds will be available," warned Witherby.

"I can collect them later," returned Rex. "We shall arrange that tomorrow, at your office. I have money of my own for the present."

"You intend to look for the lost shaft of the Quest mine?"

"Exactly! Furthermore, I expect to find it."

"You will waste your legacy –"

"Not by a one–man search."

Firth, standing in the hallway, was reaching for a telephone. Plucking the instrument from a table, the servant stepped through the curtains into the library, carrying the long extension cord with him.

Rex and Witherby had reached the outer door. Neither had observed the servant's action.

As Rex opened the door, Witherby plucked a gold–headed cane from an umbrella rack. With this last item of equipment added to hat and coat, the stoop–shouldered lawyer was prepared to leave. But as he stood on the brownstone door sill, Witherby could not refrain from caustic comment.

"SUIT yourself, young man," he snorted. "Be like your uncle. Refuse to follow wise advice. Waste your legacy, if you choose, but never say that I did not warn you.

"That stock of yours is in safe–keeping, worthless though it is. You hold the controlling interest in the Quest Gold Mine. That, however, is your misfortune."

"Just what would you advise?" questioned Rex, as Witherby paused.

"To forget it!" snapped Witherby. "Unless you could rid yourself of that idiotic investment. At two cents on the dollar, a sale of Quest mine stock would be a profitable transaction. But no fool would offer you such a proposition."

Rex Brodford smiled as he extended his hand. Old Witherby accepted the farewell shake; then turned about, mumbling, and strode down the steps, leaning heavily on his cane.

Rex watched the lawyer click away along the sidewalk. Witherby, too, was heading for the avenue. Then, with a shrug of his shoulders, the young man reentered the house.

Firth was stepping from the living room as Rex closed the door. Quickly, the servant replaced the telephone upon the table; then stepped aside as Rex approached.

The young man did not observe Firth's action. Nor did he do more than scarcely notice the servant. For Rex, musingly drawing a cigarette from his pocket, was lost in thought as he strolled back into the curtained library.

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Rex Brodford was thinking of his plan to visit Michigan, there to begin a search for the lost shaft of the Quest Gold Mine. Firth knew the trend of his new master's thought. That fact was plain by the twisted smile that appeared upon the servant's parchment-like features.

For Firth had already profited by learning Rex Brodford's intention. He had made a prompt call by telephone, without Rex's knowledge. A step had been made toward the culmination of some hidden, insidious scheme.

That smile which slowly faded from the lips of Firth boded ill for Rex Brodford and his future plans.

CHAPTER II. THE TELEPHONE CLUE

AT half past four the next afternoon, a sallow-faced man was standing by the window of a lofty hotel room, looking idly out across Manhattan. With eyes that blinked beady from between slitted lids; with dark, pointed mustache trimmed to a thin line, this individual exhibited a shrewd appearance.

From the gloating smile that showed upon his pasty lips, the sallow man would have impressed an observer as being a schemer deluxe. Alone in this room, he had no reason to veil his true type. Craftiness showed unrestricted on his jaundice-tinged countenance.

This man was James Jubal, star promoter of the fading Chalice Gold Mine. He was the swindler whom Cortland Laspar had mentioned to Rex Brodford, less than twenty-four hours ago.

Retaining his distorted smile, Jubal ran long-nailed fingers through a crop of sleek, black hair. He chuckled with contempt as he viewed the pygmy figures of the throngs in the streets below. James Jubal was a man with but little human sympathy. People, to him, were nothing more than potential victims for sharp double-dealing.

A telephone bell tingled. Jubal turned from the window and picked up the instrument. He raised the receiver, then spoke in a silky purr that he used in usual conversation.

"This is James Jubal speaking..."

A wheezy voice interrupted across the wire. Jubal recognized it. His purring tone ended. He spoke quickly, in terse, brusque phrases:

"Yes, Firth..." Jubal was talking to old Ezra Brodford's servant. "You say he is back... Yes, a visit to the lawyer... I see. You're calling from a drug store... Go ahead... Yes, tell me more..."

"You told me last night that young Brodford might go to Michigan... What's that? You're sure he is going? I see... Bought his ticket and reservations this afternoon... That's news, all right... Midnight train, you say..."

A pause. Firth's voice wheezed in Jubal's ear. The swindler listened; then gave brief instructions.

"I'll call young Brodford myself," he announced. "Yes... Right away... Yes, you go back to the house... I'll make an appointment for this evening... Yes, you be ready to cooperate... All right, Firth, give me the number..."

JUBAL listened; while he did so, he picked up a pencil from the table and made a notation on a pad that was attached to the telephone. He ended his call with Firth. Then Jubal jiggled the hook for the operator. Receiving an answer, he repeated the telephone number that Firth had given him.

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A minute passed. Then came a voice. The tone was a quiet, easy "Hello." Jubal began to speak in his accustomed purr.

"Hello..." Jubal smiled as he spoke. "Mr. Brodford? Mr. Rex Brodford? My name is Jubal, James Jubal. Dealer in investments. Gold mines, in particular. I want to talk to you about an excellent offering..."

"Chalice Gold Mines is the security that I am selling... A Michigan venture... What's that? No, no... You have been misinformed, Mr. Brodford. The Chalice mine is located in an ideal district..."

"The Quest Gold Mine? Certainly, I have heard of it... Yes, I know that you hold stock in the Quest mine... Yes, that is how I learned your name... Suppose, Mr. Brodford, that we get together and talk over the matter of mines in Michigan. It will prove to your advantage."

"Yes, tonight would be excellent... I can be there by half past ten... Your address? Perhaps you had better give it to me. I would prefer to call at your home... Certainly, to be free from disturbance..."

Jubal made new notations on his pad. He marked down the address of the Brodford residence and added the note "10:30 p.m.;" then, in suave fashion, the promoter concluded the telephone call.

The smile that appeared upon Jubal's lips showed that the swindler was counting heavily upon his appointment with Rex Brodford.

A rap sounded at the door of the room. Jubal twisted about, nervously. He shot a suspicious glance toward the barrier; then laughed slightly. He strolled over and opened the door. A young man was standing in the hallway.

JUBAL eyed the visitor. He saw a keen-looking chap of about thirty, a man who looked prosperous and clean-cut. The promoter's beady eyes encountered a frank gaze.

"Mr. James Jubal?" inquired the arrival, in a steady but affable tone.

"Yes," returned Jubal.

"I am Harry Vincent," announced the young man, extending his hand. "I tried to call you from the lobby, but your telephone was busy –"

"Step right in, Mr. Vincent," exclaimed Jubal, receiving the handshake. "Over here. Take the chair by the window. I had forgotten that you might drop in today."

"Well, Vincent" – Jubal added the comment as he produced a cigar from his pocket – "it is indeed a pleasure to meet you. At last, we have been able to get together. But I have bad news for you."

"Regarding the Chalice mine stock?" inquired the visitor.

"Yes," replied Jubal. "I have been unable to acquire any more shares. There are absolutely none on the market!"

"That's odd, Mr. Jubal. My friend Mann assured me that a purchase would be possible."

"Mann is a conservative investment broker. He is not familiar with stocks of the Chalice mine type. You understand, of course, that the Chalice mine is a speculative venture?"

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"I do. But I was certain that shares still remained unsold. Mann said –"

"Mann probably said that shares were available. In a sense, he is right. Much of the Chalice mine stock is unsold. But" – Jubal paused emphatically – "those particular shares are under option. They can not be acquired until released by the option holders."

Harry Vincent nodded his understanding.

"This very afternoon" – Jubal spread his arms in a gesture of despair – "I talked to three option holders, begging them to release shares that were wanted by customers such as you. They refused me. Every one of them refused me!" Jubal pounded his right fist against his left palm. "All three said that they intended to exert their options; moreover, they announced that they were in the market for further shares, could I obtain them."

"The Chalice mine must be a good proposition," observed Harry.

"It is," assured Jubal. "One that has been retarded, I must admit; but that happens frequently with mining projects. Flooded shafts; ruined equipment; transportation difficulties – all took heavy toll. But those expenditures will be recuperated. I have faith in the Chalice Gold Mine. Real faith, Mr. Vincent."

JUBAL sleeked back his hair. He engaged in momentary meditation, while Harry eyed him in quiet fashion.

Glancing about, Jubal looked toward the telephone. He spied the pad on which he had written Rex Brodford's telephone number and address, with the time of appointment.

Stepping over, Jubal tore the top sheet from the pad. He glanced at it and nodded. Harry could see the promoter reading comments; but the paper was turned so that only Jubal noted the markings. Jubal folded the paper and thrust it into his vest pocket.

"A long–distance call," he remarked. "I must make it at once, Mr. Vincent. To Chicago. Suppose you remain here while I go downstairs."

Harry started to rise from his chair by the window. Jubal stopped him.

"No, no," assured the promoter, "do not misunderstand me. It would be quite all right for you to listen in on the call. But in order to keep my personal expense accounts straight, so they will not be added to the hotel bill, I like to pay cash for my phone calls.

"That is why I prefer to go downstairs to a public pay station. I shall not be more than ten minutes. I can call from the drug store in the next block. Make yourself quite at home, Mr. Vincent."

With this, Jubal made a prompt departure, leaving Harry Vincent puffing at his cigar. As soon as Jubal had gone, a grim smile showed on the visitor's steady lips.

Harry Vincent had been seeking James Jubal with a definite purpose. Ostensibly a young New Yorker with a private income, Harry actually played a hidden but adventurous role. He was an agent of The Shadow. A secret aid to an amazing master who battled all undercurrents of crime.

The Shadow had learned of James Jubal. He knew that the suave man was a swindler. The Shadow had delegated Harry Vincent to contact with Jubal and learn the details of the fake promoter's game. Harry had started his appointed task.

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He had made a mistake in the beginning. By way of introduction to Jubal – through correspondence – Harry had mentioned the name of Rutledge Mann, a New York investment broker.

Mann, like Harry, was a secret agent of The Shadow.

Jubal did not suspect that fact. But Jubal did know that Mann was a dealer in reputable securities. The swindler had therefore suspected that Harry Vincent might be out to trap him. To counteract Harry's efforts, Jubal had been cagey in all his references to the Chalice Gold Mine.

Jubal did not want Harry Vincent on the "sucker list." Harry knew it. But he was making the best of a bad beginning, seeking to lull Jubal. Harry had managed this visit as his first actual meeting with the swindler.

Fifteen minutes passed. Harry had finished his cigar. Jubal had not returned.

The telephone bell jingled. It repeated. Harry answered it. He heard Jubal's voice.

"Mr. Vincent?" Jubal's purr was smooth across the wire. "Sorry to have kept you waiting. Listen, old man; I have to go to Chicago. Just time to catch the next train. I've just checked out, downstairs."

"Wait for me in the lobby," suggested Harry.

"I can't," protested Jubal. "The cab is waiting. Call me next week, old fellow. Good-by."

THE receiver clicked at the other end. Harry Vincent hung up his own telephone. He smiled sourly. He looked about the room, opened a closet door, and saw emptiness. No trace of luggage. James Jubal must have checked all his belongings downstairs.

The rogue had pulled a stall. Harry knew it and felt disgruntled. He should have suspected the game in the beginning; but Jubal had pulled it smoothly. The swindler had dropped Harry like a hot potato.

Chicago? Harry shook his head. That city would not be Jubal's destination. Perhaps the man intended to remain in New York. If there were only some trace of Jubal's real objective, this investigation would not be a total failure.

A thought struck Harry Vincent. The Shadow's agent went to the telephone and examined the pad. He saw marks on the upper sheet: the piece of paper that had been directly beneath the one which Jubal had torn away.

Harry took the pad and carried it to the window. The tracing was illegible; nevertheless, it was the only clue. Finding an envelope, Harry inserted the pad, pocketed it and picked up hat and coat. He strolled from the hotel room.

TWENTY minutes later, Harry Vincent entered the inner office of a suite that was located high in the towering Badger Building. Seated at a mahogany desk, Harry found a chubby-faced man who extended a hand in lethargic fashion. This gentleman was Rutledge Mann.

Briefly, Harry told of his visit to Jubal's. Mann listened; then stared reflectively from the window, eyeing the pinnacles of Manhattan's sky line. Then Mann turned and spoke in deliberate fashion.

"It was a mistake," he granted, "to mention my name. Jubal realized that I would not have sent a customer to him. However, the damage has been done. I shall forward your report."

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"And this goes with it," put in Harry, extending the envelope that contained the pad.

"Yes," agreed Mann. "And in the meantime, Vincent, remain at your own hotel."

Harry Vincent took his leave.

Rutledge Mann found a ready sheet of paper and used a fountain pen to inscribe a message in ink of vivid blue. This writing was in code. Mann allowed the ink to dry; then folded the sheet promptly and inserted it in an envelope. With it he placed the pad that Harry had brought.

It was after half past five. Mann arose, left his office, and took an elevator to the street. There he entered a taxi and rode to Twenty-third Street. Dusk was settling as the chubby-faced investment broker approached an old, dilapidated building.

Mann entered the antiquated structure and ascended a flight of rickety stairs. He followed a dingy hallway and stopped in front of a secluded door. Upon a grimy glass panel appeared the name:

B. JONAS

Mann dropped his envelope in a mail chute in the door. That done, the investment broker strolled away. His part had been completed. That office served as The Shadow's mail box. Later, the mysterious chief would call and obtain the envelope.

The telephone clue had been passed to The Shadow. A slender thread amid a skein of approaching complications; yet it was destined to bring The Shadow into contact with a strange trail of coming crime.

CHAPTER III. CROSS TRAILS

MANHATTAN'S dusk had become evening's darkness. Times Square was again a mass of glitter that gave the false impression of a city widespread with light. For New York, despite the brilliance of its centers, harbored spots that were dark with menace.

Such was an alleyway within the borders of the underworld. There, darkness was jet. Shuffling forms were barely discernible as they headed into the little cul-de-sac. This alleyway was the entrance to a dive frequented by mobsters. A place called "Louie's Joint."

An opening door sent a wedge of light out into the alleyway. The door closed; darkness returned. Then came another arrival; again a brief flash of light. Louie's Joint had gained another customer.

Inside that barring door was a smoke-filled room, where rowdies sat about at battered tables. The raucous gibes of hoodlums showed that some of the throng were merry. But in one corner of the room, hard-faced men were engaged in serious conversation.

Half a dozen in all, this group was discussing news that had come along the "grapevine." One big fellow, a dock-walloper called Jeff, was making comment while the others listened.

"It don't sound likely that Bugs Barwold is back in town," commented Jeff. "You can't count on the grapevine all the time. You know how it is – any heel can gum the works by starting off some hokum."

"Yeah," growled a listening mobster.

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"But one thing's sure," continued the big dock-walloper. "If Bugs is around, he'll be up to see that moll of his. The one that works at the Club Renaldo."

Nods from the gang. One man alone did not join. He was a chisel-faced chap who sat directly opposite Jeff. The dock-walloper noted that this man had not nodded. He put a query to the chisel-faced listener.

"What about it, Cliff?" demanded Jeff. "Ain't I right? Wouldn't Bugs roll in to see the moll?"

"He wouldn't go to the Club Renaldo," returned the man addressed as Cliff.

"Right," came a comment.

Jeff grinned. The dock-walloper had an answer to the statement. He looked at the chisel-faced man. Cliff Marsland was something of a hero in the bad lands. He was known as a killer; yet one on whom the bulls had pinned nothing. Jeff wanted to impress Cliff Marsland.

"Bugs don't have to go to the Club Renaldo," explained the dock-walloper. "All he's got to do is stop off at the next street. There's an alleyway through to the club. See? And he could send some mug in with a message to Trixie Lango – that's the moll's name – and Trixie, she'd come out, after her number. Get it?"

"I didn't know about that alleyway," admitted Cliff. "Do you think Bugs would risk it, though?"

"He might," returned Jeff, "but it's going to be tough if he does. He ain't the only bird that knows about that back entrance."

"You mean Chuck Haggart does?"

"Sure!" Jeff chuckled as he reached for a bottle and a glass. "Chuck's wise. And he's figuring the grapevine ain't phony. He's going to be there with his mob, to chop Bugs down."

"Where'd you get the dope, Jeff?" inquired a mobster.

"Never mind," returned the dock-walloper. "Just lay that to the grapevine, too. I'm wise, that's all. Well, boys, here's to Bugs Barwold – the guy that's going to take it."

NOT long afterward, Cliff Marsland strolled from Louie's Joint. The little gathering had broken up. But Cliff had not forgotten Jeff's comments. Cliff had been piecing facts. He had come to definite conclusions.

A feud existed between "Bugs" Barwold and "Chuck" Haggart. Both were rival mobleaders; thugs who would loose killers at the service of any high bidder. Some months ago, these two had engaged in open conflict.

The break had come when Bugs had put himself in wrong with the police as well as with Chuck. Pressed by the law, Bugs had taken it on the lam after pulling a job. New York had remained too hot for a return; but matters had simmered down since then. The law was sufficiently lulled for Bugs to risk a return.

But all the while, Chuck had been promising vengeance against the lamister. Bugs, in his final whirl of crime, had muscled in on a racket with which Chuck had been engaged. Chuck was the leader of a dozen gorillas. Every torpedo in his outfit had been instructed to hand death to Bugs Barwold, on sight. Cliff Marsland was never too sure of the underworld rumors that came along the grapevine telegraph. But with doubtful reports, he had gleaned actual facts. He was sure that if Bugs Barwold did return to Manhattan, the mobleader would

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most certainly head for that street in back of the Club Renaldo.

That, too, was sufficient to mean that Chuck Haggart would have gunners in readiness. Mobsmen would be stationed in anticipation of Bugs Barwold's return. Where mobsmen were on hand, trouble might break loose. That fact concerned Cliff Marsland.

For, despite his feigned part as a killer, Cliff Marsland was actually a man who battled crime. He was an agent of The Shadow, stationed in the underworld to watch the moves of mobsmen.

Though The Shadow frequently let mobster hordes fight their own battles, it was his policy to combat them whenever they ventured from their underworld dives. If Chuck Haggart had a squad up by the Club Renaldo, The Shadow would certainly ordain some measures to counteract the crooks.

As Cliff passed along a gloomy, deserted street, a stoop-shouldered man sidled suddenly into view. Cliff caught sight of a sharp, wizened face. It was "Hawkeye," former denizen of the underworld, now in The Shadow's service.

"Spot anything, Cliff?" came Hawkeye's hoarse query, as the little man moved alongside.

"Yeah." Cliff's rejoinder was brief. "Bugs Barwold may be back in town. Chuck Haggart has it in for the guy."

"Don't I know it?" queried Hawkeye. "Listen, Cliff; Chuck's torpedoes are on the move."

"Where to?"

"I don't know. But they've got some spot where they're going to lay for Bugs."

"Up in back of the Club Renaldo?"

"What makes you think that, Cliff?"

"That's where Trixie Lango works."

"The moll that used to pal with Bugs? Say, Cliff, that's a sure tip! That's where Chuck will post the crew. I heard one of the gorillas say something that fits with it."

"Let's have it, Hawkeye."

"This was it. The guy said: 'Bugs won't go in there himself. He'll send somebody. So whoever sticks outside is the bird we're to get.' That's what I heard, Cliff, but I couldn't figure what place they meant."

"They mean an alleyway in back of the Club Renaldo, Hawkeye. Here – dodge out of sight. I'm going ahead to put in a report."

AT the very moment when Cliff and Hawkeye were separating temporarily, a strange scene was beginning in another spot of Manhattan. From jet darkness came a click. A bluish light appeared above a polished table. White hands came into view. The Shadow was in his sanctum.

Long fingers opened an envelope. From it came a folded sheet of paper. Inked lines in vivid blue; coded words that faded as unseen eyes read them from above the light. A laugh came from darkness. The Shadow

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had perused the report from Rutledge Mann.

The hands drew Harry's pad from the envelope. Marks were plain on its surface; but they were illegible. The Shadow laid the pad on the table. A box came forward in his hand. The Shadow opened the lid. He sprinkled a black powder – fine graphite – over the surface of the topmost sheet.

Fingers rubbed powder into paper. Magically, the graphite found the depressions in the sheet. Like carbon impressions, words appeared. The Shadow read the notations that James Jubal had made. A telephone number; an address; the time of an appointment: 10:30.

Again a soft, weird laugh. The Shadow had linked these traces of Jubal's writing. He had learned where the swindler intended to be tonight. There was time for The Shadow to go to the same destination.

A tiny bulb glowed from the far wall. The Shadow reached for earphones. A quiet voice came over the wire – that of The Shadow's hidden contact man.

"Burbank speaking."

"Report."

"Report from Marsland –"

Steadily, Burbank gave information which he had just received. The rumors of the grapevine; the possibilities of killers being posted near the Club Renaldo – these demanded orders from The Shadow.

Instructions came.

In a strange, sinister whisper, The Shadow ordered Burbank to make a return call to Cliff. The underworld agent was to cover Chuck Haggart's mob. With Cliff, Hawkeye was to take up duty. The pair would await The Shadow.

For The Shadow knew that if Bugs Barwold came to the vicinity of the Club Renaldo, his visit would be a late one. Probably not until after midnight, when the floor show would be ended at the Club Renaldo. Thus The Shadow had ample time to look in on the doings of James Jubal.

Cliff and Hawkeye were going on duty that was no more than a precaution for the present. Should a gang feud, starting, jeopardize the safety of innocent persons in the neighborhood of the Club Renaldo, prompt work by The Shadow's aids would scatter the trouble-making mob.

Should underworld hordes lie latent until after midnight, The Shadow, by that time, would be present in person to command the vigil of his agents. This might well prove to be one of those many incidents wherein The Shadow figured. A stroke to show evil rats that they should confine their own quarrels to the bailiwick where they belonged.

Instructions given to Cliff and Hawkeye, The Shadow paused. He was studying the situation as it concerned Bugs Barwold. The Shadow knew the repute of that missing mobleader. A crook with wild notions, Bugs had, nevertheless, indicated canniness in the past. Would he be fool enough to risk this trip back to Manhattan?

The Shadow laughed. He was thinking of Chuck Haggart. There was another cagey customer. Would Chuck be fool enough to think that Bugs would come back to see his moll? Or was Chuck, a mercenary killer,

merely using Bugs Barwold as a pretext to cover up some job for which he had been hired?

The Shadow saw a significance that had escaped Cliff Marsland. A possibility that meant need for added precaution.

Taking the earphones, The Shadow called Burbank. This time he whispered instructions for Harry Vincent. He was putting a third agent into that beleaguered territory behind the Club Renaldo.

Earphones clattered to the wall. The bluish light clicked out. A swish denoted The Shadow's departure from the sanctum. A strange laugh filled the room, then faded into awesome silence.

The Shadow had left one trail – Chuck Haggart's – to his agents. He had taken a second – that of James Jubal – for his own duty. He had just time to reach Rex Brodford's house before ten–thirty.

CHAPTER IV. THE EARLY BIRD

"A GENTLEMAN to see you, Mr. Brodford."

Firth brought the news to Rex Brodford, who was seated in the old library. Rex glanced at a clock on the mantel. It showed only five minutes of ten.

"Mr. Jubal?" he questioned.

"That was the name he gave, sir," returned Firth. "Mr. James Jubal."

"Here early," mused Rex. "Well, that helps. Ten o'clock is better than ten–thirty. Show him in, Firth."

The servant departed. A few minutes passed; then the curtains pulled aside and James Jubal stepped into the library. His face unusually yellow in the dull light, the fake promoter delivered a suave smile as he advanced to shake hands with his host, Rex Brodford.

Apparently, Jubal sought to create an impression upon the man whom he had come to see. In that attempt, Jubal failed. Rex Brodford, keen in his study of the arrival, gained an immediate dislike for the promoter. There was something snakish in Jubal's manner.

Glossy of demeanor, purring in tone, Jubal had the ability to deceive the average customer. But in Rex Brodford, he was facing a young man who had gained ten years of experience with slippery dealers. Rex had met many adventurers in the tropics. He recognized Jubal's ilk.

Yet Rex was affable in greeting. He invited Jubal to a chair; he offered the promoter a fat cigar. Businesslike, yet frank, Rex prepared to sound out the fellow's game. He knew the way to handle birds of Jubal's feather.

"You sell mining stock?" inquired Rex, by way of opening. "Michigan mining stock?"

"Yes," purred Jubal. "I have an excellent offering. In the Chalice Gold Mine. A speculation but a good one."

"Are you speaking of the present?" questioned Rex, with a slight smile. "Or of the past?"

"Of the future," returned Jubal.

Rex shook his head. His smile was almost sad as he faced the promoter.

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"I know about the Chalice Gold Mine," the young man informed. "It may have been a good investment once. Provided, of course, that it was offered with fair intention. But at present, it is a failure. It has no future."

"A surprising statement," proffered Jubal suavely. "Especially from you, Mr. Brodford."

"Why so?"

"Because you are a heavy investor in the Quest Gold Mine. An operation that was also begun in the Lake Chalice territory."

"My uncle made that investment. It was ill-advised."

"Ah! Then you have no belief in the Quest Gold Mine? You think that it is worthless?"

Rex Brodford considered. Jubal's change of tune was something of a surprise. Rex suspected a game in back of it. He wanted to pump Jubal.

"I BELIEVE," replied Rex slowly, "that the Quest Gold Mine once had possibilities. That it failed through difficulties in production. That it was wisely closed and forgotten."

"But now?"

"At present, it may have real possibilities. Let us assume, Mr. Jubal, that there is gold in the Quest mine. Gold, today, is worth nearly twice as much as it was thirty years ago. Production methods have been improved. Gold may be mined for half the former cost.

"Therefore, an operation that would once have lost money could easily show a substantial profit today. That is why I am interested in reclaiming the Quest Gold Mine. I intend to leave for Michigan tonight, to begin an intensive search for its forgotten shaft."

Jubal smiled. His expression, though intended as a pleasantry, revealed an ugliness of twisted lips.

"Mr. Brodford," declared Jubal glibly, "you are using my own sales talk. That is exactly what I have said about the Chalice mine. Like the Quest mine, it could be operated at a low cost. Now is the time to invest in gold-mining enterprises –"

"But you are forgetting one point," interposed Rex steadily – "a difference between the old Quest mine and the new Chalice mine."

"What is the difference?" demanded Jubal.

"The Quest mine," replied Rex coldly, "was intended as a legitimate enterprise. The Chalice mine, however, has all the earmarks of a swindle."

An angry gleam showed on Jubal's visage. The sallow man calmed quickly; but his eyes still held a challenge.

