

MURDER HOUSE

Maxwell Grant

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CHAPTER I. CROOKS PREPARE

THE old sign post read: "MIDVALE, 3 MILES."

Kip Farrick grinned when he saw it. This was the crossing that he wanted. An isolated meeting place of old dirt roads, where few cars traveled. Kip, though, had been here before, in the same coupe that he was driving today.

The trip meant something, this time. Kip's ratty face showed a gleam as he looked toward the man who rode with him. He wanted to see if Nick Shoyden's stolid, darkish features could lose their poker-faced expression and betray a sign of real interest.

"Is this the corner, Kip?"

Nick's question was rasped in businesslike fashion. His blackish eyes seemed snappy when they saw Kip's grinning lips.

"Sure!" returned the rattish driver. "We only got a half a mile to go, toward Midvale. I clocked it, Nick a couple times."

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"Then what are we waiting for? Get going."

Kip turned to the left. He drove a quarter mile, squinting while the sunlight glittered from the radiator cap. As the coupe passed a pair of wheel tracks that led off to the right, Nick demanded:

"Where does that go to?"

"A road to the house," replied Kip. "The old farm covers more'n two hundred acres. I found that out in Midvale, Nick."

Nick made no reply. He was watching the speedometer. It clocked off half a mile. Kip was prompt with the brakes; they screeched, as the coupe stopped amid a cloud of dust. Kip pointed to a jagged road that looked like the path of a dry stream. The road wound downward, to the left.

"There she is," announced Kip, "an' I'll bet you a century against a fin that we'll find old Brockbright down by the creek. Every Tuesday and Friday "

"I know the rest," snapped Nick. "How do we get down to that patch of woods without Brockbright seeing us?"

In answer, Kip started the coupe. He drove thirty yards and turned off the road into a patch of open ground that stood unfenced. Pulling the car beneath a clump of trees, Kip alighted and pointed to a path. Nick followed him.

Five minutes later, Nick Shoyden and Kip Farrick had reached the bank of a rocky, wooded creek. They crept along a stony path until they reached a big boulder that jutted above their heads. Kip crawled a few feet up a slope of turf, gripped a tree root and beckoned to Nick Shoyden, who joined him.

"Take a gander," whispered Farrick. "See if it ain't Brockbright."

Nick looked across the rock.

FIFTY feet away, the flattish ground formed a delightful nook beneath the boughs of handsome beech trees. The babble of a tiny brook brought a melodious tone; where the tumbling rill entered the wide creek, cleared trees offered a view that would have inspired an artist.

The beauty of that mossy glade was lost upon Nick Shoyden. The dark eyes that glittered from his poker-face were fixed upon a man who sat alone amid the scene.

The man was old and withery; his figure looked frail, as it sat hunched upon a camp stool. The head above the stooped shoulders was erect; and its face told that the elderly man was by no means feeble. There was an eaglelike gleam in the old-man's eyes. His lips wore a satisfied smile. Ruddiness showed in the cheeks that topped his well-trimmed beard.

His hair, like his beard, was gray. Nick Shoyden could see every feature plainly. There was no disputing Kip Farrick's statement that the man was Cyrus Brockbright, multimillionaire, whose Wall Street operations and real estate developments had enabled him to pile up fortune upon fortune.

Beside Brockbright was a picnic basket. The millionaire shelled a hard-boiled egg, sprinkled it with salt and ate methodically. He poured a glass of milk from a thermos bottle and reached into the basket for a piece of cake. Evidently, he decided that he had eaten enough, for he regretfully replaced the cake as he finished the

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glass of milk.

Rising, Brockbright brushed crumbs from his lap, straightened briskly and called in a shrill voice:

"Parkins! Where are you, Parkins?"

A uniformed chauffeur came from the end of the rough road above the glen. He had been eating alone, for he was finishing a sandwich when he answered Brockbright's call. Brockbright pointed to the basket and the camp stool.

"Remove them, Parkins."