"If there is gold in that Michigan terrain," continued Rex steadily, "it may be found in the shaft of the old Quest mine. But the Chalice mine is nothing more than a rabbit burrow, dug at random. A false hope, to drag money from gullible dupes."

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The young man's words carried accusation. Jubal clenched his fists; his face showed feigned indignation. Rex delivered a short laugh. Jubal smiled sourly.

"You take me for a swindler?" he questioned.

"I do," retorted Rex. "In fact, I was warned against you, Jubal."

Jubal considered. Gradually the anger melted from his features. His smile gained a peculiar suavity. The swindler stroked his glossy, greasy hair.

"All right, Mr. Brodford," he asserted. "I shall not deny your accusation. I am a swindler; but not by choice. I did have confidence – once – in the Chalice Gold Mine. I thought that it could be made to pay. Later, I altered my opinion."

"Yet kept on selling stock?"

"Yes. I realized that the company was doomed to failure. For the same reason that the old Quest mine had ceased operation."

"Through lack of funds?"

"No. Through lack of gold. Frankly, Mr. Brodford, there is not a chunk of gold ore in that entire area."

REX stared in surprise. Jubal's confession sounded genuine. Yet the man's whole stock in trade was the ability to bluff. Rex wanted to hear more before accepting the fellow's statements.

"I have built up a clientele," asserted Jubal, in a tone that was almost pleading. "I have talked gold – gold – gold! I can sell nothing else. Yet I have reached the limit of my rope. I have not sold a single share of Chalice mine stock in the last three months."

"Yet you came here to dupe me," observed Rex coldly.

"Perhaps," admitted Jubal, "and perhaps not. I must live somehow; and I would not have passed up the opportunity to make a sale. At the same time, you will agree that I have used no high–pressure tactics."

"Agreed."

"You have called my bluff" – Jubal was leaning forward as he spoke – "and I am glad of it. I am free, for once, to talk frankly. Let me ask you one question: you intend to go to Michigan?"

"Yes; tonight."

"To look for the old Quest mine?"

"Yes."

Rex was doing no more than make statements that he had already given. Hence he saw no reason to refuse replies to Jubal's interrogations. The swindler, however, seemed as pleased as if he had gained new information. He settled back in his chair.

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"I can give you good advice," declared Jubal. "Forget the Quest mine. I have told you that the territory is barren. You will be wasting your time."

"Hardly," rejoined Rex. "I hold stock in the Quest mine that has a par value of more than two hundred thousand dollars."

"Worthless paper, Mr. Brodford."

"Perhaps. And yet –"

"And yet," supplied Jubal, catching Rex's pause, "you would like to get something from it. Am I right?"

"Yes," admitted Rex.

"Good." Jubal smiled again as he leaned forward. "I can come to the real business that brought me here tonight. I do not want to make a sale, Mr. Brodford. I am here to buy!"

"To buy?" echoed Rex.

"Yes," replied Jubal. "I want to purchase your entire holdings in Quest Gold Mine. At two cents on the dollar. That, Mr. Brodford, would mean a net profit to you of four–thousand dollars."

REX stared. He was trying to figure the game. Jubal's smile widened. Sudden understanding came to Rex. He started to speak. Jubal interrupted him.

"You see it," chuckled the swindler. "I thought you would. I told you a few minutes ago that I have found the Chalice mine stock a dead item. I need a new offering – one that can give me a chance to use high pressure.

"Stock in the old Quest mine would fill the bill. Customers would grab at it. That mine once operated, even though we have no proofs that it ever produced. You are getting four thousand dollars for old paper, Mr. Brodford, while I –"

"While you," interrupted Rex harshly, "are planning new trimmings. You want me to aid you in an enterprise which in your opinion is worthless."

"I am a promoter –"

"You are a swindler! I shall be no party to your scheme, Jubal."

Rex arose as he spoke. He glanced at the clock. It showed quarter past ten. He smiled grimly.

"You came early, Jubal," stated Rex. "You will leave early. Firth" – Rex turned toward the door as he called; Firth appeared – "get Mr. Jubal's hat and coat. He is leaving."

Firth went out into the hall. Jubal was defiant, scowling. On his feet, he thrust his leering face toward Rex Brodford.

"You fool!" snarled the swindler. "You will regret this action! I offered you a chance. To stay here – to make a profit. I brought you opportunity –"

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"And I refused it," broke in Rex. "My plans have been made, Jubal, and you can not change them. I am closing this house tonight. I am leaving for Michigan."

Firth arrived with Jubal's hat and coat. Muttering curses, the swindler donned the garments, glaring at Rex as he did so. Straightening, he issued a last statement.

"Think this over, Brodford!" exclaimed the swindler. "It is for your own good. Postpone this trip of yours until –"

"Firth," interposed Rex, "show Mr. Jubal to the door."

Firth opened the curtains. Still muttering, Jubal turned about and strode through. Rex remained in the library, listening to the swindler's departure.

Mutterings from the hall. Jubal was probably delivering an outburst to Firth. Then came the slam of the front door.

FIRTH returned. He reached the curtain to find Rex standing in the center of the library. The young man was wearing a fixed smile. He looked toward Firth.

"Everything is packed, sir," stated the servant. "Shall I call a cab? You should allow ample time –"

"Yes," interposed Rex, "I would like to reach the Grand Central well ahead of train time. It would allow me time for sandwiches and coffee. What about yourself, Firth?"

"I am all packed, sir. I shall close the house directly after you leave."

"And where will you go then?"

"To visit relatives, sir. I shall send my address to Mr. Witherby. If you require my services later, sir –"

"I shall communicate with you, Firth."

"Thank you, sir. I shall call the cab at once."

Firth stepped into the hall. He picked up the telephone from the table. Rex, pacing the library, heard the old servant use the dial. But he did not observe the actions that followed.

Immediately after dialing, Firth pressed down the receiver hook. Holding the telephone, he waited; then began to speak, as if to someone at the other end. Rex heard Firth's voice, inquiring for the Intercity Cab Company. But the curtain hid his view. He had no idea that Firth was faking the call.

The servant appeared in the doorway, hanging up the receiver. He bowed and stated:

"The taxi will be here in ten minutes, sir."

"Good," returned Rex. "Bring down my bags, Firth."

The servant departed. As he walked through the hall, his face showed the same evil gleam that it had betrayed the night before. Firth had played a new part as a tool in some insidious scheme.

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Two blocks away from the Brodford mansion, James Jubal had entered a drug store. The swindler was in a phone booth, making a call of his own. His final words sounded:

"Be there with the cab. Pull up when the old flunky gives the high sign."

It was James Jubal who had actually ordered a taxi to Rex Brodford's home. Firth had teamed with the swindler. Jubal, as he left the drug store, wore a vicious leer.

A clock was chiming half past ten – the time originally set for Jubal's appointment with Rex Brodford. The promoter had come early; he had left early. Half past ten had become the time for a different action.

James Jubal defeated in his efforts to purchase Rex Brodford's stock at two cents on the dollar, had launched a different plan to block the young man's trip to Michigan.

CHAPTER V. A DETOUR ENDS

AT the very moment when James Jubal was leaving the drug store two blocks away, a taxicab was rolling into the secluded street which harbored the old Brodford mansion. This was not the cab that Jubal had ordered; the vehicle which the swindler had called for could not have arrived so soon. This cab was one that brought a passenger.

The driver was slackening speed as the cab approached the Brodford house. A sharp hiss came from the darkness in the rear of the taxi. In response to the command, the man at the wheel brought the conveyance to a stop one dozen doors before the Brodford house.

The door of the cab opened. The passenger moved out into darkness. Like a gliding phantom of gloom, he edged across the sidewalk and reached the blackness of building fronts. The Shadow had arrived at his objective. The time was approximately half past ten.

The glow of a lamp from across the street showed the crafty, pointed face of the taxi driver who had remained at the wheel. He was staying in readiness. This driver was Moe Shrevnitz, who served as an aid for The Shadow.

Moe had been chosen for special duty on numerous occasions. Saved from death by The Shadow, he had later been singled out by his mysterious benefactor. The Shadow had seen the advantages of having a worker like Moe in his service.

The independent cab that Moe drove was actually owned by The Shadow. It was Moe's job to have it at appointed spots whenever so ordered. Tonight, Moe had been in readiness. The Shadow had mysteriously stepped aboard and had ordered Moe to bring him to this district.

The Shadow's present purpose was unknown to the taxi driver. In fact, Moe caught no sight of the cloaked figure as it emerged from the cab. He knew that The Shadow would probably return shortly. When a new command came, Moe would follow it.

MEANWHILE The Shadow was approaching Rex Brodford's home. He knew that it was the address where he would probably uncover James Jubal; for it was now the time at which the swindler's appointment had been set. Stealth was the method that The Shadow had selected on this occasion.

The Shadow wanted to look in on this secluded house; to catch Jubal in the perpetration of some swindle. By The Shadow's analysis, Jubal was a rogue who dealt in schemes, not one who could be pictured as a

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dangerous party unless backed by actual killers.

Thus the silence that lay about Rex Brodford's house was indication that no menace existed here. The Shadow's plan was one of surreptitious entry, to be followed by keen observation. This determined, The Shadow reached the front of the gloomy house and studied opportunities for entering it.

A side passage by the house offered means of access. Merged with blackness, The Shadow moved in that direction. He stopped suddenly as he heard a sound from atop the brownstone steps. Someone was opening the front door.

Pressed against the front of the building, The Shadow lingered.

He saw a face come into view. Dull light from the vestibule showed Firth's dry features. The servant looked along the street, as though expecting someone. The Shadow watched Firth eye Moe's cab. Then the servant disappeared into the house. The door closed.

The Shadow seized the reason for Firth's action. Doubtless, the servant was expecting a taxicab. He had noted Moe's vehicle and had decided that it was one that had parked by chance upon this thoroughfare.

Did Firth's action indicate that the servant was on the lookout for James Jubal? That the swindler had not yet arrived? That was The Shadow's first mental query; the answer remained in doubt. Firth's move was just sufficiently suspicious to keep The Shadow waiting where he was.

Minutes had passed between The Shadow's departure from Moe's cab and Firth's appearance at the top of the steps. More minutes followed. Then a soft laugh whispered from beside the wall. Peering along the street, The Shadow had spotted the lights of a taxi wheeling in from an avenue.

The Shadow waited. The cab rolled up in front of the house. The driver tooted the horn.

Again the door opened at the top of the steps. Firth appeared, lugging a suitcase. The cab driver opened the door, Firth placed the bag beside him in the front seat.

Another man was coming from the house. The light from the vestibule showed Rex Brodford.

Crouched beside the steps, The Shadow heard Rex stop as he neared the sidewalk. The young man held conversation with Firth.

"MAIL the house key to Witherby," ordered Rex. "Use that envelope that I addressed for you. And remember, Firth, I want you to notify him where you will be."

"Positively, sir," wheezed Firth. "And may I wish you a most pleasant journey?"

"Thanks," laughed Rex. "That's a better sendoff than the one Jubal offered me."

"He advised you to stay here, sir?"

"Yes. That's one reason why I had you show him out. Well, Firth" – Rex extended his hand to the servant – "you'll hear from me before that advance salary expires."

Turning about, Rex walked to the cab. The Shadow heard him give the order to drive to Grand Central Station. Firth remained on the stone steps while the young man went aboard the cab. But The Shadow did not

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linger.

Already, his blackened shape was in motion, sliding along the wall, back in the direction of Moe's cab. The Shadow, by his brief eavesdropping, had learned all that he needed to know. He had discovered that James Jubal had come and gone.

Moreover, he had learned that the young man who had left the house was the person whom Jubal had come to see. It was evident that Rex Brodford was going on a trip; that the taxi had been summoned to take him; and that Firth, the servant, was to close the house for the time being.

The Shadow stepped silently into Moe's cab just as the other taxi pulled away from the Brodford house. But The Shadow gave no immediate order to Moe. Keenly, the cloaked observer was watching the brownstone steps, where Firth was still standing.

The Shadow waited while Firth watched Rex's cab. Then, as the vehicle neared the distant corner, The Shadow saw Firth go back into the house.

The Shadow hissed an order. Moe's cab shot forward on the instant. A driver extraordinary – The Shadow had picked him for that ability – Moe had been holding his machine in leash, with motor softly throbbing. Arrowlike, Moe's cab sped in pursuit. The taxi driver had anticipated The Shadow's command.

Moe had seen the first cab turn left at the next corner. Moe took the turn with the speed of a jehu. Whirling along an avenue, he spotted the other cab passing a traffic light a block ahead. Moe spurted; his cab whizzed beneath the light just as the green blinked out.

The Shadow laughed softly as he rested in the rear seat of the cab. He had not told Moe the destination that Rex had given the first cab driver. Instead, The Shadow had let Moe take up the trail.

As the chase continued. The Shadow had real opportunity to study Moe's ability as a driver.

It was not an open chase. Moe was too crafty for that. As they rolled along, he spied convenient cars going in the same direction; choosing them as cover, Moe ducked his cab from sight, in case someone ahead might be looking back.

Rex's cab made a left turn. Moe spied it; as he reached the particular corner, he made a spurt that shot him straight across the path of an approach truck. Scooting clear, Moe resumed the chase, again dropping behind a protecting sedan that was rolling along the side street.

Ten blocks passed. Moe, alert at the wheel, was continuing his clever maneuvers. But The Shadow was no longer resting back upon the seat. He was leaning forward to the window, more alert than Moe.

For The Shadow had discovered that the cab ahead was taking a most unusual course toward the Grand Central Station. Instead of cutting east to crisscross down toward Forty-second Street, the first cab was swinging back to the West Side, making for Tenth Avenue.

UP in the front cab, Rex Brodford had noted the same. He was leaning forward, speaking to the driver. Rex, as he made query, noted that the cabby had his coat collar muffled up around his chin.

"What's the idea?" questioned Rex. "I said Grand Central Station. What are you doing? Going down toward the Pennsylvania Station?"

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"Leave it to me, bo," returned the cab driver, his voice a gruff one. "Dere's a detour I'm skippin' – an' a lot of heavy traffic dat might hold us up. Dis is a rush hour."

"You've got it right, then? Grand Central?"

"Sure t'ing, bo. We'll get dere in a hurry."

Rex settled back, his face puzzled. They were rolling down Tenth Avenue, nearing the Forties. A left turn would have to come shortly.

In Moe's cab, The Shadow was more alert than ever. His brain was thinking with speed; acting with keen intuition, he was threading facts together. The vicinity that they were nearing gave him an important clue. The Shadow hissed a quick command to Moe. The cab driver nodded. A sudden look of understanding appeared upon his face. Forgetting the cab ahead, Moe, shot his own machine to the left. He stepped on the accelerator. The taxi roared along an eastbound street. In performing the prompt move, Moe had cut a way straight through a barricade of traffic. Cars coming the other way had been forced to stop for him. Moe had gained the clear on nerve.

Two blocks farther down Tenth Avenue, the driver of Rex Brodford's cab had also determined upon a left turn. But he lacked Moe Shrevnitz's nerve. The muffled driver stopped at the center of the turn and waited for opposite traffic to pass.

Rex watched the flow of traffic. He lighted a cigarette and settled back in the seat. Plenty of time to make the train. He did not mind this delay. They were turning east at last. Yet as two trucks came lumbering along, to hold the cab in further halt, Rex felt some impatience.

Little did he realize that this delay was all to his advantage. Once that turn was made, Rex Brodford's life would rest in the balance. He was going into desperate and unexpected adventure, where all the odds would be against him. The Shadow had foreseen that fact. Realizing the menace, he had given a swift order. Knowing that the unexpected lay in store, The Shadow had determined upon the unexpected also. He had counted on a delay when Rex's driver came to make the turn. Seconds were precious to The Shadow.

The trucks had lumbered by. Rex's cab swung left. It rolled steadily, easily along a side street, following one-way, eastbound traffic. Idly puffing his cigarette, Rex noted that they had passed an avenue.

The cab jostled to a halt beside a curb. As Rex stared, puzzled, he saw his driver alight. The muffled man stepped to the sidewalk; then strode into a passageway that showed black between two buildings.

Looking above the darkness, Rex caught the blink of an electric sign on the next street. He saw the words: "Club Renaldo." He wondered if that might be the driver's destination.

Perplexed by the taximan's sudden departure; Rex opened the door of the cab and stepped to the curb.

He stopped short with a startled exclamation. Men were coming from doorways on this darkened street. Revolvers glimmered in fists that extended from sweated arms. On the instant, Rex realized that he was the victim of a trap.

Minions of mobland were massed for massacre. The departure of the cab driver was the signal for them to riddle the helpless victim in the taxi.

CHAPTER VI. THE SHADOW'S THRUST

REX BRODFORD was enmeshed in a most singular snare. A clever plan had been devised for his elimination. James Jubal, unable by persuasion to prevent Rex's departure for Michigan, had loosed a prearranged scheme that would have no comeback.

Chuck Haggart had stationed mobsmen here to get Bugs Barwold. Word had passed along the grapevine that such was Chuck's purpose. Actually, the mobleader had accepted payment from Jubal. His real purpose was to murder Rex Brodford.

Chuck's gorillas did not know the game. They were instructed to shoot at sight if a man should remain in a car that stopped by the back way to the Club Renaldo. The idea – as Chuck had explained it – was to keep Bugs Barwold from drawing his own gat.

Thus the intention was to have Rex Brodford slain, apparently by mistake. Police, investigating, would learn the supposed reason for Chuck and his mob being here. They would figure that an innocent person had fallen victim to a crook feud.

Thus posted, gangsters had arisen promptly when Rex's driver had cut through toward the Club Renaldo. That driver, a hireling of James Jubal's, was in the know. He had given a prompt signal. Attackers had sprung forward. The opening of the cab door by Rex Brodford was the cue for a barrage.

Rex saw the rising guns. Instinctively he dropped for safety, choosing the only refuge: namely, the interior of the cab. Dropping, he slammed the door behind him. Revolvers barked an answer. Opening shots zipped through the windows of the beleaguered cab.

The cards held death for Rex Brodford. A horde of a dozen ruffians sought to slay him. Men of crime were piling in from all directions. Murder seemed due.

But there were others beside mobsmen who had seen Rex when he started to step from the cab. Cliff Marsland and Hawkeye, posted apart, had spotted the man marked for death. Both knew Bugs Barwold by sight. They knew that this was not the missing mobleader. Emergency had arisen; The Shadow's agents acted with promptitude.

HARD on the opening shots came the bursts of automatics, as Cliff and Hawkeye fired into the killers who were closing on the cab. One mobster issued a wild cry as he sprawled to the street. Others swung about. New flames stabbed from darkened doorways. A second gangster fell.

Forgetting the cab, gorillas dropped for cover. They fired at the spots from which the shots had come. Huddling in shelter, Cliff and Hawkeye were separately boxed. Each could fire only intermittent shots; neither could longer cover all the area about the cab.

Killers from the sidewalk were out of range. One was leaping forward to thrust a revolver through a shattered cab window. Before the man could fire, an automatic barked from the darkness of the passage that led through to the Club Renaldo. The killer spilled.

Harry Vincent had fired that timely shot. But with it, he, like Cliff and Hawkeye, was thrown on the defensive. Other mobsters whirled in his direction. Bullets caromed from the wall where Harry was crouched. Firing, Harry dived back for deeper shelter.

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Chuck Haggart's men had deployed with swift precision. Spreading in all directions, they were starting a pitched battle against the three snipers. Throwing The Shadow's agents at an instant disadvantage, half a dozen gorillas paved the way for the remainder to reopen the charge upon the cab.

"Get him!" came a harsh cry. Chuck Haggart's voice. "Get him! The guy in the cab. Rub him out!"

A trio of mobsmen sprang from across the street. Leaping at an angle toward the front of the stopped taxi, they were too swift for the aim of Cliff and Hawkeye. These ruffians were coming in to kill.

Moreover, their method was double-fold. This was a one-way street, eastbound. They were coming in such fashion that they could meet any new cars that were heading down the street. Startled taximen had stopped above, blocking traffic. Rescue was cut off.

But as the killers sprang forward to deliver death, they heard a roar behind them. One man shot a glance over his shoulder. His startled cry made the others turn. Bearing squarely upon the murderous crew was a speeding taxi cab that was coming up against the traffic.

Mobsters turned to fire. The driver of the cab applied the brakes. The vehicle did a hard skid to the left, turning half around in the cleared section of the thoroughfare. As tires bent under, the right side of the cab dipped toward the street. Its door swung open. Plunging outward came a mass of blackness that caught its footing in the street.

"The Shadow!"

A MOBSTER roared recognition as he recognized the occupant of Moe's cab. The hurtling shape had gained its footing. A blackened figure, The Shadow was swinging upward, a dozen paces from his cab. Hard on the mobster's cry came his own announcement of identity.

With a wild, outlandish laugh, The Shadow opened fire. Mingled with his gibe came the tongued flashes of two mammoth automatics. Swinging with a weaving twist, The Shadow loosed deadly slugs at aiming mobsmen.

Revolvers answered. But as they fired, killers sprawled. The Shadow's shots were chosen. He picked the closest mobsters first. He caught them with their fingers trembling on triggers. He sprawled them while their fellows fired wild.

Chuck Haggart had sprung for shelter on the sidewalk. Dropping behind a thickset fire plug, the mobleader was trying potshots. But The Shadow was weaving in the opposite direction. The range was long; and Chuck's precaution for his own safety did not aid his aim. Chuck's shots went wide.

Other mobsters had whirled about to join the fray. They were hewing in from all sides. But in their desire to get The Shadow, they were opening themselves to other danger. Cliff and Hawkeye, springing from their respective doorways, were swift with a flank fire that raked these new disturbers.

Mobsters faltered. Others dived for shelter. Three dashed for the passage through to the Club Renaldo. Harry Vincent leaped forward to stop them. He went sprawling with one mobster, while the other two dashed on.

Harry drove an automatic hard against his antagonist's head. The gangster slumped. Harry arose against the wall. Bullets were whistling down that alleyway – for Cliff and Hawkeye had opened fire after the fleeing killers – but Harry, standing back, was immune.

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Again The Shadow's laugh. With purposeful objective, the master fighter had wheeled about to reach a wall on the inner side of the sidewalk, on the same side of the street as the cab wherein Rex Brodford still crouched.

Seeing The Shadow's form against a whitened surface, Chuck Haggart came up above his fire plug. From across the street, the vicious mobleader aimed to kill.

A shout. Cliff Marsland had spied the leader. With his cry, Cliff fired. A bullet plunked the fire plug. A second shot whistled close by Chuck's ear. This bit of marksmanship was Hawkeye's contribution. Chuck forgot The Shadow.

It was well he did; for The Shadow had swerved to open fire with his agents. Cliff and Hawkeye had followed with second shots. One bullet ricocheted from the fire plug; another nicked the curb by Chuck's feet. The mobleader was diving for shelter.

Chuck had chosen a doorway at the top of white stone steps. Beside it was a grilled banister, with an iron knob for newel post. The Shadow's following aim ended with a trigger squeeze. Luck favored Chuck.

The Shadow's shot was aimed directly for the mobleader just as Chuck hit the steps. The slug from the automatic bashed against that iron knob. A chance obstruction had saved the mobleader. Chuck dived through the doorway above the steps.

Despite the fierceness of the fray, the time element had been brief. Opening shots had brought response from The Shadow's agents. Quick-spreading mobsters had followed with their rush; into it had come The Shadow to deliver doom.

Hard upon their chief's arrival, The Shadow's agents had made their sortie. Battle had come, whirled about, and gone with the swiftness of a twisting cyclone. Devastation in the shape of flattened mobsters lay in the wake of this gunfire storm.

TO Rex Brodford, crouched on the floor of the cab, death had seemed imminent. Guns had barked from everywhere. Suddenly they had lulled. With that moment, Rex saw chance for better safety. Opening the door of the cab, he sprang to the sidewalk.

He wanted to make that alleyway which the driver had entered. But as he hit the sidewalk, Rex realized that he had made a misstep. Two men came pouncing upon him. One grappled while the other aimed.

Two last minions of Chuck Haggart. The first, his bullets spent, had dropped into a doorway near the cab; the other, gun still loaded, had leaped behind the taxi itself. They were still out to kill; and The Shadow was no longer in view. For in his whirl toward Chuck Haggart, The Shadow had sprung out into the street.

Rex wrested free from his first antagonist. He thumped up against the cab and strove to regain the door that he had opened. The second man drove in upon him, aiming his revolver pointblank for Rex's head. Then came a shot from the street side of the cab.

The Shadow had reached that spot. Seeing the mobster bent on death, he had aimed straight through the shattered windows. The roar of his gun spelled doom. The aiming gunman sprawled with gun unfired.

Rex leaped away at the sound of the shot. The first thug drove in upon him and lashed a hard stroke with his bulletless gun. The blow clipped Rex on the side of the skull. The young man went staggering, seeking to regain his balance, half groggy from the smash.

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The mobster leaped to deliver another blow. His opportunity never came. Two automatics spoke at once. One from the alleyway; the other through the cab. Harry Vincent had fired with The Shadow. Both aimers found their mark.

With fingers slipping from the fender of the cab, Rex Brodford was about to topple headlong into the gutter when Harry Vincent arrived to grab him. As he caught the man's limp form, Harry heard shrill whistles from both ends of the street.

The police were coming. For a moment, the situation struck Harry with stunning force. Then, from beside him, Harry heard a hissed order. He looked up to see The Shadow.

Gripping Rex Brodford, the cloaked chief started toward Moe's cab. Harry aided in the carrying.

They shoved Rex aboard. Harry clambered in. The Shadow whispered a sharp order to Moe. The wise-faced taximan came up behind his wheel, grinning. Moe shoved the cab into reverse.

Harry caught a glimpse of The Shadow swinging toward the bullet-riddled cab that Rex had left. He saw the tall form stop; then swing about, bringing a bag from the front seat. Then Moe's cab shot suddenly forward. It climbed the curb on the right side of the thoroughfare.

The Shadow hurled the bag aboard as Moe shifted gear. Then Moe's cab went roaring down that narrow alleyway, a space that was no more than a wide foot passage, heading for the lights of the Club Renaldo.

SWISHES from stone walls. The sides of the cab were skimming close against the buildings. To Harry, it was a mad flight as he stared forward, with Rex Brodford lying limp on the seat beside him.

Startled pedestrians dived for cover as Moe's cab shot out across the sidewalk of the next street. Swinging past the front of the Club Renaldo, Moe veered with all his strength. Wheels climbed the curb on the opposite side of the street. The cab was on the verge of toppling.

Then it righted. As police whistles shrilled, Moe kept on. Speeding westward, he was cutting away from the danger zone. He swung left into Tenth Avenue traffic. Twisting between two cars, he avoided notice of a police car coming in the opposite direction.

Back on the street behind the Club Renaldo, bluecoats had thronged in upon a scene of battle. They were viewing the sprawled figures of mobsters, killed and wounded, the remnants of the fierce fray that had been waged.

No others could be seen. Like Chuck Haggart, Cliff and Hawkeye had taken a path through the old building with the white steps. Too late to overtake the fleeing mobleader, they had at least gained the clear.

Only one participant remained close by; and he was unseen. From a blackened doorway fifty feet away, The Shadow was standing, blotted and motionless – viewing the forces of the law.

Patrol cars were coming up, all converging at the same spot, close by the bullet-riddled cab. Excited talk was on; soon a search would begin. The Shadow found no need to linger further.

Gliding from his doorway, the cloaked victor kept close to building walls as he moved swiftly, fleetingly away from the scene where he and his aids had triumphed.

CHAPTER VII. ON THE LIMITED

REX BRODFORD awoke. He was dizzy, swaying. His mind held a confusion. Gunfire, fighting men, grogginess. Bright lights, darkness. Then motion, through darkness; and finally this awakening. He was still moving; but it was daylight now.

Blurred vision cleared. Rex found himself looking out through a window at a passing landscape. He was clad in pajamas, resting in the lower berth of a Pullman compartment. He wondered how he had arrived here.

A door opened. A young man stepped in from the passage and closed the door behind him. Rex saw a keen-cut face; with lips that wore a quiet, pleasant smile. Rex grinned weakly in response. "Where am I?" he questioned.

"Where you expected to be," came the reply. "Traveling through Canada, over the Michigan Central."

"And who are you?" asked Rex.

"My name is Vincent," responded the other man. "Harry Vincent. A friend who happened along in time to help you out of a jam."

Rex looked puzzled. Harry sat down on a chair and studied him. Then Harry spoke.

"You were in a mix-up," explained Harry, "and it didn't appear to be your fault. Mobsters fighting – the cab I was in landed there just at the end of the brawl. I saw some fellow crack you with a gun."

"That was when I tried to get out of the cab the second time," recalled Rex. "After the firing had stopped."

"I shoved you in my cab," resumed Harry, "and brought your bag along. The driver I had was a real sort. He figured the same as I did – that you were a victim of unfortunate circumstances. I looked in your wallet for identification papers. I learned your name – Rex Brodford – and I found your tickets for this train."

"So you left New York on my account –"

"Not exactly. You see, I live in Michigan. St. Joe's County. I had figured on taking a trip there very shortly. So I decided I might help you out in the bargain. There was still time to make your train. So I had the taxi driver bring me to the Grand Central. I went in and bought a ticket. I also reserved this compartment."

"But how did you get me aboard?"

"You were just about able to navigate." Harry smiled in recollection. "So the taxi driver and I brought you in between us. The man at the gate thought you were drunk. We staggered you about a bit."

"Good work," laughed Rex. "I remember it now – going through the station. But I didn't know where I was."

"How are you feeling now?"

"Pretty fair. Something of a headache, though."

"You need breakfast." Harry arose.

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"I'm going in the club car for a smoke. Get dressed and meet me in there. I've been waiting for you to wake up."

FIFTEEN minutes later, Harry and Rex were facing each other across a table in the dining car. Other passengers had breakfasted. They were practically alone. Harry thrust a newspaper over to Rex.

"Take a look at it," he said in a low tone. "A Buffalo newspaper. Tells about a mob fight in New York. Looks like those mobsters mistook you for a fellow named Bugs Barwold. They're looking for Chuck Haggart, who started all the trouble."

Rex read the account, nodded, and passed the newspaper back to Harry. He started to dig into a grapefruit. Harry watched him.

"Rather odd, though," commented Harry, "that you should have been dragged into the mess. Where were you coming from in that cab?"

"From my home," replied Rex.

"And going to the Grand Central?" asked Harry.

"Yes," returned Rex.

"Then how did you get way over by the Club Renaldo?" questioned Harry. "What was the matter with the cab driver? He was a mile out of the way."

"I remember that," acknowledged Rex. "You know, he told me he was taking a detour to skip traffic. I hadn't been in New York for ten years –"

"That explains it," broke in Harry. "The fellow was stalling you. I'll tell you something, Brodford. This looks like a frame-up. You were yanked into that ambush."

"Do you really think so?"

"I do."

"But if they thought I was this mobleader they were after –"

"They wouldn't have thought so if the taxi man hadn't played it the way he did."

"You mean somebody hired him to drag me into the trap?"

"It looks like it – if there happened to be any reason why someone wanted to prevent your trip to Michigan."

Rex Brodford nodded soberly. He was about to speak when Harry Vincent stopped him.

"Let's talk it over after breakfast," suggested The Shadow's agent. "We can chat when we get back to the compartment."

They finished the meal in casual fashion; but all the while, Harry was planning the conversation that was to come. More had happened than he had told Rex. Harry had found time to report to Burbank after the fray. Word had come through from The Shadow; it was in response to his chief's bidding that Harry had taken Rex

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aboard the midnight train.

Harry had learned about Jubal. It had become his job to learn of Rex's contact with the swindler. After that, a report to The Shadow. For The Shadow had definitely linked Jubal with criminals in New York's underworld.

Breakfast finished, the young men went back to the compartment. Harry was ready to begin new tactics that would lead on Rex's conversation; but he decided first to let Rex talk for himself. The plan proved perfect.

The porter had made up seats to replace the berths. Sitting by the window, the two men lighted cigars. While Harry was taking the first puffs at his perfecto, Rex began to talk.

"VINCENT," he declared, in a confidential tone, "I've been thinking over what you said in the dining car. I think there's a lot to it. Those killers may have been sent to get me."

"Instead of Bugs Barwold?" inquired Harry.

"Yes," returned Rex, "and I'll tell you why. I received something like a threat last night – from a man who admitted himself a crook."

"A mobleader?"

"No, a swindler. A man named James Jubal."

"Jubal?" Harry was reflective. "An odd name – it seems to me I have heard it."

"He sells mining stock."

"In Michigan?"

"In a Michigan mine."

"I've heard of him!" exclaimed Harry. "He started operations out in Detroit some time ago. Tried to sell stock to some bankers. They wouldn't listen to him."

"Why not?"

"Because they knew that gold mines were a doubtful proposition. Particularly the one he was boosting – wherever it was. He had to get away from Michigan in order to find suckers. I heard about him through a chap who owns a lot of mine land in St. Joe's County. This friend of mine mentioned the name. Jubal – James Jubal."

"That's the man."

"Did he try to sell you stock?"

"Yes. In the Chalice mine. But I wouldn't fall for it. Then he offered to buy some stock in an old gold mine that my uncle owned. The Quest mine."

"I never heard of it. Is the Quest mine in Michigan?"

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Rex Brodford nodded. He saw that Harry Vincent was interested in the details. He knew that Harry was a friend whom he could trust.

"Both mines," explained Rex, "are situated on Lake Chalice. The Quest mine is lost. The Chalice mine appears to be a crooked proposition. But I decided to investigate the Quest mine, because of the stock that I own in it; stock left me by my uncle."

"I see," nodded Harry.

"My lawyer, Cyrus Witherby, thinks that the stock is worthless," resumed Rex. "He told me that I would be lucky to sell it for two cents on the dollar. Oddly, that was the very price that Jubal offered me for it."

"But Jubal is a swindler –"

"And that was why he wanted the stock. To sell it to dupes. I refused to let him have it. He became threatening before he left. That fact, Vincent, has given me an idea."

"That the Quest mine might still be good?"

"Yes. And that Jubal knows it. By killing me, he would have thrown the estate to charity, through the terms of my uncle's will."

"But that would not have given him the stock."

"It would have left the stock with Witherby. The lawyer does not value it. He would sell to anyone who offered him the price that Jubal promised. I think, Vincent, that Jubal was waiting for my uncle to die, hoping to deal with me. Now he wants to try Witherby."

HARRY VINCENT pondered. The theory seemed a good one. Information for The Shadow; but Harry wanted more.

"What sort of a chap is Witherby?" he questioned.

"An old fogey," returned Rex. "But he can't deal with Jubal while I am still in the picture. I'll wire Witherby from Detroit, telling him to hold the stock in safe deposit."

"While you look for the Quest mine?"

"Yes. And I shall have cooperation in my search."

"Through whom?"

"A man named Cortland Laspar."

Harry looked up at mention of the name. He had heard of Cortland Laspar.

"Do you mean the lumber magnate?" he asked.

"Yes," returned Rex. "Do you know who he is?"

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"Certainly," stated Harry. "He has made a fortune through his lumber enterprises. If Laspar is your friend, he should prove a good one."

"He is more than an ordinary friend," explained Rex. "He was once associated with my uncle. He holds the timber rights on the land that belongs to the Quest Gold Mine. He has invited me to make his lodge, on Lake Chalice, the headquarters for my search."

"Good," decided Harry. "That ought to offset Jubal. And yet, if Jubal is as dangerous as he appears to be, you may be in for new trouble. Which worries me" – Harry smiled – "particularly after helping you out of one scrape."

Rex eyed his new friend steadily. In Harry Vincent, he saw an adventurous spirit that rivaled his own. The reply that Rex gave was spontaneous.

"Why not come along, then," he suggested. "If you're out for a vacation, you can get it at Lake Chalice. I believe there's something there, Vincent."

"I might go up there with you," decided Harry. "Just for a few days, anyway. I tell you what I can do, Brodford. I bought a ticket to Detroit, like yours, intending to pay further fare through from there."

"But I'll stop off. I'll call home and New York, by long distance. While you get in touch with this lawyer of yours. If it works out, we can travel up to Lake Chalice together."

"Agreed," responded Rex, thrusting his hand forward.

Harry received the shake. It was a tentative bargain between new friends. But the smile that Harry wore had added significance. For Harry knew that this arrangement would be in keeping with The Shadow's plans.

A report to The Shadow. To prove what The Shadow had already divined: that Rex Brodford's life was in jeopardy. A trail of crime had begun; one that involved Rex Brodford. The Shadow would intend to follow that trail to the finish.

And for a beginning, none better could be had than this alliance between Rex Brodford and Harry Vincent. Together, they could encounter adventure. Whatever concerned Rex would concern The Shadow's agent also.

As the limited sped onward to Detroit, Harry Vincent was picturing the future. He knew – with positiveness – that he would be ordered to go through with this projected plan. That he, like Rex Brodford, would soon be a guest of Cortland Laspar in the lodge on the shore of Lake Chalice.

CHAPTER VIII. THE LODGE ON THE LAKE

LATE afternoon. A rattletrap flivver was jouncing along a rough road through thick forest land. It was driven by an overalled native who seemed to enjoy the bumpiest spots. Harry Vincent and Rex Brodford were bouncing about in the back seat.

"Ease it, driver," ordered Rex. "Miss a few of those rocks if you can. How much farther?"

"'Bout two miles," came the rejoinder, as the old car thumped a rut. "'Tain't far to the lumber-camp road. You'll see it over that way."

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He nudged his thumb to the right. Shortly afterward, the rattly touring car rounded a bend. Harry and Rex saw a corduroy road leading off to the right. That was the route to the lumber camp that Cortland Laspar had installed in this vicinity.

The amateur chauffeur kept driving onward. A clearing showed among the trees; through it, the passengers caught the blue sheen of a lake. Trees again; then another sight of blue. At last there were frequent glimpses of water on both sides. The car came to a rocky clearing where a low-lying house stood by the fringe of trees.

This was Cortland Laspar's lodge. Its setting was ideal. The house was situated on a promontory that jutted out into the lake. All about were twisting, wooded shores. Off toward the right, the lake widened and showed tree-clad isles.

From one, a tiny wreath of smoke was curling upward, its thin white a contrast to the ultramarine hue of Lake Chalice and the emerald banking of the forest.

Harry and Rex alighted. Coming from the verandah of the lodge was Cortland Laspar. The gray-haired man was clad in a linen suit. He seemed to be enjoying the pleasant weather.

Rex shook hands with his uncle's friend, then introduced Harry. The hired car started back toward the depot, miles away.

The arrivals accompanied Laspar up to the lodge. They ascended the steps of the broad verandah, crossed the porch and entered the front door. They found themselves in a broad, cool living room that won their instant admiration.

Laspar smiled as he noted the enthusiasm. It was plain that the magnate was proud of this room. It was furnished with wicker chairs and tables, all of attractive pattern. Smooth grass rugs carpeted the floor. Upon the walls hung numerous trophies – heads of deer, moose and elk. A bear rug in one corner formed the setting for a rack that held an array of shotguns and rifles.

Viewed from the front door, the living room spread off to the right. An alcove at the far rear was large enough to form a small library; books in their cases, reading lamp on a table, were evidences of the alcove's purpose.

Straight ahead from the front door, namely, at the left rear of the living room, was a long passage that led to other quarters of the lodge. Though low, the building occupied a large area.

"Miguel!"

As Laspar called the name, a stout Filipino appeared. The man was wearing a white coat. He grinned as he saw the visitors. Laspar called for drinks. Miguel nodded and departed.

While waiting for refreshments, Laspar motioned his guests to chairs.

"How do you like the lodge?" Laspar inquired.

"Excellently!" returned Harry. "You certainly designed it well, Mr. Laspar."

"No credit to me," laughed the magnate. "This was not my lodge originally. In fact, I have occupied it for only a short time. Since we established the new camp two miles back from the lake."

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"The lodge was here before that?" asked Rex.

"Yes," replied Laspar. "It was built by a gunning club that later disbanded. The lodge remained unoccupied for a few years. I purchased it quite cheaply. I like it so well that I may return here for the winter. This fireplace" – he indicated a huge hearth in the front wall – "should make the house warm and cheerful, even in the coldest weather."

"Lucky you are in the lumber business," remarked Rex. "You'll use a lot of logs when you get going."

"Oddly," chuckled Laspar, "I shall not have to supply my own firewood. The gunning club apparently stocked up in advance. In fact, it is lucky that I have nothing to store here. The cellar – or what there is of one – is completely cluttered."

So speaking, Laspar arose and went to the passage that led to the rear of the building. He stopped halfway and unlocked a metal-sheathed door that was set in the right wall of the passage. He beckoned. Harry and Rex arose.

Laspar opened the door and turned on a light. A glow from below revealed a square-shaped cellar beneath the living room. Harry and Rex went down a flight of steps to find their way blocked by heaps of broken-down furniture. Tables, chairs and cots formed an array of junk.

"Is this the firewood?" called Rex to Laspar; who was at the head of the stairs.

"No," returned the millionaire, laughing at the question. "Those antiques belong to the gunners, if they ever choose to call for them. I shall have to clear them out of the way when I want to get at the logs. The cordwood is stacked over beyond."

"I see it."

Rex pointed. Harry saw. The far wall of the cellar was massed with stacks of logs for the fireplace. This fuel looked sufficient to last for two winters. It was inaccessible without shifting chairs and tables.

"Come on up," called Laspar. "Miguel is here with the drinks."

Harry and Rex ascended the stairs. Laspar locked the door, then motioned toward the verandah. They found Miguel waiting with iced drinks. The three seated themselves about a table and reached for their glasses.

"FROM here," remarked Laspar, gesturing toward the lake, "you can view the property of the Quest mine. It is there, on the farther shore. Its acreage stretches to the right, clear down past those islands."

"Where does it begin?" asked Rex.

"Do you see that break among the trees?" returned Laspar, pointing slightly to the left. "That is a gully that becomes a stream during rainy seasons. To the right of it, all is Quest mine property. To the left is the property of the Chalice mine."

"It's not far across the lake," remarked Harry. "Not more than a hundred and fifty yards."

"The lake is narrow at this point," agreed Laspar. "It widens out at both sides. It is almost like two lakes, with a narrow strait between."

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"What about the timber?" queried Rex. "Your lumber camp is on this side of the lake. How do you intend to clear the Quest mine property?"

"We intend to work around the lake," explained Laspar. "Extending the corduroy road as we proceed. But we will not reach the Quest mine property until next season."

"And how long will it require to clear it?"

"Three seasons, at least. And by that time, I believe that the Chalice mine property will have long been abandoned. I shall probably be able to obtain new timber rights there."

The sun was setting. Lake Chalice, placid in its sylvan setting, was taking on a purplish hue that held the gaze of the observers.

"I had not expected you to arrive so soon, Rex," mused Laspar. "Nevertheless, I am glad that you are here. If you really intend to search for that forgotten mine shaft, the sooner that you begin, the better."

"I do intend to look for it," asserted Rex. "Particularly since a certain party tried to persuade me not to come here."

"Did Witherby advise you against it?"

"I don't mean Witherby. Of course he pooh-poohs the idea of the Quest mine being worth anything at all. I mean someone who took measures to prevent my trip here."

"Someone tried to stop your journey?"

"Yes. James Jubal."

An exclamation of surprise came from Laspar. The magnate had apparently not expected any mention of the swindler's name. Laspar's expression was perplexed. Rex smiled as he began an explanation.

In detail, the young man told of Jubal's visit. He described the fight near the Club Renaldo. He added details concerning his rescue by Harry Vincent.

"Most amazing!" exclaimed Laspar, when Rex had concluded. "What did Witherby have to say about it when you called him from Detroit?"

"I told him nothing," replied Rex. "I simply said that I wanted him to keep my stock in safe deposit. But I learned something from him, at that."

"About Jubal?"

"No. About Firth. The servant mailed Witherby the key, but no other communication."

"He will probably write later."

"Witherby thinks not. He believes that Firth is disgruntled because he was not remembered in my uncle's will. If that is so, it explains facts about the mess that I encountered."

"You mean a connection between Firth and Jubal?"

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"I do. Both have disappeared. By rights, I should be dead."

"A PLAUSIBLE theory, Rex," declared Laspar, soberly. "I like your reasoning in this matter. There is only one point that I doubt. I do not believe that Jubal wanted that stock because he thinks there is gold in the Quest mine."

"You mean he wanted it only to sell?"

"Yes. It would be a profitable offering to his sucker list. The man's game is fake promotion. Like all swindlers, he would ignore a legitimate undertaking."

"Perhaps you are right, Mr. Laspar."

"I feel sure that I am right. But do not let that discourage you if you are determined to search for the mine shaft. It is somewhere in those slopes. That much is certain."

"My surveyors went over that timber land. They built a shack there, some distance in from the lake, that you can use for temporary headquarters any night that you do not care to make a long trip back to the lodge."

"With Vincent aiding you, your search should be speeded. At the same time, I doubt that you will find the entrance to the forgotten shaft. My men looked for it – I ordered them to do so – but they found no trace."

Laspar paused. Rex took up the theme.

"It occurred to me," said the heir, "that someone in this terrain might hazard a guess as to where the mine shaft is. Your men have not been here long, have they?"

"No," replied Laspar. "Possibly you might find some natives over at the Chalice mine camp."

"They are still working there?"

"A skeleton crew is on duty at the entrance to the Chalice shaft. A mile east of the dividing line between the two properties."

"Would they welcome a visit from me?"

"I don't see why not. There should be no antagonism on their part. I think that a visit should prove worthwhile. You can use my motorboat."

Laspar paused thoughtfully. He stared out over the lake. His eyes caught the wisp of white smoke that was still coiling from the distant island. He started to say something; then hesitated, but finally spoke.

"There is a cabin on that island," stated Laspar. "It is occupied by an old hermit who has been hereabouts for years. A bearded recluse, whom the natives have dubbed Old Absalom."

"Do you think he might know the location of the Quest mine?" asked Rex.

"It is possible," acknowledged Laspar. "Yet I hesitated in mentioning Old Absalom. He is something of a dangerous character. People have found it wise to keep clear of his isle."

"He resents intrusion?"

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"Yes. His island is posted with crude signs that are a warning against trespassers. Old Absalom, himself, is seen only at intervals. Sometimes on the lake, fishing; at other times he comes ashore."

"Has he ever been over here?"

"No. But he has approached the lumber camp; and I believe he may have gone over to the Quest mine. He must have a small hoard of money, because he brings coins and bargains for supplies or tobacco. But outside of that, he avoids all conversation. At least, that is what they say."

"He has been here for years?"

"Presumably. It is said that he once killed a man who ventured to his island. Dropped the fellow with a shotgun. The intruder was a vagrant who might have been after Old Absalom's money."

"So they acquitted Old Absalom?"

"Yes. Old Absalom has claim to that island. What he did once, he might do again. That is why I would not advise you to go over there. The old hermit might make trouble for all strangers."

REX nodded. So did Harry. Yet both were intrigued by the possibility of obtaining information from the strange recluse whom Laspar had mentioned.

"Old Absalom is a trapper in the winter," added Laspar. "He must know a great deal about this territory. But they say that he talks only in grunts. Possibly he is feeble-minded, or perhaps demented."

"It would be difficult, I imagine, to gain real information from him. At the same time, he is the one man who might be able to name the exact location of the Quest mine shaft. You can think about him later, after you have inquired elsewhere."

Old Absalom's low-set isle had blackened in the shadow of the higher shores. But as the three men watched the curling smoke above the trees, they noticed a moving object on the darkened water.

It was a small boat, rowed by a stoop-shouldered oarsman. It had come from the darkness of a shore; it was coasting into the shelter of the isle.

"Old Absalom," remarked Laspar. "Coming home."

Harry and Rex continued to observe the spot where the boat had disappeared. Then came a sound that made them turn their eyes upward. The thrum of an approaching airplane.

High above the trees, they spotted the winged craft. It was topped by spinning blades that gave it the appearance of a windmill. The ship was traveling over Lake Chalice, heading toward the setting sun.

"An autogyro!" exclaimed Rex.

"The first that I have seen hereabouts," remarked Laspar. "Well, I must commend the pilot for his wisdom."

"Why so" inquired Rex.

"Because this territory lacks landing fields," explained Laspar. "But there are many rough clearings among the timber tracts. An autogyro is the one type of ship that could survive a forced landing."

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CONVERSATION ended as the three observers watched the whirling-topped ship pass low beyond the hazy green horizon. Then Laspar and Rex began new conversation about "Old Absalom." Harry Vincent alone remained silent.

For Harry was thinking of the ship that had gone from view. He was confident that the autogyro had come prepared for a landing within a few miles of Lake Chalice.

For The Shadow, when he traveled on special missions, chose an autogyro for his journeys. In that craft, he could have come speedily from New York, almost overtaking Harry and Rex on their trip to Laspar's lodge.

With his ship, The Shadow was equipped to land in one of the clearings that Laspar had mentioned. From there he could come secretly to Lake Chalice, to keep an eye on whatever might transpire.

Wisely, Harry Vincent repressed all signs of the new confidence that he felt. Dangers that might arise from the past; trials that might be encountered in the future – both were lessened by The Shadow's arrival.

That throbbing ship above the darkening waters of Lake Chalice had been a deliberate signal for Harry Vincent's benefit. To the agent, it meant that The Shadow was at hand.

CHAPTER IX. AT THE CHALICE MINE

TWENTY-FOUR hours had elapsed. New sunset streaked the western sky beyond Lake Chalice. Harry Vincent and Rex Brodford were smoking pipes on the verandah of the lodge when Cortland Laspar joined them. The magnate had come back from a visit to the lumber camp.

"Well, gentlemen," observed Laspar, "it looks as though your first step should be a visit to the Chalice mine."

"No information at the lumber camp?" inquired Rex.

"None at all," replied Laspar. "I quizzed the surveyors again. They have no idea where the Quest shaft could be located. They told me about the shack that they used when in the hills. It will be easy enough to locate. A blazed trail starts from the gully."

"Then we could find our way there by night as well as by day?"

"Yes. The shack is about two miles in from the lake. It has cots and mattresses that the surveyors left there. Also canned goods. All you will need is bedding."

"We can go over there tonight, then, Vincent," observed Rex, turning to Harry. "That will put us right on the terrain at daybreak."

"Good," agreed Harry.

"You seem anxious to lose no time," remarked Laspar to Rex. "Well, I do not blame you, even though I doubt that your search for the mine shaft will be successful. But before you start along the blazed trail, pay that visit to the Chalice mine. You might learn something."

"About the Quest mine?"

"Possibly. At least, you could gain some news regarding Old Absalom. He has not been around the lumber camp for weeks. That means that he has probably been visiting the Chalice mine. He has to go one place or

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the other to buy provisions."

"A good idea," decided Rex. "How is the best way to get to the Chalice mine?"

"Ordinarily," declared Laspar, "I would suggest that you cut across the point and pick up one of the canoes. There are several of them beached there; it is only a short paddle from that side of the point.

"But since you intend to go to the shack on the Quest property, you would have to come back around the point afterward. So you will do better to take the motorboat. It is down at the dock, here in front of the lodge."

"We'll be gone all night, at least," reminded Rex. "Maybe we will stay over at the shack for several days."

"Quite all right," stated Laspar. "I have no present need for the motorboat. Keep it as long as you want."

"Thanks," returned Rex. "All right, Harry. Let's get ready. We'll head for the Chalice mine first."

THE young men went inside. Cortland Laspar remained on the verandah, smoking a cigar. Suddenly, the lumber magnate's eyes became fixed upon the edge of the porch. There, beside a post, a shadowy streak of blackness was detaching itself and moving slowly away.

It was nearly twilight and the long line of darkness shifted uncannily beneath the afterglow. Laspar arose and strode to the edge of the porch. As he arrived there, the streak faded from view.

Laspar looked up and noticed moving clouds near the horizon. He decided that some odd freak of sunset had caused the phenomenon.

What Laspar did not see was the shape that had actually caused the shadow. Merging with the edge of the house, rounding a corner of the lodge to escape Laspar's view, was a living form cloaked in blackness.

The Shadow, close by the verandah, had overheard the conversation that had followed Laspar's return from the lumber camp. The Shadow, like Harry and Rex, had made prompt plans. Silently his figure shifted away among the trees. The Shadow was cutting across the point to find the canoes.

TEN minutes later, Harry and Rex returned with their equipment. They went down to the dock, accompanied by Laspar. There they boarded the small motorboat and took their luggage with them. They started the motor and shook hands with Laspar.

"Keep well away from the point," warned Laspar. "The lake is very shallow there. A sand bar extends across to the opposite shore."

The motorboat chugged away. Following Laspar's advice, Rex guided it almost to the opposite side of the lake; then swung in beside the gully that marked the boundary line between the Quest mine and the Chalice mine.

He pointed out the spot where the trail probably began; and Harry, also noticing the shore, called Rex's attention to a battered, flat-bottomed rowboat that lay upside down among the trees.