As the chauffeur complied, Brockbright waited to survey the little glen. He strolled to the creek's edge; he looked along the winding bank. His lips were pursed in pleased fashion when he returned and walked up to the road. Nick and Kip saw him disappear beyond a fringe of bushes.

The thump of an automobile door followed. A motor started; its low gear whined. The watchers sighted a long, sleek limousine moving up the rocky road. The car turned from view; its noise faded. Only the trickle of the brook sounded in the glade where Brockbright had been.

Nick came down from the rock, with the comment to Kip:

"Let's go back to the hill."

SEATED again in Kip's coupe, Nick showed that he had been thinking considerably on the trip up the path. Speculatively, he growled:

"It was Cyrus Brockbright, right enough. I'm wondering why the old gink comes here so often."

"What does it matter?" put in Kip. "He'll be here again. That's all we'll need. You can get the outfit, Nick guys that know their stuff. The snatch will be a cinch. I've even got the castle fixed. Look over there."

Nick followed Kip's pointing finger. Through a space above the trees, he could see a distant house, far on the other side of the creek. It was an old mansion, almost surrounded by woods.

"The Hawkins Estate," elaborated Kip. "Been empty for years. Supposed to be haunted. I've picked up a lot of dope while I've been hiding out in Midvale. I know the roads around here. A snatch would be a cinch. We can grab the chauffeur when we kidnap Brockbright "

"Forget that snatch stuff," rasped Nick. "That racket has been queered, long ago! If you know so much about the country around here, tell me something. Has anybody picked up dough in real estate, lately?"

"Yeah," returned Kip. "Just south of Midvale, there's a little summer resort. It's on this same creek, the Muskatiny. I was pricing bungalows there, in case we wanted one. The land is valued at six hundred bucks an acre; but it's cut up into smaller lots. And then there's the house besides."

"You've told me all I wanted to know, Kip. Six hundred dollars an acre. Six hundred times two hundred that is one hundred and twenty thousand. According to that, this farm, with its two hundred acres, ought to be worth a hundred and twenty grand."

Kip put an objection.

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"Farms are cheap around here," he said. "Not worth more than fifty bucks an acre. This farm could be had for less than ten grand, Nick."

"Great!" For the first time, Nick showed a grin. "That gives us the tip-off on why old Brockbright was out here. He figures on buying this land for ten thousand dollars and selling it for a hundred and twenty thousand."

"Only, a hundred and twenty grand is small change for that old bird. This won't be the only farm he'll buy. He'll grab them off on both sides of the creek, all the way down. There'll be a million in it, before he's through."

"This place sits right in the middle." Nick's smile broadened. "That's why Brockbright comes to look it over, with a picnic basket as a blind. He'd talk turkey if somebody grabbed this farm and held out for big dough. Start the car, Kip. We're going to buy a farm."

Kip drove back along the dirt road and turned in at the entrance to the farmhouse. At the end of a quarter mile, the road ended beside a sprawling house, where a tilled stretch of ground sloped down toward the creek. There was a barn connected to one side of the house; on the other, Nick saw a long, low-roofed building that puzzled him because it stood only a few feet above the ground.

"What's that funny-looking shed?" he asked Kip. "What do they do train the cows to crawl in at night?"

"It's a mushroom cellar," returned Kip. "They grow a lot of mushrooms around Midvale. Whatta you want me to do, Nick? Go in an' talk to the guy that owns this shack?"

"Yeah. Price the place. I'll wait for you."

KIP clambered from the car and went toward the rambling house. A big man in overalls came from the barn, eyed the stranger and gruffed:

"Who do you want to see?"

"The owner of the farm," returned Kip, eyeing a pitchfork that the husky yokel carried. "Is he around here?"

The fellow with the pitchfork nodded; looked toward the house and called:

"Visitor to see you, Mr. Jorridon!"

A tall man appeared from a side door of the house. He was dressed in farm clothes; but his manner showed that he was more important than the hired hand who had accosted Kip. The crook knew that this must be Jorridon. Kip noted that Jorridon's eyes were sharp and direct of gaze; that the man had the square jaw of a fighter.