"I guess the surveyors must have used it," remarked Rex. "Well, here we are, rounding the point. I'm going to hug this curving shore until we strike the landing spot at the Chalice mine."

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The surface of the lake had become quite dark; but as the boat chugged along, both men could notice the blackness of the trees. The shore guided them for more than a mile. Then they spotted the whiteness of a little wharf, with a clearing beyond it. Rex headed the boat for the wharf; Harry turned off the motor.

They coasted to a landing and moored the boat to the white dock. As they stepped to the planks, they looked back and saw Laspar's point extending like a long black finger out into the lake. They had almost completely rounded it.

"What's that?" inquired Rex, suddenly. "Listen!"

Harry, complying, heard nothing. Rex laughed.

"Like the swish of a paddle," said Rex. "It must have been a fish jumping. I only caught one splash."

He turned on an electric lantern. With Harry following, Rex led the way toward the clearing. They followed a twisting path among some trees, then came suddenly upon a flattened space beside a slope, where hanging lanterns greeted them.

SEVERAL men were seated on rough benches in front of three small cabins. Hard-faced fellows, unshaven, they looked up as the visitors arrived.

Beyond the cabins, Harry spied a pair of heavy, slanted doors in the side of the slope.

These barriers were metal-sheathed and padlocked. They marked the entrance to the closed shaft of the Chalice Gold Mine, the property that was at present in charge of this skeleton crew.

A big fellow arose to greet them. His eyes showed suspicion in the lantern light. Harry advanced while Rex extinguished the electric lantern, that was no longer needed.

"We're from over at Laspar's," stated Harry. "My name is Vincent. This chap is named Brodford. A friend of Laspar's."

"Glad to meet you," growled the big man, extending a thick paw. "My name's Luke Trebold. Supervisor here. This is private property, you know, and we're not keen about having strangers come around. But since you're friends of Laspar's, it's all right, I guess."

Despite the greeting, Harry sensed that it was not all right. He had seen Trebold shift his hand to his hip, where a revolver was hanging in a holster. He noted that the other men were armed, and they looked ready to follow any order that Trebold might give.

Mention of Laspar's name had apparently mollified the tough supervisor; but while Rex was shaking hands with Trebold, Harry discovered another reason for the disgruntled welcome. A tall, long-jawed man strolled over from the front of a shack; with an air of authority, he also came up to greet the visitors.

"I'm Sheriff Hawlings," announced this worthy. Harry noted that he was better clad than the other men. "Just happened to be here looking things over. I may have to put an attachment on this property, so I'm watching to see that it's kept closed."

"That's right," growled Trebold. "Give us a bad name, sheriff! Tell these folks that the Chalice mine is on the rocks."

THE GOLDEN QUEST

"They probably know it anyway!" retorted the sheriff. "If they don't, they'll find out. Glad to meet you, gentlemen. Friends of Cortland Laspar's, eh? Well, that makes you friends of mine."

"We just came over here to make friends," said Rex to Trebold, who was glaring grouchily. "We're not interested in the Chalice mine. I'm just as badly sunk as the fellows who have invested in this property. I have stock in the old Quest mine."

"That's why you're up here?" queried Trebold.

"Yes," replied Rex, "and I've taken on a tough job. Looking for that lost shaft. You've heard about it, haven't you."

"Sure have," rejoined Trebold. "But I've got no idea where it's located. We don't go trespassing on that other property."

Another man had come over to join the sheriff. This fellow looked like a deputy. The sheriff made no introduction. He was too interested in what Rex had said.

"LOOKS like you've got a tough job, all right," observed the sheriff. "Nobody hereabouts knows anything about that Quest mine shaft."

"Not even Old Absalom?" inquired Rex.

"That's an idea," responded the sheriff, suddenly. "What do you think about it, Trebold? Old Absalom's been over here, hasn't he?"

"Yeah," growled Trebold, "but that old cuckoo don't do much talking. Comes in with a little cash, grunts around about buying tobacco and bacon. Sometimes he wants to swap fish."

"Do you ever chat with him?" asked Rex.

"You can't," snorted Trebold. "He talks sign language, that guy! He hasn't been around here for a week. Sticks close to his island when the fishing is good. And he's got plenty of tobacco. We loaded him up with a lot of plug when he was here."

"Old Absalom lives on an island, you know," began the sheriff. "It's down at the other end of the lake."

"And it's a good place to stay away from," put in Trebold. "They say he shot a couple of guys who went down there. I've told my men to stay away from there."

"He did kill a man once, I believe," admitted the sheriff. "Some years ago, before I was hereabouts. Of course it's his property –"

"And if any of my men went there," interrupted Trebold, savagely, "and Old Absalom loaded them with lead, you couldn't do a thing about it, could you, sheriff?"

"Not if they knew they were supposed to stay away from there," replied Hawlings. "Old Absalom has his signs up. He lives alone, and they say he has money in his cabin. He has a right to protect it."

"If somebody blundered in there by mistake, there might be a case against Old Absalom if he made trouble. But if you or your men went there, knowing the situation as you do, I'd have to stick up for the hermit if he

made trouble."

"Does that apply to Vincent and myself?" queried Rex.

"It does," acknowledged the sheriff. "From now on. You know the island is taboo. We've just told you."

"Then if we went to see Old Absalom –"

"You'd better hail him while he's out fishing on the lake, or catch him when he's here or at the lumber camp."

Conversation lulled. Rex turned to Harry.

"Well," decided Rex, "I guess we'd better be on our way. Glad to have met you, Mr. Trebold; and you also, sheriff. Thanks for the information."

Rex turned about and clicked the electric lantern. He swung it toward the path; as he did, Harry noted an odd blackness between two trees. It seemed as though the light was blocked by some solid obstacle.

Then the lantern, swinging, reached the path. The odd sight was ended. Harry alone had spotted it. He was thinking of that blackness as he and Rex made their way back toward the dock.

Only a fleeting glimpse of solid inkiness.

Yet that token was significant to Harry Vincent. It told him that although he and Rex Brodford were departing, The Shadow was present and remaining by the Chalice mine.

CHAPTER X. THE TRAIL BELOW

THE visit of Rex Brodford and Harry Vincent had produced only a temporary ripple in the monotony that surrounded the Chalice mine camp. Luke Trebold grumbled something about the dumbness of the visitors. Evidently he thought that they were fools to institute a search for the old Quest mine.

The sheriff added a few remarks, recalling stories from the past, regarding the days when the Quest mine had been in operation. Then he also dropped the conversation. He motioned to the deputy, to indicate that they were leaving.

"We're heading back to town," the sheriff told Trebold, "and if we don't crack up our car on that bum road of yours, we'll be lucky!"

"Don't blame me for the road," grumbled Trebold. "I didn't build it. Maybe we'll have a new one, some day, if those smart promoters can dig up some new dough to run this works of ours."

"Still selling stock in the Chalice mine, are they?"

"Trying to, I understand. But they wouldn't dish any to me, even as a gift!"

The sheriff laughed.

"I guess you figure this mine is a has-been, too," he said. "Well, Trebold, you should worry, so long as they keep up the pay roll. Only remember this: I'm not going to be the goat if anybody springs an attachment on this mine property. That's why I've come over here in advance.

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"Like that old hunting lodge that Laspar bought. When the gunning club that owned it began to look rocky, I warned them not to start sneaking stuff away. They didn't. And the same thing applies here."

"Yeah?" Trebold spoke with challenge. "Well, don't get too previous, sheriff. Your duty don't come until later. After you do plank on the attachments."

"I'm waiting, Trebold. But there's such a thing, you know, as people evading a law. It don't go in this county. People can't make false statements to the law –"

"Who's made false statements?"

"Nobody, yet – so far as facts show; but –"

"I've told you, sheriff; that this mine shaft is locked up. That it's not going to be opened for the purpose of removing equipment. I'm keeping it locked, except in case of emergency."

"And you'll report to me –"

"If I get orders to open the shaft, I will. And if I have to go in there for any reason, I'll tell you all about it. This mine is closed until further notice."

"That's all I want to know." The sheriff turned to the deputy. "Heard it, did you, Hank? Well – it goes on record."

Trebold scowled as the sheriff turned about. With the deputy following, Hawlings made his way toward an obscure roadway past the slope. Trebold made no comment, nor did any of his sullen men.

From somewhere on the lake came the chugging of the motorboat in which Rex and Harry had departed. Then followed the rumble of the sheriff's automobile. The car sent back jouncing sounds as it started along a rocky road.

"TOUGH baby, that sheriff," commented one of Trebold's crew. "Talks like he meant business!"

"Sounded like he was scairt of Old Absalom, though," chuckled another of the outfit. "Maybe he had words with that old bozo."

"Old Absalom's cuckoo," chimed in another. "All he says is 'Gimmee 'baccy' – yah, and then jingles a pocketful of change. I wouldn't worry about that old goof. If he –"

"Nix on the chatter," interrupted Trebold. "It's bad enough to have the sheriff mooching around here, without having to listen to you saps gab about it. Come on" – he picked up a lantern as he spoke – "and start that pinochle game we was talking about when the tin–star blew in."

Other men arose as Trebold spoke. They went into one of the cabins. Two of the crew remained on duty – one smoking a pipe, while the other whittled away at a stick.

The putt–putt of the motorboat was only a tiny echo in the distance. Croaking frogs, the occasional buzz of a gnat – these were the only sounds outside the cabin. From inside came the mumble of voices. The card game had begun.

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Outside, lanterns made a vague circle where the two men were seated. Along that fringe of light came a gliding tinge of darkness. Someone was skirting the luminous circle, gliding softly and unseen.

The doorway to the Chalice mine shaft showed dimly. Neither man was looking in that direction. One was staring toward the ground; the other out to the lake. Hence they failed to observe the strange manifestation that occurred.

The doors were blackened by a bat-like shape. A living figure pressed close against the entrance to the mine shaft. Taking advantage of the break-up of the throng. The Shadow had approached the spot that the sheriff had tabooed.

THE SHADOW'S form, almost motionless, obscured his gloved hands as they worked. The big padlock was formidable; it would have required a heavy sledge to crack it. But The Shadow was working on that lock, picking it with a wedge-shaped tool of metal.

The lock yielded. Softly, The Shadow removed it from its staple. He drew back the hasp. He drew on one door. A hinge began to groan. The Shadow muffled the noise with his body.

The opening widened by inches. Then the black shape performed a sidewise maneuver. Easily, The Shadow entered the shaft.

The door closed only part way behind him. A narrow crevice remained. Reaching through it, The Shadow swung the hasp back into position. Pressing the other half of the door outward, he managed, with a minimum of space, to let hasp come over staple. He pressed the padlock into place and clicked it.

One of the two men looked about. The fellow had heard the click; his eyes caught the slight waver of the doors as they settled inward. The man uttered an oath.

"What is it, Cholly?" inquired his companion.

"Them doors, Beef," returned Cholly. "Looked like somebody was jiggling them!"

"Locked, ain't they?"

"Le's go see."

Cholly sauntered over to examine the doors. He found the padlock in position. "Beef," arriving, uttered a laugh.

"Looks like you're goofy, Cholly," he said. "Seeing things, ain't you? Whatta you want me to do – call Luke?"

"Naw," retorted Cholly. "No use in that, Beef. Just the same, he don't want nobody fooling around here – and it's our job to watch these here doors, even if we do go bugs while we're looking at them."

The two men went back to their places on the bench. They forgot the episode. The Shadow's strategy had tricked these observers.

MINUTES passed. A light glimmered in the mine shaft. It was far below the doors; its rays were directed downward.

THE GOLDEN QUEST

The Shadow was descending at a downward angle into the earth. His course was straight, between rocky walls; but his pace was a stride. The floor of the passage was smooth enough to permit it.

The Shadow stopped. He had reached a turn. He rested his flashlight upon a little ledge. Paper came into view. The Shadow marked the number of his paces. He produced a compass and held the instrument level until it indicated north. He drew a penciled line on the paper.

That was not all. The Shadow produced an instrument like a carpenter's level and held it until an air bubble rested level in the center of a watery tube. He raised an angled sight and calculated by directing it back along the shaft. He added another notation to his sheet.

Taking the turn in the passage, The Shadow continued his progress. He came to a division of the shaft. There he made new calculations. He took one rocky road, sighted it and determined the direction at every turn. Reaching an end of this side passage, he made a notation and returned. The interior of the Chalice mine formed a labyrinth of passages. Always descending, these side channels had been driven off, then abandoned. The rock was dull and barren, except at rare places where a mica-like substance glistened in the walls.

The main passage, though it curved and twisted, was easy enough to follow. Each time that the diggers had found no gold ore, they had returned to drive the sloping shaft still farther.

Each side passage ended in a mass of shattered rock. Evidently, when orders for abandonment came, the useless stone had been left where it lay. At last, after a return to the main shaft, The Shadow reached a final spot where the chief tunnel also ended in chunks.

The Shadow placed his paper upon a large stone. He produced a map – a topographical survey chart – that showed the ground about Lake Chalice. He compared this with his own mapping of the Chalice mine.

From the comparison, The Shadow discovered the exact spot where he stood. The main shaft had ended a hundred yards inland from the lake.

The depth, as The Shadow calculated it, was some thirty feet below the ground level on the lake shore. The shaft had twisted so it was heading lakeward when abandoned.

A soft laugh came from The Shadow's lips as his eyes studied the diagrams beneath his light.

A blackened finger pointed to one of the side shafts that The Shadow had followed. It was a longer shaft than some of the others. Its slope had been considerable. It had gone off to the left of the main shaft, paralleling the lake shore.

THE SHADOW returned up grade until he reached the entrance to that particular siding. He took the side shaft and came to its rocky ending. Setting his flashlight so he could work within the rays, The Shadow began to remove chunks of rock. A black opening showed ahead, above the level of the floor.

The Shadow found ample space to enter the hole. He found himself upon a rough-hewn floor, yet one that was level and had a ceiling high enough for standing room.

Making new calculations, The Shadow followed this path. He was traveling left. He came to a slope that led down to the right. But he did not take it. Instead, he kept straight onward.

At the end of a few hundred yards, The Shadow struck a cross shaft. He marked his calculations; he used the compass, then threw his light down a slope to the right.

THE GOLDEN QUEST

That end of the cross shaft ended within thirty paces. The Shadow turned left. He followed up a slope.

At times, his light caught glitter from rocky walls. But The Shadow's interest lay straight ahead. He was careful, exacting in his calculations, until he came to a steep incline. Almost vertical, this shaft ended in a mass of jagged, chunky rock that looked cracked and ready to fall inward.

In fact, several ragged blocks had already dropped. Using one of these for his flashlight, The Shadow set his charts upon the other. As calmly as if in his sanctum, he completed his calculations and comparisons.

He located the exact spot where he was; from the contours on the topographical map, he estimated that he was near the surface of the ground, far distant from the sheathed doors of the Chalice mine.

The Shadow returned down the chunky slope. He went back into the level that he had uncovered. He stopped when he came to the one slope that he had not investigated. This led to the left, as The Shadow now was facing. It was straight.

Marking both his own chart and the map, The Shadow took the downgrade. A good clear shaft, one that made footing easy, The Shadow needed his light only at intervals. He was counting paces as he went, the flashlight blinking into the depths.

The shaft leveled. The Shadow paused. Then he continued straight ahead. The floor of the shaft began to rise. Another calculation; then, with light blinking intermittently, The Shadow followed upward. Ahead loomed a smooth surface – either the end of the passage, or a turn.

The Shadow's light blinked out. His form moved on through darkness. The Shadow stopped; he flashed his light upon the paper diagram and made another notation. His work was finished.

Two hours had elapsed during The Shadow's strange investigation of the depths. With his calculations, he had learned every detail of the burrowed tunnels that he had reached from the entrance of the Chalice mine.

At one point, The Shadow had paused to change the battery in his tiny torch. The new battery was showing signs of feebleness. The Shadow extinguished it entirely. Evidently he did not need it, now that he had acquired knowledge of these tunnels.

A strange laugh rippled from The Shadow's lips. It was eerie in that tomblike passage. Though whispered, it traveled far. Its mockery was picked up by hewn walls. Echoes crept back from distant spots – ghoulish, quivering reverberations that remained prolonged.

Then silence. The Shadow's movements were inaudible. Master of darkness, he had become familiar with these depths. His unfollowed trail had ended as mysteriously as if the walls themselves had swallowed him.

CHAPTER XI. PLOTTERS BY NIGHT

WHILE The Shadow had been engaged in his strange expedition, Harry Vincent and Rex Brodford had not been idle. The two young men had chugged their way to the gully that marked the edge of the Quest mine property. They had moored the motorboat and found the blazed trail to the shack.

Stowing their luggage, they had decided to return to the lake. In course of discussion, both had agreed that it would be more pleasant to spend the night at Laspar's lodge. They could then start their first day's search from the water's edge.

THE GOLDEN QUEST

The trek up to the shack had been a rocky one. Their return progress had been slow. With the boat ride, and two miles of hike up the hill and two miles down again, they had consumed considerable time. Added to this was a half hour that they had spent at the shack. The entire procedure had required more than two hours and a half.

Seated on the shore beside the motorboat, Rex and Harry lighted their pipes and began to talk about the night's work. Rippleless, the blackened water of Lake Chalice lay before them. Under a cloudy sky, they could scarcely discern the point where Laspar's lodge stood.

The air was warm and sullen. The water lay Styxlike in its inkiness. The adventurers were like lost souls, waiting for Charon's barge to take them to some nether shore.

Something in the gloom aroused Rex Brodford.

"Vincent," declared the young man, seriously, "we'd be dubs to call this a night. We're betwixt and between, if you get the idea."

"Elucidate," laughed Harry.

"We've left the shack," resumed Rex, "and we'd be crazier than we are if we went back to it. But at the same time, we told Laspar we intended to stay there."

"We intimated that we would."

"Well, there are no lights showing on the point. He has given us up for the night, and a pair of fine wahoos we'd be if we barged in at this late hour."

"So therefore, we should camp here."

"No. The shack is the best bet, provided that we can kid ourselves into thinking we had a reason for coming back here to the lake."

"A reason? How about a ride in the motorboat?"

"A mode of transportation. I want a purpose. I have one, if you're game."

"A trip to Old Absalom's isle?"

"You've guessed it."

HARRY pondered. The adventure appealed to him. But Harry held some concern about the advisability of such a step. He felt that it would be better to first contact The Shadow.

While Harry considered, Rex broke the chain of thought.

"Come along," he scoffed. "We ought to find out something about this bearded hermit before we start hunting for the mine shaft. Let's look in on him, at his native habitat. He's part of the fauna of Lake Chalice."

"It might not be wise," began Harry.

THE GOLDEN QUEST

"Why not?" Rex's query carried a note of suspicion. "I thought you were with me a hundred per cent, Vincent."

"I am," acknowledged Harry. He saw need of an excuse for his reluctance. "I'm not worrying about Old Absalom. What I don't like is the motorboat."

"What's the matter with it?"

"You can hear it anywhere on Lake Chalice. If we chugged down by that island, the hermit would be out with a howitzer, waiting to sink us."

"No other objection?"

"None."

Rex chuckled. "How about that old rowboat we saw on the shore?" he queried. "The flat-bottomed scow that somebody turned turtle. We can use that. Come along we'll get it."

Rex arose. Harry was forced to follow. He had no present excuse for dallying. He hoped only that they would find a leaky boat, with no oars.

But Harry was doomed to disappointment. After blundering through underbrush, they came upon the boat. Rex thumped it and found it solid; then stumbled upon the oars projecting from beneath the inverted gunwales.

"Loop oarlocks," he commented, as he shook one of the oars. "All ready to go. Come along – we'll launch this beauty and begin our voyage."

ONE hour later, the boat was gliding close to the lee of Old Absalom's island. Rex was at the oars; Harry was seated in the stern, watching the boat's course.

Progress had been slower than anticipated. The trip had begun with creaking oarlocks, which Harry had protested. As a result, they had stopped at the motorboat for an oil can.

Generous squirts of lubricant had banished the noise. Rex was a competent oarsman; and he had added skill rather than speed. Half a mile from the isle, he had muffled his strokes entirely. The approach was one of stealth.

The boat grounded on sand. Rex clambered ashore. Harry followed, and they drew the boat up among the bushes. Skirting the shore of the little islet, the two men looked for signs of a path. They did this in darkness, not caring to risk a flashlight.

Harry stumbled against a large object. It turned out to be a skiff – the boat that the hermit evidently used. Pressing among the bushes, Harry used a flashlight on the ground. The rays showed what appeared to be a path.

The investigators prowled their way toward the center of the island. They saw a glimmer. Edging away from the path, they came to the side of a crude cabin. A glow from a grimy window proved that someone was at home.

"Listen!" Harry whispered the warning. "Voices – in the cabin!"

THE GOLDEN QUEST

"We can make it to the window," returned Rex.

They prowled closer. One windowpane was broken; hence sound came from the interior of the cabin. Harry was the first to peer in from darkness. He grabbed Rex's arm, warningly. Both stood with bated breath.

Inside the cabin was a stoop-shouldered man clad in dungarees. His face was matted with a thick, black beard. His eyes looked wild; his entire appearance was unkempt. Such was Old Absalom, the hermit.

But it was not this strange recluse who captured the attention of the peering men. Old Absalom had two companions who appeared to be visitors. One of them, sallow of visage, was a man whom Harry Vincent recognized as he whispered the name to Rex Brodford.

"James Jubal!"

Harry had hardly uttered the name before he realized his mistake. He had never told Rex that he had once seen Jubal.

But Rex was too tense to realize the significance of Harry's whispered recognition. Rex not only knew Jubal; he recognized the other visitor as well.

"Firth!"

Answering Harry's whisper, Rex gave this proof of the servant's treachery. Here they were, Jubal and Firth, together on Lake Chalice. Fellow conspirators, they could have but one purpose: to defeat the aims of Rex Brodford.

"It's all right, old-timer" – Jubal was chuckling these words as the men outside listened – "we're here to make a deal with you. Money – for you!"

As he spoke, Jubal turned slightly. Harry and Rex saw that he was holding a revolver. That explained why Old Absalom had been standing rigid.

As Jubal moved, Firth brought out a bag and jingled it. The hermit's hands rose eagerly. A smile spread amid his beard.

"It makes us friends, eh," laughed Jubal. "Well, we can forget the guns then. I'll pocket mine. Don't make a grab for that shotgun of yours, old-timer. Show him the silver, Firth."

The servant opened the bag. It was like a small pouch, heavily laden. Silver coins jingled on a crude table. Old Absalom began to snatch at them. He grabbed coins that were rolling to the floor. Jubal stopped him with an outstretched hand.

"Not yours yet," he told the hermit. "We must make a bargain, first. You understand?"

Old Absalom stood still and nodded. But his eyes were avaricious as they remained upon the coins.

"You don't like people to come here, do you?" inquired Jubal. "You were going to shoot us, weren't you?"

"Yah," grunted Old Absalom. "Maybe."

"But we brought you money," stated Jubal. "You would like to keep it? You would like more?"

THE GOLDEN QUEST

"Yah. I like money."

"Then here is what you are to do: Keep other people away. Men are coming here to steal your money. Be ready for them."

The hermit stepped back. His fists clenched. He glowered as he stared about.

"Two men are coming," explained Jubal. "You must kill them! Quickly! Before they kill you! Young men!"

Old Absalom nodded wisely.

"Men who will come from up there" – Jubal pointed in the direction of the Quest mine – "men who are living up on that hill. Kill them, like you killed before!"

"I kill!" snarled Old Absalom.

"You kill," rejoined Jubal, "but say nothing. When you have killed them, we will come back. With more money. But we can not come here again until they are dead."

Another nod from the hermit.

"Remember," warned Jubal, "they are coming soon. Stay here – away from the lake – and be ready for them."

"Yah," agreed Old Absalom.

Jubal motioned to Firth. The two turned about and started from the cabin. Rex Brodford was drawing a gun from his pocket. He was ready to spring through the window. Harry stopped him with a quick clutch.

The move was a wise one. Sounds were coming from bushes off to the sides of the cabin. Harry drew Rex away from the window. Jubal and Firth were not the only ones who had come to this isle.

They had brought a gang of thugs with them; but luckily they had posted their reserves on the other side of the crude building, to watch the doorway. Thugs had not noticed Harry and Rex approaching.

A whisper from Harry. He and Rex sneaked away toward the path. They could hear Jubal and his crew moving off in the opposite direction. The crooks evidently had come by boat to the other side of the island.

BACK at the rowboat, Harry and Rex pushed off and began a slow, cautious trip along toward the lake shore. They whispered as they progressed.

"They've come here with a lot of mobsters," informed Rex. "They've figured what we'd be doing. They must be parked somewhere in the woods, those rogues and their crew. There's enough of them to attack us."

"But they're passing the buck," commented Harry, wisely. "They figure Old Absalom as a better bet."

"Why? Because the guy's goofy?"

"Sure! He'd take the rap. We'd be in wrong for trespassing on his island."

"And that would leave Jubal and his outfit in the clear."

THE GOLDEN QUEST

"That's just it. But it leaves us safe for a while, anyway."

"Until we visit Old Absalom."

"No; it leaves us safe until they begin to wonder why we haven't come to see the hermit. We have three or four days to go. But I wouldn't like to bump into that crew in the dark."

"Neither would I. Do you think it will be safe up at the shack?"

"Safer there than anywhere else, Rex. Those thugs will stay away until Old Absalom gets his whack. We'll lie low tonight and talk it over."

"Maybe we could bribe old whiskers ourselves."

"Possibly. We'll talk about it."

Rex rowed slowly onward. He knew that he and Harry were safe for the present. Jubal, Firth and their men had obviously departed across the lake.

But as he rowed, Rex kept his eyes on that isle that they had visited. He was picturing old Absalom, in his cabin, counting the blood money.

Rex was correct in his picture. Back in the crude building, the hermit was stacking silver in little piles. He had been given more than a hundred dollars – a sum which Jubal had figured as plenty for an advance.

His counting finished, Old Absalom chuckled. With a short laugh, the bearded man found a loose board in a floor by the corner. He picked up the coins, jingled them, and added the stacks to a smaller hoard that he had beneath the floor.

There was something cagey in the bearded man's action. His smile showed broad in his matted beard as he turned back into the light. His chuckle was a satisfied gloat; not the wild chortle of a madman.

There were eyes that saw Old Absalom's face; ears that heard the hermit's outburst. A new prowler had arrived at the window of the cabin. This personage had arrived just after the departure of Jubal's crew.

The Shadow was on Old Absalom's isle. His divining eye discerned much that was of import. For brief moments, The Shadow paused outside the window; then turned and moved off through the trees.

The Shadow reached a small cove, midway between the opposite landing spots. His tall shape stepped aboard a low, dark canoe. His hidden lips phrased a whispered laugh that faded soft and eerie among the sheltering trees.

The Shadow had guessed the game that was afoot. Unseen, his very presence unsuspected by the foe, he was prepared for crime that was to come.

CHAPTER XII. MOVES AT DUSK

IT was late the next afternoon. Harry Vincent and Rex Brodford were seated in a clearing half a mile from the shack on the slope. Rex was lighting a pipe in disgruntled fashion.

THE GOLDEN QUEST

"I'm for going back to the lodge tonight," he announced. "This has been a tough day, prowling through these hillocks. Lucky we had sense enough to put on leather puttees."

"When will you come back?" inquired Harry, puffing casually at his pipe.

"Tomorrow," returned Rex, "or the day after. I've kept my determination, Harry. I'm going to scour every inch of this land. But the job won't be done in a week – or month."

"Or a year, perhaps."

Rex laughed at Harry's rejoinder.

"Maybe you're right," he decided. "But our only bet is to keep on. No one's going to give us a tip-off. Not even Old Absalom."

"Why not?"

"Because I don't think he knows anything about the Quest mine. I think Jubal knows he doesn't. Jubal didn't talk to him about it."

"Maybe Jubal is waiting until we're out of the picture."

Harry's tone was significant. Rex looked gloomy. He was deep in thought. Harry was meditating also. For The Shadow's agent had an idea that a break was coming.

Last night, at the shack, Harry had inscribed a coded note that he had later tucked under the door. In the morning, the envelope was missing. The Shadow had most certainly come for it.

Thus had Harry acquainted The Shadow with the events that he and Rex had observed in Old Absalom's cabin. Until a reply came from The Shadow, Harry was content to continue an aimless search about the vicinity. Harry had a profound impression that The Shadow was already accomplishing some result.

HARRY was right. While he and Rex were smoking in the clearing, a figure was approaching the shack that formed their temporary headquarters. The sun had set over a hill just westward of the shack. Deep gloom was shading the tiny, one-room building.

Spectral in the dusk, the approaching form revealed itself. The Shadow was again at work, this time on the surface of the ground. Settling night was to be his mysterious habitat.

Stopping near the shack, The Shadow saw that it was empty. He turned. Pale light showed a flash of crimson, the lining of the black cloak. From folds of cloth, The Shadow drew the contour map that showed the surface of this terrain.

Moving up the slope, he picked his course with care. The Shadow was guiding his steps with the same accuracy that he had used the night before. Passing a jagged rock, The Shadow slowed his pace. He stopped beside matted ground where loose stones showed through the turf.

The trees hereabout were scrawny. Large timber was lacking on the slope.

Few persons would have noticed anything from the foliage; but The Shadow picked out a significant fact. One spot – the very point indicated on his map – could well have been a clearing years before.

THE GOLDEN QUEST

It had scrubby trees at present, but only a few maples had grown to considerable height. Evergreens looked younger than others near by. Stones, too, looked loosely imbedded. Among the trees was one that seemed alone. It showed white in the dusk. A birch tree.

The Shadow laughed. As his light mirth faded, he turned and retraced his steps toward the shack. Stopping there, he brought out paper and pen. He inscribed a brief note; folded it in an envelope and thrust the packet under the door.

Footsteps were approaching. The Shadow faded quickly toward the trees. Harry Vincent came into view. He was arriving well ahead of Rex Brodford.

There was purpose in Harry's advance from the clearing. His eyes were looking toward the door the moment that he arrived.

Harry spied the envelope. He grasped it, tore it open and scanned blue–inked lines. The fading daylight was just sufficient for him to read The Shadow's message. Dried ink disappeared as Harry completed his reading. The agent thrust paper and envelope into his pocket.

Swinging about, Harry saw Rex coming from the corner of the cabin. In casual fashion, Harry motioned toward the hill. He had a suggestion.

"It's getting dark," he remarked. "Let's climb up the hill before the sunset. Get a look at your domain."

"All right," laughed Rex. He was carrying a pickax. "Wait until I drop this piece of junk."

"Bring it along," said Harry. "Be prepared."

Rex laughed again, in agreement. Shouldering the pickax, he followed Harry along the hill. They had gone about fifty yards when Harry stopped.

"That's odd," remarked Harry, pointing.

"What is?" queried Rex.

"A birch tree," answered Harry. "A young one. First I've seen right around here."

"Maybe someone planted it."

"Why?"

"Don't ask me."

They started on. Harry paused.

"Wait a moment," he suggested. "You've given me an idea. Maybe someone did plant that birch tree; and maybe there's a reason for it. It might be a marker, for instance."

"To locate the mine shaft?"

"That's what I'm thinking."

THE GOLDEN QUEST

Rex sprang forward with the pickax. He began to chop at the ground about the birch tree. Harry pointed to a spot where rocks projected loosely. Rex drove at the turf. Stones rolled free at every stroke.

Then the pick hit wood. Battering away loose earth, Rex uncovered a buried beam. More strokes revealed a second log. The two looked like railroad ties, with rocks and earth imbedded between them.

Harry took the pick. His strokes added new discovery. Chunks of rock jounced free. Old timbers cracked. One split. Stony fragments fell loose and dropped through a hole. The workers heard them crash below.

"It's the mine shaft!" cried Rex. "The buried entrance to the old Quest mine! My turn at the pick, Harry."

IN five minutes, Rex cleared a sizable opening. Timbers recoiled with his blows; stones gave way, and clattered through the crevice. Portions of the covering surface gave from their own weight. Rex stopped working while he and Harry peered down into a yawning cavity.

The entrance was large enough to enter. But the work had taken time. Both men were exhausted; meanwhile, dusk had settled, and it was almost as dark as night.

"Clear away some more, Harry," said Rex. "I'm going down to the shack. I'll bring back the lantern and a lot of rope. By that time, we'll be ready to explore this hole."

Harry took the pick as Rex hurried away. His strokes began again.

Eyes were watching from the darkness. The Shadow had remained. But now, with the job under way, The Shadow saw no cause for lingering. As Rex's footfalls ended in the distance, The Shadow moved slowly away from the vicinity.

Rex was eager in his haste. He felt that chance had aided his cause. With the mine shaft actually uncovered, the heir wanted to lose no time in its exploration.

He reached the shack, found the lantern and lighted it. He placed it upon a cot; then began to dig into the luggage that he and Harry had brought.

Rex found a rope. He coiled it and placed it beside the lantern. He found another pick; then decided to take a spade also. He went to a corner beyond a cot, pulled a tool into view, and shouldered it. He turned to get the pick and the rope.

It was then that a sound startled him. Rex looked toward the door. Spade in hand, he stood glaring at a man who had stepped into view. For a moment, Rex had expected to see Harry Vincent.

Instead, he was face to face with Old Absalom!

THE hermit was grinning through his beard. There was something friendly in the manner of the recluse. Under ordinary circumstances, Rex would have taken the man for a friend.

But Rex had not forgotten last night's episode. Old Absalom had taken blood money. He had been paid to murder; and Rex and Harry were to be his victims. In a second, Rex had sized the situation.

The hermit, eager for more coin, had grown impatient of waiting. Knowing that his victims were living in this shack, he had decided to venture from his isle and trick them to their doom.

THE GOLDEN QUEST

Unwitting of the fact that Rex and Harry had listened in on Jubal's sales talk, the bearded man had no reason to believe that a trap would be suspected. To Rex, this friendliness on the part of the recluse was nothing more than an assassin's ruse.

As Old Absalom stepped into the shack, hands forward, Rex decided upon quick action. Leaping to meet the advancing hermit, the young man swung the spade and started a fierce stroke to beat down the bearded man.

Rex made a swift spring, calculating that the recluse would dodge. It was that belief that proved his undoing. For Old Absalom acted in a manner that was both swift and effective. Instead of diving backward toward the door, the hermit leaped forward with surprising agility, coming in under the sweeping blade of the spade.

It was the handle, not the spade edge, that staggered the bearded man. The blow missed Absalom's head, thanks to a shift that the hermit made. It was Old Absalom's shoulder that took the stroke; and though the force spun him about, it did not cripple him.

Before Rex could recoil from the blow he himself had delivered, Old Absalom made a new pounce forward. The hermit's big hands found the young man's throat. With a swift surge, Old Absalom hurled his quarry back into the corner.

Rex's head struck the wall. The young man slumped. The spade clattered useless to the floor. Panting as he stood above his half-stunned foe, Old Absalom grinned in triumph. Picking up the rope that lay upon the cot, he began to bind his enemy to prevent further battle.

Swift seconds had brought a startling turn of affairs. Rex Brodford, elated by the discovery of the lost mine shaft, was now a prisoner. He was in the hands of Old Absalom, the man who had been hired to slay him!

CHAPTER XIII. THWARTED RESCUE

UP on the slope, Harry Vincent had paused with his pickax. He had cleared an opening of sufficient size. That done, he was wondering why Rex Brodford had not returned.

There had been ample time for Rex to get down to the shack and back. Rex had started in a hurry; Harry had expected him to continue the pace. Amid the darkness, Harry stared for some sign of Rex's lantern. He saw none.

Harry was trained to scent trouble quickly. When doubt seized him, he acted. Dropping his pick, he started down the path that his companion had taken. Rocks clattered under his hasty stride.

Rounding a clump of bushes, Harry caught a slanted view of the shack door. He saw a swaying glimmer. Evidently Rex had hung the lantern on a hook; there were several in the shack. But why was he delaying?

The time interval had been a short one. Though puzzled, Harry did not feel that an actual menace existed. Hence he did not draw his gun as he hurried to the shack. He was totally unprepared for what he saw when he arrived at the opened door.

Crossing the threshold, Harry spied Rex sprawled upon the floor in the far corner. Bending above him was a stoop-shouldered man. Both were beneath the glare of the lantern that now was hanging from the wall. Harry could see that Rex was bound with rope.

As Harry's footsteps stopped, the stooping man leaped up. There, in the circle of light, Harry saw the bearded visage of Old Absalom. To the hermit, Harry was a figure just beyond the range of light.

THE GOLDEN QUEST

A vengeful cry escaped Harry's lips, The Shadow's agent stopped short, ready to pull his gun. Old Absalom came twisting with a wild fling. Instinctively, Harry leaped to ward off the attack.

They locked. Harry's fingers caught the hermit's throat. Gargling, Old Absalom tried to splutter words. The attempt only made Harry tighten his clutch. The bearded man fought wildly. As they staggered close beside the gleaming lantern, Harry saw lips moving in the light.

The hermit's eyes were half closed. They did not see Harry's face. The man was struggling for life, and Harry's grip was strong. But as they lunged toward the wall, a break came in the hermit's favor.

The locked fighters blundered against a cot. Harry lost his footing. He stumbled; his hands yielded. Old Absalom wrested free. Again the man tried to cry out; but his voice was no more than a hoarse gasp.

Harry pounced hard to bear the fellow down. The hermit met him with an unexpected uppercut; one that showed Old Absalom to be no mean fighter with his fists. The pugilistic effort staggered Harry.

In a trice, Old Absalom had the advantage. It was he who caught Harry in a vicious grip.

Harry fought back. Odds against him, he reeled toward the door, dragging the fighting hermit with him. Old Absalom swung him against the wall, to deliver a blow like the one that had felled Rex Brodford. But Harry resisted; a twist of his head spoiled the hermit's attempt.

Harry shoved a fist into the bearded face. Knuckles cracked hard against the matted protection of Old Absalom's chin. The hermit rocked; then caught at Harry's hand. Struggling in darkness, they fought equally.

BACK and forth, from wall to wall, the combat continued. The shack clattered with the noise of the strife. The swaying bodies thumped the thin board walls with terrific force. Then Harry made a valiant effort to end the fray.

Throwing out a foot; he tripped the hermit. Old Absalom, falling, increased his clutch. They rolled across the floor. Harry wrestled free. He was willing to give this enemy a temporary triumph if it would bring the break he wanted.

As the hermit plunged after him, Harry came to hands and knees. He dodged, clutched the wall and came to his feet. Old Absalom was doing the same. Harry could see the fierce face in the light, although he himself was out of the range of illumination.

Diving away as the hermit came plunging in bull-like fashion, Harry started for the door of the shack. Old Absalom leaped in front to block the move. Twisting, Harry swung back in. Old Absalom turned about and lunged after him.

Again, Harry reversed tactics. He dived toward the door, dropping wide as he did. His leg clipped the hermit's shins. Old Absalom kept onward, headlong, rolling clear to the corner where Rex lay bound.

Instead of trying to pounce after the fellow, Harry came up in the opposite direction, twisting about as he headed toward the door. Hence the hermit, also coming to his feet, was distant by the full length of the shack.

Old Absalom was groggy, but still determined. He launched himself forward for a tremendous leap, anxious to grapple again. He swayed momentarily before starting forward. It was nerve alone that was holding him together.

THE GOLDEN QUEST

Panting, Harry yanked his automatic from his pocket. Though he felt pity for this deluded foe, he could see but one course open. Like Rex, he had begun a vicious attack, knowing that Old Absalom had taken murder money.

Harry's thought was that Rex's life, like his own, depended upon the coming deed. He must drop the hermit with a single shot; for Old Absalom, like a ferocious bear, would fight more venomously if merely wounded.

The hermit's forward plunge was starting. Harry's finger was steady on the trigger. But no shot left the automatic. Before Harry could fire, a new attack came from another quarter.

A form whirled inward from the opened door. It plunged upon Harry Vincent with the speed of an avalanche. Powerful arms sent Harry headlong toward the floor. A viselike fist plucked the automatic from his clutch.

Sprawling, Harry came up, half facing his antagonist. In one brief instant, he saw the attacker who had downed him. A figure in black, with burning eyes beneath the brim of a slouch hat. A cloaked fighter who had acted with the swiftness of a cyclone.

A strange laugh came from hidden lips. Mirthful, taunting peals gave enigmatic mockery.

As Harry swayed, bewildered, another form came plunging on him. Old Absalom, at last in action, had found his quarry.

HARRY dropped back upon the floor. His head took a thump. He felt the hermit's fists against his face. With a gasp, Harry sank exhausted. That swift blow from the doorway; this final thump from Absalom – the two strokes had combined to eliminate him from the fight.

As Harry's senses faded, the last impression that came to his bewildered mind was that of a throbbing laugh that died to nothingness. The laugh of The Shadow. Harry had heard it peal in times of triumph; but never on such an event as this.

Old Absalom heard the mockery also. But the hermit, still half groggy, did not see the figure that had swung back to the door. With bearded chin upon his chest, Absalom was holding Harry Vincent pinned down while he tried to regain his own strength in case The Shadow's agent offered new attack.

But Harry was out. As seconds passed, the hermit learned that fact. Old Absalom's eyes lost their glassiness. His gaze focused upon the white face beneath his hands. For the first time, he was getting a good look at his downed antagonist.

A sudden laugh came from the man's bearded lips. Old Absalom released his hold, seeing that Harry lay half-stunned. Drawing himself up, the hermit rose to his feet, wobbled for a moment, then steadied. He picked up Harry's automatic from the floor.

A chuckle. A shake of the head. Old Absalom was again surveying his conquered foe. The battle over, this potential killer seemed to relish it as a huge joke. He looked toward Rex, bound and helpless in the corner; then toward Harry, who lay moving feebly.

Again, Old Absalom laughed as he stood in the focus of the electric lantern. Turning about, the hermit stared in the direction of the door. But he saw no one there. Black was fading into blackness.

The Shadow had witnessed Old Absalom's recovery. He knew that the hermit stood triumphant. He had watched the expressions that had come over the bearded face. Then The Shadow had departed.

THE GOLDEN QUEST

Moving silently through the darkness, The Shadow gave no further token of his presence. He was turning toward the slope, going to the vicinity that he had left – the spot that Rex and Harry had unearthed as the entrance to the forgotten mine shaft.

The Shadow's action indicated that he was through with those who remained in the shack; that new duty summoned him to the hillside, away from the scene of strife. He seemed to see no further reason why he should remain upon the scene where men had battled.

IN the shack, Old Absalom stood by the lantern, his eyes keen, his lips forming a smile that showed plainly through his matted beard. Though he did not realize how the tide had turned, the hermit did know that he had won. He was chuckling over his double victory.

Harry Vincent heard him dimly. Eyes half opened, The Shadow's agent was regaining his lost senses. Again the details of the fight throbbed through his brain. Harry realized how he had been stopped from victory. He knew the identity of the fighter who had hindered him in his struggle against Old Absalom.

Harry closed his eyes with a groan. Dizziness, as well as misery, had gripped him. He did not care what his own fate might be. He could not understand all that had happened. What matter if he lay in the hands of a man who had been bribed to kill?

All through the conflict, Harry had battled with but one thought in mind. That was to save Rex Brodford, the man with whom he had become friends. Now that chance was ended, by the most incongruous turn of events that Harry had ever experienced.

Harry had fought to save a friend. He had failed in the task. Rescue had been thwarted by The Shadow!

CHAPTER XIV. THE ALLIANCE

"HARRY!"

Rex Brodford's voice. Harry Vincent stirred. Dizzily, he rubbed his forehead and opened his eyes. He was resting upon a cot, propped up by Rex's arm. His friend was trying to give him a drink of water from a cup.

Harry stared. He was in the little shack, blinking at the glare of the electric lantern. Rex was not the only other occupant. Leaning over the foot of the cot was Old Absalom, the bearded hermit.

Harry tried to rise at sight of this foe. Rex stopped him. Old Absalom chuckled. Rex joined with a laugh.

"This chap's all right, Harry," he informed. "What's more, he's an old friend of yours. He's –"

"A friend of mine?" queried Harry, staring at the hermit. "I never saw him before –"

"No?" queried Old Absalom. "Think again, Vincent. Try to picture me without the whiskers."

Harry recognized the man's firm tone. For the first time, he realized who the hermit really was.

"Vic Marquette!" exclaimed Harry. "Of the Secret Service. Say, Vic" – Harry leaned forward to thrust out his hand – "why didn't you tell me who you were?"

"How could I?" demanded Vic. "You landed on me like a tiger! I didn't even get a look at your face! I was trying to explain, though, but you choked the words out of me."

THE GOLDEN QUEST

"So you had to slug me, finally."

"Sure! You were covering me with an automatic. I was nearly out on my feet. It's lucky you were half groggy, too, or you would have drilled me."

Harry smiled. He realized that Vic had not seen The Shadow's interference. He realized also that The Shadow had recognized the Secret Service operative. The Shadow, taking the swiftest way to save Vic from Harry's gun, had pitched into his own agent.

The Shadow's actions were explained. Harry realized that his chief had left him in good hands. That settled, the present matter was to learn what Vic Marquette was doing in the guise of a bearded recluse.

Harry and Vic had met several times before. Frequently they had cooperated, Harry working for The Shadow while Vic represented the law. The present situation, however, was more bizarre than any in which Harry had previously encountered Vic Marquette.

"How do you figure in this, Vic?" inquired Harry. "We thought you were the old hermit who has been around here for years."

"Every one else thinks the same," chuckled Vic. "I've bluffed them perfectly. There really is an old duck whom they call Old Absalom; and he did live on that island in the lake. But I was the first person to make a deal with him."

"How long ago?"

"A few months back. My chief sent me up here to investigate this Chalice mine outfit. There's something phony about that layout. I don't mean just the stock selling. I refer to the payments of corporation taxes. They've been misrepresented."

"And your job was to find out how."

"That's it. And by whom. So I came to Lake Chalice and sleuthed around. I spotted Old Absalom out in the lake and I went to see him. He wasn't so tough as he was supposed to be.

"I made a deal with him. I lived there on the island and grew my own crop of whiskers. When I looked like the hermit's twin, I talked him into shaving off his beard. You'd never have known who he was.

"I paid him to take a trip to Wisconsin to see some relatives he hadn't met for years. He was glad to quit the hermit racket, after someone had talked him into going back to civilization." Vic paused. This time it was Harry who laughed. The story was a rare one.

"I bummed around the lumber camp occasionally," resumed Vic. "Then I concentrated on the Chalice mine. But I wasn't getting anywhere with the hermit business. All I had was a swell disguise. No results.

"Last night, however, I had unexpected visitors. Two men who looked like scoundrels. They brought me a hundred bucks in silver and wanted to make a deal. So I listened. They said they'd heard that I was a tough hombre and they wanted me to act in my accustomed style.

"They told me two men were camping up on this property. They said those two persons would come to see me shortly. They wanted me to commit double murder. The cash was advance payment.

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"I took the dough and played dumb. Tonight, though, I figured I'd come up here and find these chaps that I was supposed to massacre. I knew the ones who had visited me were crooks. I wanted to beat their game; to give a warning here."

This time it was Rex who chuckled as Vic paused. Rex was picturing Vic's arrival in the cabin.

"Marquette didn't know we'd listened in," said Rex. "He came in here friendly enough. I took a swing at him with the spade, figuring his friendliness was a bluff. Luckily, I missed him."

"You put me in a tough spot," acknowledged Marquette. "I knew there were two of you around here. After the fight you put up, I had to tie you so I could look up your pal."

"And then I came in," interposed Harry.

"Yes," returned Vic, "and I was in for another battle. I didn't know who you were until you sprawled out on the floor. I put you here on the cot. By that time, Brodford was trying to get loose, so I talked to him. Then I cut the rope and the two of us decided it was time to wake you up."

Harry was sitting up. He motioned to Rex.

"Have you told Marquette why we're here?" asked The Shadow's agent.

"I just started to," replied Rex.

"Go ahead, then," ordered Harry.

REX went into his story. He told of his holdings in the Quest Gold Mine; of the episode in New York; of his meeting with Harry Vincent and the arrival at Cortland Laspar's lodge on Lake Chalice.

Then he mentioned that James Jubal and Firth were the two rogues who had come to Old Absalom's isle. He added that others had been with them.

"I thought so," remarked Vic, when Rex had finished. "Well, that only puts more phony biz on the records of the Chalice mine. One thing, though: this new crew must be working independent of Luke Trebold's skeleton squad that is posted at the Chalice shaft.

"It looks as though Jubal is working a game on his own. With Firth helping him. The tie-up is a puzzler. He has evidently decided that it is more important to balk your search for the Quest mine than it is to go on with his bum stock selling."

"We've found the Quest mine shaft," remarked Rex.

"You have?" exclaimed Vic. "That's great! It fits right in with my purpose here. I came to warn you for one thing; for another, I wanted to get the dope on these rogues who came to bribe me on the island.

"You've told me who Jubal and Firth are. Now the job is to learn just why they have tried to block you fellows. We can do that tonight. By a visit into the old mine shaft. Is it far from here?"

"Just up the slope," stated Harry.

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"Good," asserted Vic. "We'll go there and investigate it. After that, I'll slide back to my cabin and keep on playing the part of Old Absalom."

"Waiting for Jubal and Firth to show up again?"

"Sure. They're counting on me to annihilate you fellows. They'll be around to find out why I haven't. When they learn that neither of you have been to the island to see me, they'll hatch some scheme of their own.

"Immediately after their next visit, I'll head over here. Then there will be three of us on guard, to get them. But that won't come for a few days yet. Maybe it won't come at all, now that you've found the shaft you're after. Our job right now is to take a look up on the slope."

Harry and Rex were in agreement. With Vic, they bundled up items of equipment: picks, spade and rope. Using the electric lantern, they marched from the shack.

The expedition was on again. With three in the party, instead of two, Harry and Rex had found an important ally.

Vic Marquette would unquestionably prove a welcome aid in the exploration of the mine shaft.

SOLID night blanketed the hillside as the trio advanced toward the slope. The electric lantern, however, made it an easy matter to find the path that Harry and Rex had previously taken. Their trail followed a natural contour from the shack.

Harry swung the lantern to find the birch tree. That marker was no longer the only indication of the buried shaft. The work that Harry and Rex had performed was more tangible evidence than the solitary tree.

The unveiled entrance to the old mine formed a blackened hole capped with loose stones and chunks of timber. Rex spoke in elation, when he observed the added clearing that Harry had accomplished.

Reaching the shaft, Harry uncoiled the rope and looped its center over the end of an imbedded log. He instructed Rex to hold the lantern while he made a descent.

Using both portions of the rope, Harry went down into the shaft. He called up for the others to follow.

Vic Marquette lowered himself, bringing a flashlight. They had come fifteen feet straight downward; but a return would not be difficult. Although the shaft was vertical, it was lined with rough rock that offered an easy mode of ascent.

Vic's blinking torch showed this. Harry called up to Rex, who came down with the lantern. While his companions held the lights, Harry tugged at one end of the rope and brought the whole coil down into the shaft.

"We'll need the rope later on," he explained. "Maybe we'll find some bad spots in the shaft. It will be easy enough to get out when we come back. We can climb those rough walls without difficulty."

The trio headed down a sloping tunnel. They could see that the passage led a long way. That fact offered them cause for elation. As they progressed, the passage turned slightly. They saw the reason.

Rocky walls were glistening. Splotches of yellowish luster gave indication that this visit would bring results. This ground contained gold. The old Quest mine had been driven into a vein of the precious metal.

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"Keep on," suggested Rex, breathlessly. "It's getting better as we go deeper."

They reached a spot where the shaft leveled off. Advancing, they discovered a passage veering toward the left, downward. It was bearing from the vein, for the glitter that remained was on the right wall of the main tunnel.

The three kept on ahead. They saw spots where men had chopped at walls. This was the real heart of the mine, the portion that would bring wealth, if new excavations were made in the proper direction.

"They kept straight ahead," observed Harry, pointing out the path. "That took them wrong. See – the passage ends."

"No ore here," remarked Rex. "Look at this; there's an opening – a lot of loose rock."

They had reached the end of the passage; what Rex had said was correct. But Harry, probing the hole with a flashlight, brought back the word that only base rock lay in view below.

"They must have given it up at this point," declared Harry. "Come on back to where they were chiseling at the wall. There's where we'll find the real ore."

THEY returned to the spot that Harry had indicated. Rex set to work with his pick. Chunks of rock came free as he attacked. Glistening strata showed anew. Rex ceased his effort.

"It's a sure bet," he decided, "that the vein moves off in this direction. The gold is here, Harry. All we'll have to do is start this mine in operation."

"I wonder why they quit operations?" questioned Harry. "They were striking metal when they stopped."

"They were out of funds," explained Rex, "and mining was a tougher job then than now. This rock will pay, I believe, but it took better ore to make operations worthwhile in the old days."