Those features made Kip jittery. Jorridon reminded him too much of a district attorney. It took Kip a few seconds to assure himself that Jorridon could have no reason to class his visitor as a crook. Kip approached to shake hands.

"My name's Farrick," he told Jorridon. "I come from New York. Been up here in Midvale the last few weeks, looking for a farm. Thought I'd find out if this one was for sale."

"Where did you hear about this farm?"

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Jorridon's question worried Kip. Luckily, he knew a good bit about Midvale. Moreover, he remembered having seen an old farm truck that bore the name of Rex Jorridon. That truck came into town frequently. Kip had seen it parked near the post office.

"I was talking with one of the fellows at the general store," lied Kip. "Asked him about farms. He said I ought to see Rex Jorridon. Told me where this farm was "

"And said it was for sale?"

"He said it might be. That's why I came here."

Another hired hand had joined the man who first met Kip. Jorridon saw the pair standing by, and gestured them toward the barn.

"Get back to work, Hector," he told the first one. "Take Ezra along with you." Turning to Kip, Jorridon added: "They told you wrong, Mr. Farrick. I'm not trying to sell this farm."

"The fellow didn't say you were," began Kip. "He only said that I ought to see you "

"And that was a mistake, too," interposed Jorridon. "I don't own this farm. I only rent it. The farm belongs to the Midvale Title Trust Co. They wouldn't sell it the last time I talked to them."

Kip mumbled excuses and returned to the car. As he drove away, he gave a sidelong look toward the house; saw Jorridon with arms akimbo, watching the coupe's departure. Kip said nothing to Nick until they reached the dirt road; then he gave the details.

"That guy Jorridon sure made me jittery," concluded Kip. "He's no hick! He looked more like a district attorney!"

"Trying to shove you off that's all," grunted Nick. "He's renting the place and don't want to give it up. Drive into Midvale, Kip. Show me that title company."

WHEN they reached the town of Midvale, Nick Shoyden entered the bank alone. He was gone about thirty minutes. When he returned, he motioned for Kip to drive along. As soon as they were out of town, Nick chuckled and pulled an official-looking document from his pocket.

"I bought the deed to the farm," he told Kip. "It cost me seventy-five hundred. Cheaper than you thought. Took just half of the fifteen grand that I brought with me from Chi. I'll need the rest when we get to New York."

Kip shot a nervous look toward his companion. New York was a hot spot for both of them. Nick had been hiding out in Chicago, while Kip was in Midvale. Nick saw the reason for Kip's anxiety.

"Don't get jittery again," growled Nick. "I didn't give my own name at the bank. I signed myself 'J. J. Burlow'; and it's legal to use any name in this State. I gave the old Eighth Avenue address in New York City, that the bulls don't know about. We'll head there, Kip."

"This hunk of paper isn't hot. We're working a racket that the law can't touch. All we've got to do in New York is put up a front. Leave that to me, Kip."

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Kip was taking the road to New York, a proof that he intended to take chances along with Nick. Pocketing the title deed, Nick added a last detail.

"Jorridon talked about buying the farm," he said. "They mentioned that at the bank. But the guy has no dough. He's one of those educated guys from a farm college, that thinks he can make money out of growing mushrooms. All he could raise to buy the farm was fifteen hundred bucks and the bank wouldn't take a mortgage on the rest. So he had to keep on renting it.

"We'll let him stay there. I told the bank to collect the rent and keep it for me. Jorridon will think he's sitting pretty, until old Cyrus Brockbright buys the farm. Then Jorridon will have a headache, when he learns what Brockbright paid for it. I'm going to hold out for sixty grand, Kip, when I deal with Brockbright."

Nick Shoyden spoke with assurance, as though he and Kip Farrick already had fifty-two and a half thousand dollars in the bag. Kip did not share the enthusiasm. Nick noticed it and growled:

"What makes you sour? More than twenty-five grand apiece is better than a snatch, ain't it? There's a bigger chance of this going through; and we're running no risk."