"But your uncle was foxy enough to order the shaft closed," put in Vic Marquette. "He knew he had something here. From what I know about present gold conditions, I'd say you've walked into a bonanza!"

"Take the other pick, Harry," suggested Rex. "Let's drive some more chunks from this wall. Just to see how good it looks. Then we'll pick specimens of rock and take them over to the lodge."

"And watch Cortland Laspar's eyes pop open," laughed Harry. "This will be a surprise, all right, for him. That's it, Vic. Hold the lantern so we can both chop."

With Vic Marquette retaining the light, Harry and Rex set to work upon the wall. Their picks chimed in steady clangs as they battered at the rocky side of the old mine shaft.

Danger and trouble were forgotten. Enemies were out of mind. Success had been gained. Harry and Vic were as elated as was Rex Brodford. None of the three gave thought to the menaces that they had discussed in the old shack on the hill.

CHAPTER XV. TRAPPED BELOW

STARLIGHT showed Lake Chalice, black within its wooded shores. Obscuring clouds dulled the twinkling illumination, masses of trees were darker where slopes hid the vales beyond them.

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Thick gloom had prevailed at the entrance to the mine shaft where Harry Vincent and his companions had entered. That was due partly to the hillside, partly to the trees. But there were spots near Lake Chalice that were less blackened.

One, for instance, was a projecting crag that issued from the very slope where The Shadow had discovered the mine entrance. Gray rock showed amid trees. Upon that jutting point stood a figure, so motionless that it could easily have been mistaken for a patch of darkened foliage.

The Shadow had chosen this lookout. He had watched the glimmer of the electric lantern, which had told him that three men were on their way to reclaim the old Quest mine.

Still within range of the opened shaft, The Shadow had gained a second vantage at his new post. He could command a view of Lake Chalice.

A clear night would have served The Shadow better. Then, he could have viewed the twisted lake as a complete panorama, picking out any movement upon its placid surface. The clouded starlight, however, made observation difficult. The Shadow could barely discern the spots where shore changed to water.

Old Absalom's isle, abode of Vic Marquette, was almost invisible. The point across the lake was also hard to see; tiny specks of light alone indicated the location of Cortland Laspar's lodge.

Off along the lake shore was a slight touch of light. The light indicated the cabins by the entrance to the Chalice mine, where Luke Trebold and his men were still guarding the doors of the closed caverns.

The night was amazingly still. The distant cry of a loon came in faint trill from far across the lake. The bird's call dwindled. Stillness returned. Then, from the hush, The Shadow caught other sounds: the splash of an oar; the creak of oarlocks.

The sounds faded; but not because of distance. These tokens of voyagers upon Lake Chalice were muffled by trees close to the shore. Calculating, The Shadow decided that the boats must be between Old Absalom's isle and the landing place where Harry and Rex had placed the motorboat.

The Shadow waited. A weird watcher from the crag, he followed the course that he could not see, estimating how the boats were moving, looking for some sign of the men who manned them. At last came blinks of light, down by the gully where the motorboat was moored.

Lights moved inshore. Men had landed. Blinks, vanishing and reappearing, came as tokens of their progress. The landing crew was heading along the old path, aiming for the deserted shack wherein Rex Brodford and Harry Vincent had battled with Vic Marquette.

A LAUGH came from The Shadow. It was a guarded burst of whispered mockery that faded through the trees that fringed the crag. The Shadow had anticipated this move. That was why he had remained on guard. He had taken account of a possibility that Vic Marquette had rejected.

Jubal and Firth had paid a new visit to the hermit's isle. Evidently they had decided to be about, to aid Old Absalom should he encounter trouble with Rex and Harry. The Shadow had doubted that those rogues would leave all to the hermit.

They wanted Old Absalom to take the rap. They had not guessed that the hermit was Vic Marquette in disguise. But they wanted to be there, to take their toll if their killer failed. They had nothing to lose, for if Old Absalom should kill his visitors, they could depart before the law learned of the slaying.

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But Jubal and his followers' arrived at the isle had found the hermit missing. They had drawn the logical conclusion: that Old Absalom had pulled a double cross. They had decided that he had gone up to the shack to parley. They were coming along to put an end to the double game.

Lights were farther up the slope. The Shadow was some distance from the path that the attackers were following. It was time for him to move. Gliding from the pinnacle, The Shadow retraced his steps through the trees. He moved silently to a point where he could follow the arriving men.

Lights were blinking cautiously. Jubal's gang was coming to the shack. Silently, The Shadow followed. He saw lights go out; he listened while men crept forward to surround the shack.

Then came a burst of illumination. Figures sprang into the little wooden building. Then came oaths and growls of disgust. The surprise attack had failed, for the simple reason that the shack was empty.

Enshrouded in darkness, The Shadow had every opportunity to open fire upon his foemen. But he had reasons for preferring to leave them alone. Though he had suspected that the band might move tonight, The Shadow had hoped that they would remain latent for the present.

The discovery of the empty shack might produce the result The Shadow wanted. There was a chance that Jubal would decide that Rex and Harry had gone back to the lodge, even though the motorboat was still moored by the gully.

Unless they had found Old Absalom's skiff, Jubal and his crew might think that the hermit was out somewhere on the lake. The Shadow felt sure that Vic Marquette would have been smart enough to put his boat in a secluded spot.

Tonight was important to The Shadow. Events had moved as he had wanted them, in steady, regular progression. Harry Vincent had faked a lucky break that had brought the opening of the Quest mine. Vic Marquette had joined forces with Harry and Rex Brodford.

This was opening the way to the type of climax that The Shadow wanted. He knew that the discovery of ore in the mine would hold the searchers and bring them back to the shack. If Jubal and these rogues of his decided to depart, The Shadow's plans would resume.

MEN formed a group about the shack. The Shadow could hear the mumble of conversation. For a short while, the crew seemed on the point of returning down to the lake. Then came a growled command; lights began to bob and spread about.

Jubal had ordered a search of this terrain. Perhaps he suspected that Harry and Rex might still be about. Men were deploying for a short hunt. The Shadow saw that danger was imminent. Perhaps they would fail to find the entrance to the Quest mine. If they failed, The Shadow could afford to let them go for the present. But if they succeeded, three men below would be in danger. The Shadow took measures to prevent such a pass.

Stalking through the darkness, the cloaked guardian took the shortest course toward the mine shaft. Avoiding loose rocks, The Shadow reached the birch tree, picking it out as a rod of white in blackness.

There he waited, close to the mouth of the uncovered shaft, counting upon the possibility that blunderers might pass by the dug-up earth that marked the opening.

For a while, all was to The Shadow's liking. Flicks of light did not come close to the birch tree. Searchers were all about, but none were within fifty yards of the vital point. Then, just as growled orders were coming

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to draw off the crew, one searcher made the discovery.

The swinging gleam of a flashlight came straight for the opened shaft. A man shouted; others came clambering through the brush as they heard his call. Jubal's crew of murder-makers were on their way to the uncovered shaft.

The first man stumbled up to the pit. A snarl of elation came from his evil lips. He flashed his light toward the opening; then up beyond it. He stopped as a sharp hiss reached his ears. The ruffian blurted a gasp.

Rising from just beyond the shaft was a shrouded form that reared ghostlike in the flashlight's glow. Cloaked shoulders obscured a living form. Burning eyes glared from beneath the brim of a slouch hat.

"The Shadow!"

THE discoverer gulped the cry of recognition. His words told The Shadow the fellow's ilk. This man must be a mobster, imported by Jubal from New York. A local outlaw would not have made so prompt a statement of identification.

The cry, moreover, told The Shadow how the man would act. He had sought to suppress this fellow who had blundered upon the mine shaft. There was no chance to do that now.

Looming forward, The Shadow dropped into the edge of the pit. An automatic swung up in his right fist.

The move came as the mobster fired. Viciously, the thug stabbed flame into the night, hoping to down the archenemy of crime. Hard on the first wild shots came The Shadow's answer. The automatic tongued its flash.

The mobster went sprawling on the rocks. His flashlight dropped uselessly to the ground. In place of it came the glare of half a dozen other torches. The crew, clambering close, was ready to take up the cause of the man whom The Shadow had dropped.

Jubal's voice roared hoarse with its command. With it came a fierce growl that The Shadow recognized: that of Chuck Haggart, the mobleader who had escaped after the battle behind the Club Renaldo.

Chuck was the leader of the imported crew. Jubal had brought him out to Michigan to escape the dragnet. With him, Chuck had carried along an outfit of gorillas. Once again, The Shadow was faced by vicious marksmen.

Yet The Shadow's laugh rose strident, before guns could bark. Weird, defiant mockery was loosed from the pit upon the hillside. His course no longer one of watching, The Shadow was delivering a pent-up challenge that brought fear to the hard men who heard it.

The Shadow was fighting from a stronghold. Resting upon the rough edge of the pit, he was weaving his head and shoulders in the light. Harry and Rex, by their excavation, had provided him with a perfect fortress.

Deep in the improvised pill-box, The Shadow opened stinging fire. Twisting, he aimed for lights. Plucking targets from about him, he sent mobsters sprawling to the turf. Revolvers spoke as would-be killers pointed for that weaving silhouette. But the odds were all against the maddened gorillas.

The Shadow's head dipped with uncanny fashion. It dropped behind projecting lumps of rock. His automatics thundered from crevices that served as loopholes. Revolver bullets dug up turf; they ricocheted from jagged

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stones, but those slugs failed to find the defender.

Men with flashlights sprawled. The Shadow picked them as his first targets. A few were quick enough to blink out their torches. From then on, all were firing in darkness – the mobsters at the flashes of The Shadow's guns; The Shadow at the spurts from mobster revolvers.

ODDS were with The Shadow. His muzzles pointed from jagged edges of rock. When they moved, they merely withdrew, to find some new loophole that he could use in the darkness. The guns of mobsters, however, told The Shadow where their bearers were.

The Shadow's slugs were crippling. The attackers found no luck. Dropping away from the withering fire, they dropped for cover, firing spasmodically, at total disadvantage.

A lull. Mobsters arose to start new shots. A quick volley came from the blackness where The Shadow lay. The master fighter had paused to reload. Mobsters ducked and stopped their fire.

Another lull. Then came a voice, snarling through the darkness from some sheltered spot. It was Jubal, calling a command to Firth.

"Give me a light!" cried Jubal. "I'll fix him! Like we were going to fix them in the shack –"

"He'll pick me off!" came Firth's wheezy plea. "He's watching –"

"I'll give you a light!" came Chuck Haggart's rasped interruption. "Get ready. Here goes!"

A powerful electric torch released its glow. A burning bull's-eye for The Shadow, had he chosen to fire. Chuck had wedged the torch in the crotch of a small tree, ducking as he pressed the switch.

But The Shadow did not fire. He wanted Jubal for his victim. He was searching, from beside a rock edge, to spot the first man who had called. Jubal was beyond the range of Chuck's torch. The Shadow did not find him on the instant. His keen ears caught a swish in the darkness. His eyes spied an object coming through the air.

Too late to stop the unexpected missile, The Shadow pressed the triggers of both automatics. One shot shattered Chuck Haggart's torch. The other whizzed close to the spot where Jubal lay. Rising as he fired, The Shadow took the recoil.

As the torch went out, Jubal and his men saw the cloaked form dropping backward. In one split-second, The Shadow had launched himself down into the pit. It was his only way to escape that rounded object that Jubal had hurled high into the air.

One second later the missile struck. It hit just beyond the pit, driving against crushed stones that lay imbedded in the upper turf. The aim, however, was good enough.

A terrific explosion shook the embankment just above the shaft. Flame flashed up; rocks split and timbers crackled. Huge stones rolled down upon the hole into which The Shadow had plunged. Masses of earth, chunks of wood were added to the avalanche.

The Shadow had caught the significance of Jubal's words. The crook had brought a spherical bomb for emergency. He had intended, if occasion called, to toss the "pineapple" into the shack occupied by Rex Brodford and Harry Vincent. He had used it, instead, to counteract The Shadow's bulwark at the opening of the mine shaft.

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The blast had riddled the slope beyond the pit. Rocks were still crashing – some bouncing into the opening; others clattering down the hillside. Trees had wavered, then fallen about the shaft. The marking birch tree had toppled.

Lights were flashing now as Jubal and his men came clambering up to the spot of chaos. Their torches showed the devastation that the pineapple had wreaked. Large stones had clogged the opening. Earth was sifting through in chunks.

Willingly, mobsmen seized stones and threw them down to fill the spaces in the blocked entrance. The Shadow was entombed, perhaps dead, but they were taking no chances. Their job was to block the space so completely that their foe could never wedge his way out.

As they worked, crooks croaked their triumph. Jubal had turned the tide. The Shadow's battle was ended. They had balked their superfoe. The uncovered outlet had again been filled.

The Shadow was buried below!

CHAPTER XVI. IN THE DEPTHS

QUICK action had always been The Shadow's forte. Not only when he took the offense; but when he found need to protect his own position. Grim abandon was a measure that he could seize upon when circumstances demanded it.

Such had been his system when he had caught sight of Jubal's hurtling bomb. The Shadow had realized that some desperate device was coming into play. He had remained above ground on the chance that Jubal would fluke the opportunity.

In an instant, he had picked the one way out; seeing the bomb coming close to his nest of rock, he had entrusted himself to the depths of the mine shaft. His backward fall had thrown him away from the jagged points that marked the inner end of the shaft.

At that, The Shadow took no easy fall. He struck bottom just before Jubal's pineapple burst. He kept on rolling, huddled in his cloak, down the lesser slant. His automatics clattered in the darkness; his tight fists helped to break his tumble.

With the end of The Shadow's roll came the deluge of debris from above. Chunks of stone rattled downward. They struck before they reached The Shadow's huddled form. The missiles bounced hard against The Shadow's shoulders. A shower of earth half buried him as it shook loose from above.

Then the tiny avalanche ended as suddenly as it had begun. Loose stones, rattling one by one, were the only reminders of the downpour. The opening of the shaft had clogged.

Jubal's bomb had worked too well. Had it started a steady, chunky cascade of massy stone, The Shadow might not have survived the ordeal. He would, possibly, have been buried where he lay. The very power of the explosion, however, defeated its main purpose.

THE SHADOW arose unsteadily. He was badly jolted by the fall. Blood stained his gloved fingers as they probed in search of cuts. The Shadow moved his left arm slowly. He limped as he moved downward in the shaft.

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Then, satisfied that he was uncrippled, The Shadow produced his little flashlight and found the automatics that he had released in his fall.

The Shadow paused. From way below came a hollow shout. He listened. A mumbling came through the shaft. As The Shadow moved downward, he caught the blink of distant lights. His laugh was a weird whisper that rustled through the tunnel.

Harry Vincent and the others had heard the gunfire. The explosion had come as the finale to the fight outside the shaft. Three men were coming back to learn the cause of the disturbance.

The Shadow raised an automatic. He turned out his light. Steadily, deliberately, he aimed high shots down the shaft. His automatic was thunderous in its delivery. Bullets ricocheted from the ceiling of the tunnel.

Advancing swiftly in the darkness, The Shadow fired again. He saw the lights bob away. He released more shots. He started with his second automatic. Lights went out.

The Shadow paused. He waited half a minute, then laughed softly as he turned on his torch and began to load his weapons.

No outlet here. That was the message that The Shadow had sent. Without revealing his identity, he had told his friends that danger lay along this path. Wisely, the trio had moved back farther into the mine.

In fact, The Shadow's advance had created the impression that a squad of fighters were on their way. Harry, Rex, and Vic were making quick progress for the depths. They were past the side passage that sloped downward. They had only one course: to that hole at the very end of the main shaft.

HARRY risked a light as they neared their objective. He called to the others to listen. No new sounds came from above. Harry offered a theory.

"Somebody's crowded in on us," he declared, firmly. "They're waiting; if we start back, we'll walk into a trap. Our best bet is through there."

He flashed the light toward the opening that lay above chunks of broken rock. Vic Marquette shook his head.

"Where does it lead?" questioned the operative. "Only to some worse trap. I think we'd do better to hop for that side passage that we saw."

"No," persisted Harry, "we'd better pick this hole. I'll tell you why. One man can hold it like a fortress by firing above the ledge. That means that two of us can look for other passages."

"A good idea," agreed Rex.

"It sounds all right that way," admitted Vic.

To prove his agreement, the operative wedged through the hole and dropped beyond. Despite the tenseness of the situation, Harry and Rex could not help laughing at the funny sight that Vic made with his beard.

They followed Vic through and were surprised to discover that the passage led farther on. Harry was anxious to investigate, so Rex stated that he would stay on guard while his fellows began their search.

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Carefully, Vic and Harry advanced. They flashed their lights with caution, probing the side passage as they went. Some distance on, they came into what appeared to be another main passage.

"Can there be two outlets?" queried Harry, in surprise. "This one leads upward. It ought to go somewhere worthwhile."

"Do you think Brodford is all right?" returned Vic.

"Yes," replied Harry. "For the present, anyway."

"Then let's go on," suggested Vic. "You first, while I keep midway. Then I can get back to Brodford if you call."

Harry started up the new slope, studying the walls as he went. He saw side passages and avoided them. The main channel seemed the only bet. He noted that the walls here were dull; this was not a vein shaft. But Harry was not thinking much of useless gold.

A sound came to Harry's ears. He thought he could hear someone approaching down this shaft. He turned off his flashlight and crept forward to a turn. New sounds – clicking steps – gave Harry the impulse to learn who was coming. He flashed his light.

His torch showed men, some forty feet ahead. Instantly, a brighter light flashed from the group. Cries of recognition came from husky throats. A revolver barked as Harry ducked back behind the turn.

Harry had met another menace. In the brief moment when his light had revealed the group, he had recognized the leader. That man was Luke Trebold, the supervisor of the Chalice mine.

Trebold, too, had recognized Harry. Gunfire was the challenge which the supervisor had issued.

MORE shots were coming. Harry was ahead of them. He flashed his light as he stumbled down the shaft, calling to Vic Marquette. The fake hermit came up to join him. Harry panted quick word.

"Back with Brodford!" he exclaimed. "Hit the side shaft before they get here!"

"Who is it?" queried Vic. "Jubal?"

"No," returned Harry. "Trebold!"

A startled exclamation from Vic. They found the side passage; as they scurried into it, they could hear the shouts of Trebold's men, some distance behind. Harry gave quick phrases as he and Vic hastened to find Rex.

"We've struck the Chalice mine shaft," he declared. "How – why – I don't know. But Trebold recognized me. He's an enemy! His crew is with him."

They reached Rex's stronghold. In quick sentences, they told of the new menace. Rex pointed up through the hole by which they had dropped here.

"Better that way," he decided. "They've got us cornered here. Of course, there're others; we already know that –"

"Don't forget the side passage," broke in Vic. "Maybe we can make it. Let's try."

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As they scrambled up through the hole, a glow came from the far end of the Chalice shaft that they were leaving. Trebold and his men had picked their hiding place. The ruffians were coming in, around a turn.

Regaining the level of the Quest shaft, the three trapped men lost no time in speeding along their straight course. Their one hope was that those who had come from the Quest opening would not block their way.

"Here we are." Vic stopped the others. He turned his light to the right. "Looks like this side passage goes down deep; but we'd better take it."

Lights from behind made Vic's course the only hope. Trebold's outfit had come up through the hole and was pressing hard. Vic dived down into the slope to the right. Harry and Rex followed.

They paused for breath as they neared a level portion of the path. Harry called for time. He proposed a plan which struck him as their only hope.

"We don't know what we're going into," he reminded. "We've got to use our heads before we're blocked. Douse the light. Hold ready. We're going to cripple some of these pursuers."

They waited. Far back, they saw a blink of light. Trebold and his crew had entered this passage. They must have spotted the trio taking the turn.

"Creep back on them," ordered Harry. "Ready with the guns when I give the light."

Upward, slowly upward. Lights were blinking down. Harry flashed his own torch. At the same time he opened fire. Rex and Vic joined. Their shots were terrific as the weapons roared a message to the pursuers.

A cry from above. A light wavered. Then came answering shots. Harry twinkled out his flashlight. He motioned the others down the slope. They plunged to the safety of darkness.

Yards back, Trebold was snarling at his men. One of the ruffians had fallen; another was holding a wounded arm. The supervisor rasped an order.

"Keep after them!" was his command. "We've got them blocked if they try to come back! But there's more of us than them. Get going –"

Trebold stopped short. A strange sound had struck his ears. It did not come from down in the passage. It was back by the main shaft of the Quest mine, close by the turn that he and his squad had made.

The sound was the quiver of a sinister laugh. Scoffing, mocking, it rose as an eerie taunt within these rock-vaulted walls. Fierce gibes rose to a wild crescendo. The mirth broke, to send reverberating echoes down the passage.

Trebold wheeled with his flashlight. He threw the beam toward that entrance from the shaft. His light picked out a ghostlike shape, a cloaked form that looked like a living phantom.

Blurting a cry, Trebold raised his arm to fire. His hand trembled at sight of that shape that looked like some vengeful gnome or kobold. To the startled eyes of Trebold's band, The Shadow was a specter that ruled these depths. They, too, felt dread; but, like their leader, they were ready to fire.

Shots preceded theirs. Automatics roared, with muzzles pointed down the slope. Tongued flames brought loud cries. Men staggered, firing wildly.

Trappers were trapped. Breaking while their fellows fell, villains stumbled downward, firing vain shots as they went.

Lights were out. This was a battle of gun flame in the dark. A fight by venomous men against an invisible foe who had the advantage of the corner where the side corridor met the main shaft.

Villains fired at the blaze of automatics. The Shadow aimed for revolver muzzles as they flashed. Low in the shelter of the main shaft peering through the semi-loop-hole of a jagged rock, he again held a strength that mocked at odds.

Shots from above; shots from below. Both lessened. Flashes were less frequent; but The Shadow's fire was ever hard upon that of the foe. Final shots resounded. Stillness followed.

Then, through the silence, came the tones of a chilling laugh. The strange shudder sounded above groans. Issued from blackness, it quivered through depths that were Stygian.

Complete silence came as the creepy mirth ended. The Shadow had fought another battle. Again, he was invisible in the hushed depths of the Quest mine. Once more, it seemed as though walls of rock had swallowed the master of the dark.

CHAPTER XVII. THE PATH TO SAFETY

ONCE again, hunted men had been deceived by The Shadow's strategy. Harry Vincent, as well as Rex Brodford and Vic Marquette, had given a wrong significance to the shots that had echoed from behind them.

They had taken to temporary flight after crippling two of Trebold's mob. But they would have been fools to have stayed where they were. Dashing downward in this corridor, they reached a low level before they stopped.

Shots from behind had spurred them onward until they reached an upward slope. Then, amid silence, they held council regarding the next step. First they discussed the wild outburst that they had heard.

"A parcel of fools," was Vic Marquette's comment. "They saw us duck. Yet they stayed there, shooting after us. Wasting bullets on nothing."

"Maybe they have plenty of ammunition," put in Harry. "If they have, it wasn't wasted. It drove us deeper."

"So deep we're going up," chimed in Rex.

"That's right," remarked Vic. "Say – maybe we're in for a lucky break after all. When a passage goes up, it may go out!"

"Maybe," grunted Harry. "My idea, though, would be to creep back. Surprise those guys the way we did before. Clip one or two of them and make them fire away."

"They'll be expecting that the next time we pull it," objected Rex. "Look here, Harry: If we go on while it's quiet, we'll have time to come back. I think those chaps were trying to scare us."

"Sure," agreed Harry, "so we'd dive in deeper."

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"No," commented Vic, "that doesn't hold. They think that we're coming back. They're waiting. We've got time to take a trip along this corridor. Even if it is blocked it may give us a stronghold."

"Perhaps another side passage," reminded Rex.

"All right," consented Harry. "Let's go ahead. Make it fast."

They traveled up a way; then risked a light. The corridor continued steadily upward. New hopes came to the trapped men as they persisted in their journey. At last Vic Marquette's torch showed a blank wall.

"This ends it," decided Harry.

"Let's take a look," suggested Rex.

They continued toward the wall. When they arrived there, Vic Marquette grunted a discovery. The bearded man placed his hand upon a smooth surface. He picked out a vertical crack.

"Looks like a slab," remarked Vic. "Sort of a door, even if it is smooth stone. Let's see if we can wedge it."

They tried. The surface yielded. It moved away as Harry pressed. The motion was slight. Harry shoved his shoulder hard and Rex aided with a shove. The slab moved on a hinge. Then it struck a barrier.

"Space enough to wedge through," said Harry. "Only, there's something on the other side."

"Don't try to squeeze through," warned Vic. "Get this slab open all the way. Lean on it. Hit it hard."

In unison, the trio threw themselves against the doorlike barrier. They budged it a foot. Again they struck; this time, there was a terrific clatter on the other side. The slab swung wide.

HARRY, by the opening, went plunging headlong. He sprawled upon a stone floor. Toppling upon him came a stack of logs. One piece of wood struck glancingly on Harry's head and laid him groggy.

Vic Marquette turned on his light. His first thought was for Harry. Rex Brodford also forgot the surroundings as he aided Vic to bring Harry to his feet. Pieces of wood lay in a loose stack. They sat Harry down upon the logs.

"I'm all right," grunted Harry to Rex. "Say – what did I get into, anyway?"

Vic Marquette was spreading the beam of his light. The Secret Service man spoke in puzzled answer.

"Some kind of a cellar," he exclaimed. "Say this is a funny ending for a mine shaft! This slab we shoved was in back of a stack of cordwood. That's what we knocked over. We'd have done better to have squeezed through and wiggled out in back of it."

"Cordwood?" queried Rex. He looked up, then stepped out into the range of Vic's light. He uttered a startled exclamation as he saw other objects beyond the scattered logs.

"Say, Harry!" blurted Rex. "Do you know where we are? We're –"

Rex never finished the sentence. At that instant, a light flashed on. The whole cellar was revealed by illumination from the ceiling. Harry Vincent, looking about, knew where he was without Rex Brodford's

explanation.

The three fugitives had crashed their way into Cortland Laspar's cellar! The passage that they had followed had dipped below the level of Lake Chalice. It had traveled through the rock beneath the sand bar and up to this house upon the point.

SOMEONE had heard the clatter. Someone upstairs. That was why the light had been turned on. The sheathed door had opened at the head of the stairs.

Harry reached for his gun as he heard footsteps. Rex and Vic followed suit.

A gray-haired man came into view, peering cautiously. Rex uttered a cry as he recognized Cortland Laspar. He sprang forward to announce his identity to the lumber magnate.

Cortland Laspar came further down as he heard Rex's voice. He was carrying a rifle that he had brought from his living room rack; he dropped the muzzle of the weapon as he recognized Rex Brodford.

"What – how" – Laspar paused. Spluttering in astonishment as he saw Harry also coming forward – "where in the world have you come from?"

Before Rex could reply, Laspar saw Vic Marquette. Sight of the bearded man added to his amazement. Laspar's face was ludicrous as the others viewed it. The lumber magnate stared at the scattered cordwood. He leaned forward over an old dusty table in an effort to see what lay beyond.

"We've found a passage into your cellar," explained Rex, hastily. "We'll tell you all about it later. Right now, we've got to guard ourselves. We're being followed."

"Let's get that slab shut," suggested Harry, turning to Vic Marquette. "Come on – we can block it up."

"With cordwood?" queried the fake hermit.

"An opening in the wall!" put in Laspar. "Why – why – it looks like a door! Was that the cordwood that I heard crash?"

"Yes," acknowledged Rex. "Listen, Harry" – he turned to The Shadow's agent – "don't mind about that slab. It won't hold unless we barricade it. But that door at the top of the stairs will hold back the mob that's after us."

"That's right," accorded Harry. He and Vic had already shoved the slab shut. "Come on, Vic. We're safe enough. Let's get upstairs."

Laspar was eyeing the bearded man. He turned to Rex and delivered a puzzled question.

"Is that Old Absalom?" he inquired. "Has the man really exhibited signs of sanity?"

"It's Old Absalom, all right," chuckled Rex, "and it isn't. We've got a lot to tell you, Mr. Laspar. But the first thing I want to know is this: Do you have a telephone to the lumber camp?"

"Yes." Laspar was moving up the stairs with Rex. "Do you want to communicate with someone there?"

"I want you to bring men over here," returned Rex. "There's trouble, plenty of it, and we'll need all the help we can get! Go ahead and put in the call. I'll lock the cellar door."

Laspar nodded. He reached the top of the stairs and turned right, to the room where the telephone was kept. As soon as Harry and Vic had reached the hallway, Rex closed the heavy door and locked it. He motioned the others into the living room.

"We're getting help from the lumber camp," Rex told his comrades. "Laspar is putting the call in right now. He'll be with us shortly. Then we can give him the details. We hit a lucky break tonight."

"No wonder someone went to all the trouble of stacking up those logs and piling that furniture before Laspar took this lodge. They wanted to keep him out of the cellar; and they did."

"We've found the old Quest mine. We've spotted a phony connection with the Chalice mine. This lucky passage was the oddest break of all. But it's left us so we can turn the tables on Jubal and the rest."

Rex concluded. Cortland Laspar entered. The lumber magnate caught the last words that Rex spoke. His eyes showed immediate interest. With quizzical gaze, Cortland Laspar turned to Rex Brodford to gain an explanation of the amazing events that had brought the three fugitives to this house of refuge.

CHAPTER XVIII. DEFENDERS PREPARE

"INCREDIBLE!" exclaimed Cortland Laspar. "Utterly incredible!"

The lumber magnate had heard Rex Brodford's story, terse but complete. He had learned how Harry and Rex had gained a new ally following the fight in the shack. He had been told the details of the flight through the mine shafts.

"Incredible," repeated Rex, "yes. But it is true."

"I do not need your word for that," smiled Laspar. "Your appearance in the cellar of this lodge stands as proof of these astounding events. The identity of this man" – he indicated Vic Marquette – "is but another amazing point in the sequence. Yet there are details which still need clearing."

"There are," agreed Rex. "To begin with, our first trouble in the shaft. Who was it that opened fire from up by the mouth of the Quest mine? Who followed us down into the uncovered shaft?"

"I can answer that," put in Vic Marquette. "Jubal and his outfit must have come up to the shack. Not finding you fellows, they looked about and spotted that open mine shaft."

"But what brought them up to the shack?" quizzed Rex.

"They probably went to my island first," replied Vic, in a rueful tone. "They found me missing. They thought they'd better start up the hill."

"Do you think they found your skiff?" inquired Harry.

"No," returned Vic, "because I buried it under some bushes in a cove near the landing. I don't think they could have discovered it."

"What about the crew from the Chalice mine?" queried Rex. "What brought them into the game?"

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"They heard the firing on the hill," responded Vic. "That's why they decided to take a step."

"But they went underground –"

"Yes – to stop us."

"Then they must have known that we would be in the mine –"

Rex paused, puzzled. It was Cortland Laspar who took up the theme. The millionaire raised his hand for silence.

As the others quieted, he listened, to make sure there was no noise from below. Then he spoke in a quiet tone.

"THE situation appears quite clear to me," he stated. "Let us analyze it from the beginning. First of all, how did Jubal and Firth, coming here, learn where you two were?"

"I don't know," admitted Rex.

"They must have visited Trebold," asserted Laspar. "They could well have been hiding in the vicinity of the Chalice mine. There is every reason to suppose that Jubal and Trebold would be in league. Jubal was a promoter of the Chalice mine; Trebold a hireling."

"But how," asked Rex, "did Trebold figure that we were in the mine shaft?"

"Very easily," replied Laspar. "Apparently, workers in the Chalice mine drove a shaft off their own property and struck the old Quest shaft. You say that the Quest mine showed signs of ore. Trebold, the supervisor, must have known it."

"Jubal learned it through Trebold. That was why Jubal tried to block your efforts to find the shaft of the Quest mine. It also tells us why he wanted to buy your stock. By adding the Quest property to the Chalice property, he would have a paying mine."

"But Jubal, from all that we have learned of him, was a rogue. Probably he was trying to keep his discoveries from the investors in the Chalice mine. He wanted that new enterprise to go broke. He planned thievery of a big sort."

"The tunnel drilled into this lodge was an example. This place was empty until I took it. Jubal probably had Trebold put through the submarine corridor so that this building could be used as a rendezvous or a mode of getaway."

"I understood, when I bought this property, that unknown persons had already been dickering for it. Jubal, I suppose, was trying to purchase it by proxy. When I made the buy, the old owners wanted to hold off until they heard from the other buyers. I settled that argument by putting up spot cash."

"And in that way," chuckled Rex, "you put Jubal in a hole."

"Without knowing it," added Harry.

"Exactly," nodded Cortland Laspar. "I presume that Jubal decided to forget the lodge for the time. His chief task, Rex, was to eliminate you. But he failed. Right now, gentlemen, it is Jubal and his men who are in the bad spot."

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Laspar paused for emphasis; then he explained.

"PROBABLY," he stated, "Jubal and Trebold have met within the connected mines. They are trying to decide what to do. Whether to attack here, or to retreat. They can either follow your path or they can go back to their outlets. To the Chalice mine or the Quest mine. Either one."

"And if they retreat?" asked Harry.

"They will either take to flight," responded Laspar, "or they will prepare for a mass attack upon this lodge. To do so, they will have to cross the lake. By that time, we will be ready for them."

"But suppose they come through the tunnel!" exclaimed Rex. "They'll arrive here sooner if they do."

"No sooner than my men," asserted Laspar. "I talked with Hoxon, my lumber camp superintendent. He is coming with a picked crew, by car. We can expect them any minute."

"And what's our step then?" put in Vic.

"To wait," decided Laspar. "To guard this lodge at all cost. It is the focal point. We shall be prepared for attack either from below or from outside."

"How about scouring the countryside?" asked Rex. "Those rogues may have taken to flight."

"We shall hold council regarding that," replied Laspar. "We must not make the mistake of dividing our force. By keeping ourselves concentrated, we shall be able to resist attack. If our enemies have become fugitives, it will be simple enough to capture them."

"How?"

"Through the law. All this land is forest and wilderness. The nearest railroad is a dozen miles away. There are no through highways that can not be blocked. I shall notify Sheriff Hawlings by telephone. He will form a posse and pass the word to other counties.

"Bands of men will close in upon the terrain. Jubal, Firth, Trebold – all with them – will be trapped. The mine shafts, when examined, will be definite proof of crookedness on the part of these criminals.

"The work of capture rightfully belongs to the law. We have no right to wage battle except in self-defense. That is why I propose that we should stay close to this lodge. We can hold it as a fortress. If we are attacked, we can shoot to kill."

Vic Marquette stepped over and clapped Laspar on the shoulder. The bearded operative turned to Rex and Harry. Vic spoke with commendation.

"Here's a man," he told his friends, "who uses headwork when he plans. Mr. Laspar has the right idea. Young chaps like you should listen to him. Even I can profit by his advice.

"We've only got our own word that Jubal and Trebold are in league. Even the fact that I'm a government man doesn't give me every privilege. We can't swear that it was Jubal who fired from the entrance of the Quest mine.

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"We can testify, of course, that Trebold aimed shots at us. But when he opened fire, you, Vincent, and I were in a passage that belonged to the Chalice mine. We were lucky to get through to this lodge; now that we're here, we'd better stay.

"We're in the right at present. We can fight and so can Mr. Laspar's men, if we are attacked. It's our business to stay here, where we can't be anything but right. We've got enough of a case against these crooks to demand their arrest. It's the sheriff's job to get them."

Laspar nodded. He smiled at Vic's support.

"When they're rounded up," concluded Vic, "we tell our story. I can state that I was bribed to commit murder. You two can testify that you overheard the plot. Then the mines can be investigated. The rights of the Quest mine will be upheld. The crooks connected with the Chalice mine will be due for State and Federal trial."

BOTH Harry and Rex were impressed by Vic Marquette's sagacity. At the same time, they realized that the Secret Service man had merely echoed Cortland Laspar's statements. To the lumber magnate belonged the real credit for showing the way to a successful and complete conclusion.

A lull followed Vic Marquette's emphatic statements. In that pause, all listened, tensely wondering if attackers had yet arrived in the cellar. All remained silent below. Cortland Laspar smiled in satisfaction.

"Three minutes more will bring my men," declared the lumber man. "Even if those raiders do come through, it will take them longer than that to smash through the metal-sheathed door at the top of the cellar stairway. Moreover, there are four of us, all armed. We have nothing to fear.

"We can afford to be tranquil. Our plan is complete. I shall take advantage of these few minutes to put in that call to Sheriff Hawlings. The forces of the law will have time to function; but the sooner they begin, the better.

"Remain here while I make the call. If Hoxon arrives, explain matters to him and tell him to await my orders. He is likely to appear while I am still at the telephone."

Laspar walked out into the hall, toward the rear of the lodge. Harry and Rex seated themselves. Vic followed suit.

They chatted quietly for another minute; then became alert as they heard a sound in front of the lodge. Gleaming lights showed as they peered toward the windows. They caught the rumble of motors.

Two cars were pulling up to the steps of the lodge. Cortland Laspar had estimated the time correctly; reinforcements had arrived from the lumber camp. Hoxon and his men were on hand to aid in the defense of the lodge.

CHAPTER XIX. RIFLES TAKE CONTROL

HARRY VINCENT and his two companions were on their feet when footsteps sounded from Laspar's verandah. Though they felt positive that these were the lumber magnate's men, they wanted to be sure that they were right. Grimly, they placed hands to gun handles.

Cortland Laspar stepped into view at the same moment. He had evidently completed his telephone call; he had heard the arrival of the automobiles. Coming through from the rear of the lodge, he was the first to spy the men beyond the screen door of the verandah.

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"Hoxon!" exclaimed Laspar, in elation. "Good work! We've been waiting anxiously. Come in at once."

Hoxon stepped through the door. The superintendent was a brawny fellow, clad in khaki and wearing leather puttees. Others followed him, a squad of four, all attired in similar fashion. Every man was a husky. Revolvers showed in hip holsters.

"What's up, Mr. Laspar?" inquired Hoxon, eyeing Harry and Rex, then Vic Marquette. "You told me you expected trouble."

"Not from these gentlemen," chuckled Laspar. "They are friends: Rex Brodford, Harry Vincent, and –"

"Old Absalom," put in Hoxon.

"No," laughed Laspar, "you're wrong there, Hoxon. This man is Mr. Marquette, of the Secret Service. Old Absalom's substitute."

"Whiskers and all," growled Vic, "and I'll be glad when I can take a shave. That will be mighty quick, too. I don't need this shrubbery any longer, now that the Chalice mine has been proven phony."

Hoxon looked puzzled. Laspar gave him a brief explanation. Hoxon nodded, and his four men did the same.

"Now I know why you wanted a picked crew," stated the leader from the lumber camp. "Well, I brought along the four men that we can count on in a job like this. What's the next step, Mr. Laspar?"

"To guard this lodge," replied the lumber magnate. "There is still a possibility of an attack from the cellar, but it seems more likely that the trouble will come from outside. Therefore, I intend to post you and your men about the grounds."

"While we stay inside?" asked Rex.

"Yes," stated Laspar. "After all, this is my property. I am responsible for your protection. With four of us in here, guarded by a ring of competent sentinels, we can concentrate our own efforts on any inside attack."

"If a large force comes through by the tunnel, we can call in Hoxon and his men. That suits you, Hoxon?"

The superintendent nodded.

"The longer the range, the better the fight," decided Laspar. He pointed to the rifle rack in the corner. "There are half a dozen Winchesters there, Hoxon. The ammunition is in the case beyond. Pick your weapons and load up."

HOXON strode across the room. His men followed. They chose rifles, brought out the ammunition and began to load.

Harry Vincent looked toward Vic Marquette, who nodded in approval. This was the correct form of defense. Cortland Laspar had evidenced real traces of generalship.

Five men, well posted outside the lodge, would be ample protection against an attack upon the point. The use of rifles meant that Hoxon and his four woodsmen would gain the range on crooks who came with revolvers.

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Moreover, Hoxon's squad would have their small-arms ready for closer work. Should the enemy come en masse, they could retreat, firing, into the lodge while those inside covered them with a barrage from the windows.

An attack from the cellar could easily be repulsed. Invaders would have to hammer at the sheathed door. It would be a simple matter to determine the size of such a force. If small, Harry, Vic and Rex could handle the fray; if large, Hoxon and the outside guards could come in to aid.

Harry and Vic were thinking alike. Both were recalling that Laspar had just put in a telephone call to the sheriff. A posse would soon be heading for the entrance to the Chalice mine; additional men would start for the shack on the hillside. If crooks attacked the lodge, the sheriff's men would hear the sound of battle and would come in from the rear, while those at the lodge were repelling the onslaught.

But in this chain of thought, Harry was puzzling. He wondered what had become of The Shadow. He knew that his chief had been very much in evidence at the time of the mistaken fray in the shack. It was not The Shadow's policy to drift away while a climax still was pending.

Harry's brows knitted in a troubled frown. Had The Shadow remained too close to the shack? Had he encountered danger from Jubal's band. The thought was maddening, and Harry could not reject it.

Despite his confidence in his invisible chief, Harry knew The Shadow's penchant for danger. He realized that The Shadow would have used every effort to prevent Jubal and Firth from discovering the opened shaft of the Quest mine.

There had been shots outside that shaft. Then shots from within. Bullets directed toward Harry and his companions. Summing up that evidence, Harry found himself faced by a terrible conclusion.

He pictured The Shadow wounded perhaps dead near the little shack. Victim of a valiant effort to stay an attacking horde. Harry could think of no other way in which to account for the fact that driving shots had come down the mine shaft.

An impulse seized The Shadow's agent. Harry wanted to dash forth into the night; to seize a boat and start for the shore across the lake. Even though he might be forced to go alone, he was ready to defy all odds in search for The Shadow.

Then Harry groaned. He realized that he must remain here. There would be no way to explain his hasty action without revealing The Shadow's part in the game. That would be definitely against The Shadow's wish, for the cloaked chief had delegated Harry to discover the lost Quest mine.

To start forth without an explanation would also be a hopeless course. The others would take Harry's action for flight. They would believe him guilty of cowardice. Grimly, Harry set his lips. He could only hope that The Shadow had escaped.

"Worried, Harry?"

The question came from Rex Brodford. It brought Harry back with a jolt. The Shadow's agent laughed slightly.

"Not much, Rex," he returned. He looked toward the corner. "I'm only wondering how soon these lumber men are going to get on their job. They have a tough duty ahead."

"They've finished loading," commented Rex.

As Rex spoke, Hoxon and his followers turned from the corner. Carrying their rifles under crooked arms, they strolled over toward the front door. Laspar was standing there. Harry, Vic, and Rex were in the center of the living room.

"All ready, Hoxon?" queried the lumber magnate, brusquely.

"Just about," returned the superintendent raising his rifle and squinting along the barrel. Two woodsmen did the same. "All ready, Mr. Laspar. Just waiting for you to say the word."

"Then cover!" snapped Laspar.

Three rifles swung. One aimed straight for Rex Brodford; the second for Harry Vincent; the third was trained on Vic Marquette.

As the three men gaped at the looming rifles, Cortland Laspar issued a sneer.

"Put up your hands!" rasped the lumber magnate. "Make it quick, the three of you! One move by anyone means death for all!"

CHAPTER XX. THE BIG SHOT SPEAKS

FOR an instant, three men thought that they were victims of an ill-timed jest. Harry Vincent was the first to realize that he was wrong. His eyes passed from Hoxon's gun muzzle to Cortland Laspar's face. The evil smile that showed on the man's lips was proof that this could be no joke.

Harry raised his arms. Vic Marquette was prompt to do the same. His eyes had followed Harry's gaze. Rex Brodford hesitated; then he caught a look at Laspar. Rex submitted with the others.

Hoxon and his two companions remained steady. They were unflinching with their rifles. They held steady aim. Perpetrators of a trap, henchmen of a supercrook, they were ready to kill if ordered.

Grimly, Harry Vincent realized how cleverly this had come about. Had Hoxon and his men drawn revolvers upon entering, there might have been indication that a fight was coming. Laspar had foreseen that. He had told his men to choose their rifles, giving a reason why such weapons would be needed.

The loading of the guns had lulled the intended victims. The raising of the rifles had been quite natural. In a twinkling, friends had become foemen, and the unanticipated move had rendered an armed trio helpless.

Cortland Laspar, stepping forward, was chuckling in evil satisfaction. Coldly, the crooked lumber king eyed his victims. There was no mercy in his gaze. Contempt alone was registered upon his gloating face.

Harry was thinking as he eyed Laspar. He recalled the statement that Hoxon's men were a picked crew. He understood what that meant. They were men in "the know;" ones whom Hoxon could bring along for crooked work.

The call to the sheriff had been a fake. Just another bit of dust kicked up by Laspar. Harry felt himself a fool. He realized that he and his companions should have suspected something wrong the moment that their trail had ended. Laspar had lulled them into false security.

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Three against one, they had been in a position to overpower this man, had they known him for a fiend. But Laspar's surprise at their arrival had been genuine. The lumber man had played a cunning game. They had even let him send for his murder squad. Harry realized that he and his companions deserved this fate that their folly had brought them.

Laspar felt the same. His chuckle showed it. He had covered his game until the last. The time had come when he could reveal himself as the big shot in the chain of crime. His manner indicated that he enjoyed the triumph.

"BLUNDERERS!" accused Laspar, in a gloating tone. "You had the secret in your grasp. You fumbled it. You refused to accept facts that a child might easily have understood. You deserve the death that you will gain!"

"The Quest Gold Mine was lost long ago. Yes – but it was not forgotten. I knew that the shaft contained gold, and wanted the opportunity to gain it. I was forced to bide my time. Then came changed conditions that offered me the chance to reap a double profit. The rising value of the gold market made me think more and more of the old Quest mine."

Standing away from the rifles of his henchmen, Laspar paused to survey the glum faces that confronted him. The crooked magnate chuckled as he continued.

"A few years more would have meant the complete dissolving of the Quest mine corporation. The company still existed; but, even though its end was near, I could not wait to begin my harvest. So I evolved a scheme that suited me.

"I started the Chalice Gold Mine. James Jubal was the proxy who promoted it. He sold stock everywhere. Profits poured into the enterprise. Dupes were affording gain that I had not expected.

"We used sucker money to drive shafts into worthless ground. Workers, supervised by Trebold, started a corridor off in the direction of the Quest mine shaft. I knew where the vein lay; I had seen to it that the old Quest shaft was covered.

"We struck the Quest shaft. We did not stop there. We burrowed under the lake, bringing a passage to this lodge. My game had ripened. Details alone remained. First, to let the Chalice mine fail. I had made a fortune from it. I needed it no longer.

"Next, from this lodge as headquarters, I could work the old Quest mine – harvest its golden treasure. Gain steady profits while times were best for such a course. Later, perhaps, I might put up the Quest mine and the Chalice mine, when those enterprises were definitely dead.

"But so long as both remained latent, I was as well off as if I owned them. My lumber camp would serve me as a blind. It would provide a means of transporting gold ore from this vicinity, under cover."

Laspar had said enough to indicate the depth of his schemes. He dropped the subject of his swindling tactics and his measures to purloin wealth. He came directly to a point that concerned his prisoners more imminently.

"HOXON and trusted men at the lumber camp, Trebold and his hirelings guarding the shaft of the Quest mine; Jubal and his henchmen in New York. Those were the forces upon whom I could depend. I kept two groups here: Hoxon's and Trebold's. I sent for Jubal, Firth and the others after the game of murder failed in New York."

THE GOLDEN QUEST

Laspar stopped. He studied Vic Marquette. He spat vicious words at the bearded operative.

"You played a clever game," declared Laspar. "Taking the role of Old Absalom; playing the part of a half-wit who knew nothing, and who was allowed to dwell unmolested in these parts.

"I sent Jubal to see you. He made the deal by which you were to kill. I told him to keep tabs on you. He did that, tonight. It appears that he headed for the shack on the hill when he found you missing."

Laspar turned his gaze. He studied the three helpless men as a group.

"Jubal trapped you, apparently. His shots brought Trebold into the game, through the Chalice mine shaft. You were fortunate to find your way here, between two fires. My men – Trebold and Jubal – have shown their wisdom in staying back. They knew that I could handle you. I have.

"I was in a pinch; but I stepped out of it. I sent for Hoxon. But I do not intend to leave your deaths to him. He belongs back at the lumber camp with these picked men of his.

"They have been covering Jubal and his mobsmen, who have been living in a distant, hidden camp at the end of Lake Chalice. Jubal lost one opportunity. I shall give him another."

Laspar paused, as though considering Jubal's merits. Then he laughed.

"Perhaps Jubal shall have the job," he decided. "Possibly I shall give the assignment to Trebold. One or the other will soon be here. The first can have priority. You three blunderers will be taken back through the passage beneath the lake. You will die in a corridor of the Chalice mine. You will be buried under piles of loose rock.

"It would have been better for you, Rex Brodford, had you sold that Quest stock to Jubal. Your Uncle Ezra would never part with it. When he died, I saw an opportunity to gain it. If you had sold, no attempt would have been made upon your life.

"Owning control, I would have dissolved the corporation, selling myself the land. The Quest mine would have been legally my property, in its entirety. The law, however, does not concern me. I am a law unto myself!"

Laspar paused to look at Harry Vincent. He shook his head in mock sorrow.

"Too bad, Vincent," declaimed the villain. "You were unfortunate in your choice of a friend. You would have done better to have avoided Rex Brodford. You know too much; you die."

"As for you" – again Laspar turned to scoff at Vic Marquette – "the presence of a Secret Service operative is bad enough in these parts. As for one who has learned something, as you have, there can be but one fate: Death!"

LASPAR stepped back toward the hallway that led to the rear of the lodge. Miguel had appeared there. The Filipino's fat face was leering above the white collar of his coat. This rascal was another party to the big shot's game.

"By this time," chortled Laspar, "my men from the mine have certainly shown enough judgment to be on this ground. They would have come quietly; for they are not blunderers. They are waiting, beyond that sheathed door, for my call.

THE GOLDEN QUEST

"It will be interesting to learn which band took the initiative – Trebold's or Jubal's. So I shall have Miguel unlock the door, that we may see. You three" – he waved his hand toward the prisoners – "will then learn the identity of your executioners."

Laspar was smiling in his usual benign fashion. His storm of elation had passed; he was again the smug individual whose countenance was so deceiving.

"Unlock the door, Miguel," he ordered.

The Filipino applied the key to the door at the head of the cellar staircase. He turned about to speak.

"It is not locked," he announced.

"Good!" laughed Laspar. "Both Jubal and Trebold have keys. One of them has wisely unlocked the door from the other side. Step back, Miguel, and allow your friends to enter. Come, Jubal – or Trebold – we are waiting."

The sheathed door swung open. Harry and his fellow prisoners could not see it, for they were in the center of the living room, away from the hallway. But Laspar and Miguel could observe; and so could Hoxon and the riflemen, clustered by the front door.

Laspar waited as the barrier swung clear. The man was amused at the situation, guessing which of his lieutenants was due to appear. A broad smile beamed from his rounded face.

The smile became a frozen grin. Laspar stood aghast at the manifestation that came from the opened doorway. Instead of human arrivals, blackness issued forth. Sweeping blackness, that whirled in the dim light of the hall, to become a human shape.

A WEIRD laugh broke. Hoxon and his men turned instinctively from their rifles. The two who stood with lowered guns joined them in the turn. Miguel dropped back against the wall. The Filipino's face was as white as his jacket.

That mocking laugh betokened menace. It compelled all eyes to turn. Villainous gazes became rigid. Men with leveled rifles dared not move. They were covered by weapons that loomed like tokens of death.

Crooks were caught helpless. They were staring at a cloaked figure. They saw burning eyes that gleamed from beneath a slouch hat. Automatics were the weapons that extended from tight-clenched fists. Gloved fingers were ready on the triggers.

The laugh broke. Amid its echoes came a fierce, commanding hiss. Men of crime cowed. Raised rifles dropped, then clattered useless to the floor. Hands went up in unison.

Trapped when they least suspected danger, Hoxon and his crew could do nothing else but yield.

Harry Vincent heard that laugh. So did Vic Marquette. Both knew its significance. Their hands came down as they sprang forward.

Rex Brodford, his blood chilled by the tones of that sinister laugh, stood frozen, hardly daring to follow.

He alone of the trio was the only one who did not realize that they had been delivered. But Harry and Vic understood; they had gained experiences like this before.

They knew that The Shadow had come from the depths. Somehow, he had conquered odds, to turn the tables on the foe. Helpless prisoners had been rescued by The Shadow!

CHAPTER XXI. THE COUNTERSTROKE

THE SHADOW laughed. His tones were low and sibilant. Hidden lips whispered a new taunt from above the leveled automatics. Covering, The Shadow watched the prompt work of the men whom he had saved.

Harry Vincent and Vic Marquette had yanked out their revolvers. Thrusting the menacing weapons toward Hoxon and his men, the rescued pair were using their free hands to pick up the rifles that the crew had dropped.

Rex Brodford was too numbed to aid. He had stepped forward mechanically. He was looking toward the hallway, where Laspar and Miguel, closest to The Shadow, were cowering beneath the very muzzles of the cloaked fighter's .45s.

The Shadow!

Dimly, from somewhere, Rex recalled the name of this mysterious being. A warrior who battled crime. A master of vengeance who stood for right. He remembered, now, that he had heard the name cried by an affrighted mobster, during that fight on the street behind the Club Renaldo.

"Take these."

Rex obeyed as Harry passed him a pair of rifles. He took other guns that Vic had picked up and carried the lot over to the rack from which Hoxon and the woodsmen had obtained them. There, Rex proceeded to stack the weapons, leaving them loaded until other orders might be given.

The Shadow's automatics held an enfilade. His vantage post beside the door to the cellar enabled him to hold a flank aim on Hoxon's men; and all the while, Laspar and Miguel were under the same threat.

The strength of The Shadow's position enabled Harry and Vic to work with precision. Hoxon and his men were still armed with revolvers. Covering one man, Harry ordered him to step forward. Vic frisked the fellow's gun. Harry motioned the woodsman to the inner corner at the front of the living room.

As the woodsman walked sulkily to that spot, Rex raised the last rifle and held the fellow covered.

One by one, the other woodsmen submitted to the same procedure. Harry tossed their revolvers on the floor, over by the rifle rack. Hoxon was the last raider to be disarmed. Surlily, the superintendent joined his helpless squad.

Vic Marquette joined Rex Brodford. With leveled revolver, the bearded Secret Service man was also there to see that the prisoners made no break.

Harry turned about; he heard a whispered command from The Shadow. Harry nudged his automatic at Miguel.

The fat Filipino waddled forward.

Harry found a .32 in the man's coat pocket and appropriated the weapon. Miguel took his place in the corner with the woodsmen.

THE GOLDEN QUEST

Harry went up to Cortland Laspar. The lumber magnate had no weapon on his person. He had relied completely upon his murderous henchmen.

The Shadow had turned toward the corner where captured men were standing. Thus the prisoners were under the muzzles of his guns, in addition to the weapons that were held by Rex Brodford and Vic Marquette. Stepping clear of The Shadow's range, Harry ordered Laspar to back over into the corner with his henchmen.

Laspar refused to budge. Hands raised, he was staring past Harry, glaring at The Shadow. Sight of burning eyes made Laspar waver. As if controlled by that gaze, acting like an automaton that obeyed the action of a lever, Cortland Laspar began to move slowly backward.

Mechanically, he was acting under the compulsion of an irresistible power. Laspar's lips tried to emit a snarl. The hiss that came from them was weak.

In response, The Shadow delivered a sinister laugh. The Shadow spoke:

"YOUR game was plain, Laspar," declared the weird avenger. "I, too, came through your tunnel beneath the lake. I entered here one night ago, from the Chalice mine. But I came silently and left unseen. I picked the lock of your sheathed door; then departed out into the night.

"But the proof of your treachery was not the existence of that passage. The actions of James Jubal gave your game away. Jubal was not in the neighborhood of the Chalice mine. He had no opportunity to contact with Trebold.

"Yet Jubal, when he visited Old Absalom's isle, had knowledge of the fact that Rex Brodford and Harry Vincent were at the shack near the Quest mine shaft. Only one person could have given him that information. He gained his knowledge through you, Cortland Laspar."

Laspar scowled. His expression was an admission that The Shadow's deduction was correct. The Shadow's tones came mocking as the accuser resumed.

"From within the mine shafts," announced The Shadow, "I located the old Quest opening. It was I who gave the clue to its discovery; through comparison of charts below and above the surface. Three men" – significantly, The Shadow indicated Harry, Rex, and Vic – "entered the old Quest shaft. Jubal did not follow them."

Pausing in his backward motion, Cortland Laspar stared. This news was truly astounding to the unmasked lumber magnate. It startled Harry Vincent as well.

"It was I who followed," mocked The Shadow. "Jubal bombed the opening and sealed it. I drove my own followers deeper. They encountered Trebold and his crew. The only outlet was the tunnel beneath the lake. My followers took it; they came here, while I" – the tone was sinister – "while I remained to deal with Trebold and his would-be murderers!"

A gasp from Laspar. The big shot understood at last. He could picture what had happened in the mine. So could Harry Vincent. For the first time, The Shadow's agent understood the meaning of that prolonged fusillade.

While three fugitives were taking the path to safety, The Shadow had opened a rear attack upon the killers from the Chalice mine. Two had been crippled to begin with; the others had fallen prey to The Shadow's ambush.

THE GOLDEN QUEST

Then The Shadow had come onward. Delayed, he had arrived about the time that Hoxon and his crew had sprung their game with the rifles. Waiting beyond the door to the cellar, The Shadow had planned his final coup.

OTHER facts were clear to Harry Vincent. He realized that The Shadow had planned a simpler ending. The Shadow had wanted Harry and Rex – Vic as well – to complete an exploration of the Quest mine.

That done, Rex could reclaim his property. Vic could start a government investigation of the Chalice mine. Swindlers and rogues would have been on the spot, their game suddenly laid open, while the Shadow waited to deal with any who might offer fight.

James Jubal had introduced the unexpected. The Shadow, faced by a desperate situation, had come clear. From chaos, he had evolved new methods to deal with men of crime. The Shadow stood triumphant.

Laspar was backing again; he was almost in the corner with his minions. Harry Vincent, too, was covering that corner. The Shadow was stepping forward. Light showed his form more clearly.

Black cloak and slouch hat. Both were streaked with brown. This was the dust from the earth that had buried The Shadow after his plunge. There was a wavering limp to The Shadow's approach. It had taken an effort for him to make his spring from the cellar doorway. Tattered portions of the black cloak were mute testimony to the work of jagged rocks. The fall had shaken The Shadow, but his nerve had kept him in the fight.

Harry realized suddenly why his chief had left so much to others after his arrival here. The Shadow's strength was waning.

Yet a laugh came again from his hidden lips. The Shadow knew that he could depend upon his aids for further effort. A call to the sheriff; the binding of Laspar and his tools – these would be the first step.

Then would come the rounding up of Jubal. The Shadow, like Laspar, knew that outlaws could easily be hunted down in this wild territory. The law could take its course from now on. Details alone remained.

Automatics lowered. The Shadow was easing from the strain. A weary hiss came from the lips that were hidden by the upturned collar of the black cloak. The Shadow was giving the instructions that would bring culmination to the cause of right.

The Shadow, alone, was facing toward the front door. His eyes were the only ones that could discern the darkness of the verandah. Hence it was The Shadow, first, who gave sign of a sudden change.

Harry and his two companions were facing the corner, stolidly covering the prisoners. Hoxon and those beside him were staring sullenly at their captors. Only Laspar was intent upon The Shadow; it was the crooked magnate who gave a sign of the change.

For Laspar saw The Shadow tighten. He saw the black fists come up as The Shadow's weariness ended. He saw the cloaked form whirl in sudden tension.

Laspar uttered an elated cry. He guessed instantly what had occurred; and at the same moment, he heard the screen door swing open wide.

Jubal and his minions had come back from the Quest mine. Suspecting trouble here, the swindling lieutenant had launched a surprise attack. Chuck Haggart and the remnants of his mobsmen were surging in from the verandah, to put an end to The Shadow's triumph!

CHAPTER XXII. DESPERATE STROKES

THE SHADOW had almost been taken by surprise. Weakened by his ordeal, holding up through nerve alone, he had lost his uncanny sense of judging moves by others. Though he had suspected that Jubal might come here, he had not anticipated so prompt an arrival.

The lieutenant must have placed his men aboard the motorboat.

Muffling of the engine had prevented the sound of its chugs from reaching the lodge. Landing down the point, Jubal had advanced for a surprise attack.

Intuitively, The Shadow had spotted danger; but his discovery of the menace had been belated. Realizing his fault, he was springing into action at a disadvantage. To counteract that condition, he took to the defensive.

Chuck Haggart, at the doorway, fired before The Shadow. So did two mobsmen, bulked beside their leader. They aimed for a fading target. The Shadow had whirled; traveling on a swift arc, he was swinging for the cover of the opened door to the cellar.

Slugs thudded that barrier. Wide shots from mobster guns. The Shadow cut suddenly in front of Chuck Haggart's aim; but the barrier was now a refuge. Another bullet rammed the metal sheathing.

The Shadow's automatics roared. One hand above the other, he opened fire from the edge of the metal door. Quick, zipping shots, aimed for the front doorway. One mobster sagged, still firing. Chuck and others blazed away, retreating. Another mobster fell.

Quick, yet intermittent stabs of guns. Shot for shot, The Shadow was driving the invaders back. Mobsters were low on the verandah, dropping for the cover of the steps. The Shadow was clinging to his vantage post.

There was method in The Shadow's action. He had three men upon whom he could count. He was trusting that they would show the proper aid. One – Harry or Vic – could hold the prisoners, while the other and Rex came into action against the mobsmen on the porch.

It was Cortland Laspar who balked The Shadow's aids. He had been the first to realize what was up. As The Shadow whirled; as the bombardment began, Laspar took desperate action of his own. Closest to the three who held him and the other prisoners, Laspar leaped for the nearest guard.

THAT happened to be Harry Vincent. Pouncing upon The Shadow's agent, Laspar gripped Harry's arm and drove it upward. He and Harry grappled while staccato shots were marking The Shadow's duel with Chuck Haggart's mob.

Vic Marquette swung to aid Harry. The Secret Service man wanted to get Laspar; by dropping the arch-crook, he could weaken the cause of the underlings; moreover, he would bring Harry back into the fray. As Vic turned, Hoxon piled forward to seize the bearded operative.

Rex Brodford had his chance. A quick shot from his rifle would have finished Hoxon and enabled Marquette to down Laspar. But Rex fluked the chance. Swinging to aim at Hoxon, he delayed too long. Before he could fire, the superintendent had grabbed Vic Marquette.

Then came confusion. Hoxon's woodsmen sprang forward in a body. Rex went sprawling on the floor beneath their attack. Leaving Rex half stunned, the villains dove on, anxious to regain their revolvers from the floor.

THE GOLDEN QUEST

Harry Vincent could have stopped them. He had wrenched his right arm from Laspar's grasp. Holding the magnate at bay, Harry swung to cover the charging prisoners. Vic was all right; he was holding his own with Hoxon.

Harry did fire one shot that sprawled a woodsman, just as the fellow snatched up a gun. But before he could deliver a second bullet, Harry spotted a graver danger. Rex Brodford was trying to rise from the floor. Miguel was pouncing upon him.

Harry had frisked the fat Filipino. He had found Miguel's gun. But from beneath his belt, the man had gained another weapon: a stout-bladed bolo.

Out to kill Rex Brodford, the Filipino was raising the vicious-looking knife. His arm was ready for a downstroke with the blade.

Forgetting the woodsmen, Harry aimed at Miguel. He fired as the Filipino started to stab. Miguel jolted forward; at the same instant a roar came from The Shadow's vantage point. Miguel jounced up in the air and sprawled dead.

The Shadow, too, had spied the menace. He had swung wide of his protecting door to deliver a quick shot at Miguel. Harry had plugged the Filipino in the shoulder blade; The Shadow had found the villain's heart.

Vic and Hoxon blundered against Harry. With a wrench, The Shadow's agent sent Laspar sprawling headlong in a corner. Swinging his automatic, Harry clipped Hoxon's skull. As the lumber superintendent collapsed. Harry shouted to Vic. Together, they leaped across the body of Miguel and surged in on the three woodsmen.

Those fellows had gained guns; but they had no chance to use them. Fiercely, Harry and Vic drove down gun arms and grappled with their desperate enemies. This was their job; to beat the break that the prisoners had made, while The Shadow kept up his battle with men outside. Harry and Vic were doing well.

They had failed, however, at the outset. Through their slip-up, they had done damage to The Shadow's cause. In firing to save Rex Brodford, The Shadow had been forced to swing clear of his bulwark.

Mobsters had fired quickly from beyond the verandah. The Shadow had miraculously escaped their first hasty shots. But in swinging back to cover, he was too late. Chuck Haggart, aiming with precision, fired one shot at the fading form.

The mobleader's bullet clipped The Shadow's shoulder. A high, skimming shot, it failed to incapacitate the mighty fighter. But The Shadow staggered and sagged partially in his final twist.

Chuck gave a cry; leaping from the steps he dashed forward into the lodge, shouting his elation.

Chuck Haggart had followed a good stroke with a bad. He had reckoned too much upon the effectiveness of his aim. Had he remained where he was, he could have dropped The Shadow with a second sniping shot. But Chuck's desire for closer range brought his own undoing.

As the mobleader burst through the door, The Shadow steadied on one knee. Chuck stopped short to aim point-blank; The Shadow fired while the mobleader was flat-footed. The aim was true. Chuck sprawled, his rod unfired.

Behind him, a last mobsman stopped, startled as the leader fell.

THE GOLDEN QUEST

Again, The Shadow, though weakened, had advantage. The only unwounded gorilla made the same mistake as Chuck. He hesitated, wondering whether to dive back or to surge forward. He aimed mechanically and tried to fire. Again an automatic thundered in advance.

Flame from The Shadow's gun spelled the mobster's fate. Staggering, the final gunner toppled upon Chuck Haggart's body.

Steady, despite his slowness, The Shadow had scored a double stroke. Propped upon the floor, using the door edge as a rest, the wearied fighter gave a hollow, tired laugh.

A man yanked at the screen door. It was Firth, the butler. Wild of gaze, the dry-faced man had come to take up the fray. The Shadow could hear Jubal prompting him. Firth had an opportunity; he was firing as he came. But the servant was no marksman. His first shots whistled wide; then The Shadow answered.

One shot. The last of three in that lone automatic which The Shadow still could wield. The Shadow's bullet found a human mark.

Firth staggered, wounded. He tried to fire again, but could not. Attempting to rise, he lost hold of his gun. He remained, a wavering, snarling foe, still covered by The Shadow's automatic.

Had Firth managed to regain his gun, The Shadow would have been forced to drop him. As it was, Firth proved himself incapable of further attack. The Shadow could well afford to save his bullets for later events.

BURNING eyes looked toward the center of the living room. Harry and Vic had knocked out one of the woodsmen; they were fighting to subdue the last pair, and the woodsmen were putting up a hopeless resistance. Hoxon was out altogether.

Rex Brodford was rising, seeking a gun. He had every chance to checkmate Cortland Laspar, for the big shot had taken a heavy fall and was crawling up with painful slowness from the corner where Harry Vincent had hurled him.

One glance told The Shadow how that situation lay. Keen eyes reverted to the doorway. Firth, almost on his feet, was tumbling backward. Suddenly, the servant's body straightened. Firth came straight forward in a rigid advance.

The reason for the servant's strange action became immediately apparent. Firth was not acting of his own volition. A man had come up in back of him. James Jubal, surging low from the verandah, had caught Firth's sinking frame and was using it as a bulwark.

Behind his human barricade, Jubal was trying to get at The Shadow; yet he was wise enough to keep himself covered. If Jubal intended to try a revolver shot, he would be forced to lose this hold on Firth. Knowing that fact, The Shadow held stead. He saw Firth's body waver.

An arm shot into view: Jubal's. The hand held no gun. Jubal's fist was drawn backward; instantly, it started forward for a throw. The swindler's hand showed round and black, because of a spherical object which he gripped.

Jubal was resorting to the measure that he had used on the slope. Where guns had failed, he was employing a weapon that had already proved effective against The Shadow. The swindler, bereft of minions, was about to hurl another bomb.

THE GOLDEN QUEST

The Shadow's fate hung in the balance. Not only his own fate, but that of others. By blasting the hallway, Jubal could eliminate his indomitable foe; after that, the swindler would be free to use a gun on Vincent and Marquette.

The Shadow's only chance was to stop Jubal. A dive into the cellar, like the drop into the mine shaft, was an alternative that must be rejected. It was what Jubal had expected; and this time the swindler was using a close range toss to prevent it.

Jubal's shrewd and evil face glowered sallow from beside his swinging fist. The Shadow could have aimed for that yellow target; but killing Jubal would not have stopped the motion of the arm that was already on its way.

Aiming with cold precision, The Shadow chose black instead of yellow. He fired pointblank at the bomb that was leaving Jubal's hand.

THE shot was perfect. With the flash of The Shadow's automatic came a terrific roar close by the doorway. Bursting flame spread wide as the bomb exploded with gigantic force. The lodge quivered from the concussion. Walls crackled, split asunder and collapsed with devastating effect.

The main force of the blast took place within the doorway to the verandah. There, the front of the lodge was shattered. Thick smoke was clouded with the white dust of falling plaster. The whole wall was shattered as far as the fireplace; there, stone resisted the blast.

Chunks of the fireplace rattled to the floor. Portions of the ceiling caved and sent splintered debris down into the room.

Harry and Vic, overpowering their last two foemen, went sprawling; but they had already downed their stubborn antagonists.

Where Jubal and Firth had been was blankness. The unscathed swindler and the wounded servant had taken the full brunt of the explosion. The fate intended for The Shadow was theirs. The bursting bomb had riddled them.

Farthest from the ruined doorway was The Shadow. Propped against his metal-sheathed barrier, he remained unshaken by the concussion. Reverberating roars reechoed in his ears; he viewed the chaos with unrelenting eyes.

Then, as the roars ended, The Shadow gave challenge of his own. Weird lips released their mockery. A sinister laugh rang clear. The Shadow had turned the final tide.

CHAPTER XXIII. THE LAST SHOT

MEN were rising from massed debris. Harry Vincent and Vic Marquette were finding their feet in the midst of a strange setting. Pushing aside strips of lath and chunks of plaster, they formed white-powdered figures as they came up from the floor.

Rex Brodford, too, was crawling out. The wreck of the living room had been a complete one; but it was due largely to the light construction of the lodge. That same fact accounted also for their lack of injury. The ceiling was fragile; its falling portions had contained no heavy beams.

THE GOLDEN QUEST

Hoxon's few remaining henchmen were also stirring. Badly beaten, they had no urge for fight. Harry and Vic were quick to find their guns and cover these survivors. Seeing that the men were submissive, Harry turned to look for The Shadow.

There, by the door to the cellar, the tall black form had risen. The Shadow was leaning obliquely against the wall. One cloaked arm lay limp. The other was lowered and its fist held an automatic. The mirth that Harry had heard was ended.

As Harry stared, he saw a fierce burn come into The Shadow's gaze. Instinctively, Harry wheeled. Dumfounded, he became witness to a scene that he had not anticipated. The Shadow was staring toward the far corner where another form had risen.

It was Cortland Laspar. Never before had Harry seen a face so tinged with venom. If ever he had been a ruling menace, the magnate was one now. For Laspar had profited by the explosion that had wrecked the lodge. Occupying a corner remote from the explosion; situated in a spot where the stone bulwark of the fireplace had protected him, Laspar had regained new opportunity. From the floor he had picked up a loose revolver that had been kicked toward his corner. He was wielding the weapon with intent to kill.

Laspar was aiming for The Shadow. His gun was coming up. The lumber magnate's move was swift; and Harry, recalling The Shadow's pose, could do no more than give a despairing cry. True it was that Harry swung his own gun in a hurry; but he realized that he would be too late to prevent Laspar's shot.

In that crucial instant came a burst of whispered mirth. The Shadow had seen Laspar before Harry had observed the lumber magnate. The Shadow's pause had not been one of incapacity. He had delayed for steadiness.

Harry had turned just in time to see Laspar start an upward aim. The Shadow, too, had put his gun hand into motion on that same instant. It was a race to the shot, between The Shadow and the chief of crime.

The finish came with terrific suddenness. The Shadow's automatic roared. Hard upon it came the burst of Laspar's revolver. Then Harry Vincent fired.

In those split-seconds, The Shadow's agent noted a singular phenomenon. Quick though Laspar's shot had been, the villain's hand had wavered as his finger pressed the trigger. Upon the waver had come a slump – so promptly, that Harry's shot went wide. Again, Harry fired too late; Laspar was caving faster, than Harry could aim.

The crooked lumber magnate sprawled upon the floor. Again a whispered laugh came to Harry's ears. Turning, the agent saw The Shadow, moving wearily forward. Harry realized what had happened. The Shadow had beaten Laspar to the shot. With one bullet, he had slain the master of crime.

The last bullet. The Shadow had reserved it wisely. Harry did not know that the automatic had held but one live cartridge. He did know, though, that The Shadow had gained this last belated triumph. Harry stood watching The Shadow's progress.

STEADIED, The Shadow was moving from the lodge, out through the shattered doorway, across the wreck of the verandah. The cloaked figure blended with the outer blackness. Silence; then to Harry's ears came the trailing mockery of a sardonic laugh.

Triumphant, The Shadow had left the field. Though wearied and wounded, he still possessed strength to go his way.

THE GOLDEN QUEST

Harry Vincent realized that his chief must have some reason for this action.

The Shadow's departure indicated that a sequel to conflict was due.

Vic Marquette had ordered the prisoners back into their corner. Rex Brodford was with the Secret Service man. As Harry turned to join them, he heard a distinct sound from the cellar of the lodge. Harry spoke quickly to Vic, who told him to guard the door to the inner steps.

Some of the lights had survived the explosion; when Harry reached the cellar door and pressed the switch, a glare appeared from below. Looking down, Harry saw a man coming through the stacks of furniture. He recognized Sheriff Hawlings.

The official came up as Harry greeted him. Hawlings became grim as he saw the scene of conflict. Then Harry introduced Vic Marquette. Astonished when he learned the true identity of the man who had played the part of Old Absalom, the sheriff listened with respectful attention.

"I get it," he acknowledged, when Marquette had finished brief, blunt facts. "I knew something phony was up when I came over to the Chalice mine tonight. I was making another inspection there. Trebold and most of his men were gone. A couple of guards that were still there tried to stop us.

"I had three deputies with me, just by luck. We grabbed Trebold's guards and one of the deputies took them back into town. I came in with these men" – he indicated his two deputies – "and we found Trebold and his outfit in the shafts. Some dead, some wounded. We came on through."

As the sheriff paused, there was a new sound from outside. Automobiles were snorting in from the road. The sheriff gave a hail. It was answered. Two groups of men arrived. Some were deputies, who had started out to the Chalice mine. Others were from the lumber camp; men who had been in Laspar's employ, but who were not parcel to his game.

The explosion at the lodge had alarmed the countryside. All hands had made for this spot to learn the cause of the trouble.

Sheriff Hawlings issued orders. Bodies were carried out; debris was cleared; prisoners were packed into cars, under arrest. Hawlings also sent men down into the passage under the lake, to bring out the dead and wounded of Trebold's crew. He stated that Trebold was among the ones who had died in the fray.

Nothing had been said of The Shadow. Vic Marquette, as spokesman, had been careful to avoid such mention. Like Harry, Vic knew that the hidden master had departed in order to keep his part unknown.

Rex Brodford also showed equal tact. When he approached to talk to Harry Vincent, it was on a different matter.

Rex grasped Harry's hand. In warm tones, he told his appreciation. His words had added significance, for Harry knew that Rex was expressing thanks that could be forwarded to The Shadow later.

"ABOUT the mine," concluded Rex. "The claim is fully established. My fortune is made, and the other stockholders will gain their proper share.

"Although I didn't tell Witherby, I knew the mine was worth something, for my uncle intimated it in letters I received before his death.

THE GOLDEN QUEST

"As for the investors in the Chalice mine, they will certainly be entitled to a return from Laspar's estate, now that his crookedness has been proven. He had shares in the Quest mine; the profits from it will go a long way toward redeeming money to those he swindled."

"I think you're right," agreed Harry. "With Vic Marquette on the job, it means Federal action. The Chalice mine was already branded as a fraudulent corporation."

"That's settled," smiled Rex. "As for my controlling shares of the Quest mine, there will be a slice. Some of that stock is going to be made out in another name. After I see Witherby."

"You mean your lawyer –"

"Will arrange the transfer of certain shares from Rex Brodford to Harry Vincent."

Harry tried to protest against this generous plan. Rex would not listen. Smiling, the young man clapped The Shadow's agent on the shoulder, then strolled out through the shattered doorway, leaving Harry speechless.

Another man walked into the wrecked living room. Harry turned about as he recognized Vic Marquette's voice. During a brief absence, the Secret Service operative had undergone a transformation. His black beard had disappeared.

Smooth-shaven, Vic grinned. He rubbed his chin with real enthusiasm.

"Guess you thought I was talking to the sheriff," remarked Marquette. "I wasn't. I was back in the rear of the lodge, hunting scissors and a razor. I found them. It was good-by whiskers!"

Harry looked about. He and Vic Marquette were alone. Harry spoke in a low, serious tone.

"Listen, Vic," he said. "This is our chance to slide out for a while. To a place where you would logically go."

"To Old Absalom's isle?"

"Yes."

Vic chuckled.

"There's nothing there," he said. "Nothing that I need to take along –"

"I'm thinking of The Shadow."

"You mean he's over there?"

"Yes." Harry nodded seriously. "That was one place where he could go to rest up after the battle. He must have taken a rowboat from the dock. We can use the motorboat. It's here on the point."

"Good," agreed Marquette. "You're right, Vincent. The Shadow may need our aid."

"Not our aid," corrected Harry. "But our services may be useful. The fact that he could reach the isle is proof that he is all right. But a visit, on my part, to that cabin of yours might prove most timely."

THE GOLDEN QUEST

THE two men left the lodge. Soon the motorboat was chugging across the lake in the direction of the isle. Rex Brodford heard its departure. He assumed that Harry and Vic were paying a brief visit to the island.

An hour passed; then Vic returned alone, in a rowboat. From far away, Rex could again hear the chugging of the motorboat traveling farther down the lake. Vic had nothing to say. He suggested that Rex accompany him into town with the sheriff.

It was dawn when Vic and Rex returned to the lodge. Stopping by the edge of the shattered verandah, Vic recalled a belated message. He gave it.

"Vincent will see you in New York," he remarked. "He's not needed here; nor are you. My testimony will be sufficient to handle this case. Pack up what you brought along; look up Vincent at the Hotel Metrolite."

Rex Brodford nodded in agreement. As he did, his ears caught a distant sound. Steadily it increased in mono-toned rhythm; the purr of an airplane motor. Looking upward, Rex saw an autogyro winging a thousand feet above Lake Chalice.

With Vic Marquette, Rex Brodford watched the ship head eastward. He saw it dwindle until its whirling blades alone were conspicuous in the dawn-streaked sky.

The Shadow, Harry Vincent with him, was departing as he had come.

THE END