"Except that we're goin' into New York."

"We'll only stay there a week. I know that the cops are looking for the guys who croaked Jim Kildean in his gambling joint; but they haven't pinned it on us, yet. It will look better for us, if we're seen in New York."

Nick's words had logic. Kip's objections ended. The crooks were agreed that the law would make no trouble for them during a short stay in New York. Murderers, planning a different sort of crime, were sure that their new activities would pass unwatched.

There was something that both Nick Shoyden and Kip Farrick had forgotten. In New York dwelt a being called The Shadow, who ferreted out the misdeeds of crooks and hunted down the perpetrators. Once he had gained the goods on criminals, The Shadow never forgot them.

When The Shadow learned that this pair of rogues had returned to New York, Nick and Kip would be due for trouble that they did not expect.

CHAPTER II. AT THE LUCKY SEVEN CLUB

NICK SHOYDEN had predicted a week's stay in New York. His estimate was short. It took longer than a week to deal with Cyrus Brockbright. Just seven days after he had bought the farm in Midvale, Nick was seated in a small office he had rented, glumness showing on his normally expressionless face.

He was mulling over the real estate matter. He had sent Brockbright a letter, representing himself as head of the "Interstate Resort Development Co.," and asking for an appointment, as he had some property that the millionaire would be interested in. Nick, however, did not intimate where the property lay.

The answer came in the form of a letter from Brockbright's secretary, Klauden, saying his employer was not interested in any property. Nick had then sent Kip Farrick to interview the secretary and try to make an appointment with Brockbright for Nick. In this, Kip was successful. Nick was to see the millionaire to-morrow.

Kip had gone to the Lucky Seven Club; Nick was to meet him there tonight. Both thought it best to be seen in

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public; that if the coppers saw them boldly in the open, they might not suspect their connection with the murder of Jim Kildean.

Nick locked his office, started for the elevator. A tall, gangling man in the hallway made him suspicious he was being spied upon; but when the man mumbled he was looking for a bookbinding company, Nick shrugged off his suspicions as jitters caused by his return to New York after Kildean had been murdered.

Nick made for the Lucky Seven Club, to meet Kip.

THE Lucky Seven Club was outwardly a dining resort of high caliber. But for those in the know, the third floor of the club was outfitted for gambling on a complete scale.

An hour after Nick Shoyden arrived there, a tall stranger, dressed to perfection in evening clothes, entered the club, showed credentials to Morridy, the owner, and ascended to the gaming rooms. Most of the seats around a roulette wheel being occupied, the tall visitor merely watched the game with other spectators who were awaiting a chance to play.

At the far end of the short floor was a curtained room that served for poker players. The curtains were only partly drawn; beyond them could be seen the faces of men who were seated around an oval table. Some discussion must have passed among the group, for a man came from the poker room and closed the curtain behind him. He crossed to the doorway of a little room at the side, glancing toward the roulette table as he went past.

The man from the poker room was Nick Shoyden. A slight smile appeared upon the lips of the tall stranger at the roulette table an expression which Nick did not observe. The visitor with the masklike face was The Shadow. Through information received from his contact men, he knew Kip and Nick would be here this evening.

As soon as Nick had gone into the little room, The Shadow stepped away from the table. He saw an empty room that adjoined the one that Nick had entered. Casually, The Shadow strolled toward the vacant room. Unnoticed, he stepped into its darkness. In the gloom, he spied a connecting door to the room that Nick had entered. The Shadow moved toward that inner door.

NICK had joined Kip Farrick, who was playing solitaire in a lighted corner of the little room. As Nick sat down, Kip looked up eagerly, as if he expected news.

"Just talked with Jake Prenzel and some of his pals," announced Nick. "They've made this their regular joint. They looked glad to see me. Wanted me in the poker game."

"Any cracks about Jim Kildean?"

"Not a one, Kip. They haven't tied that on us. Talked like they thought I'd been out in Chi on business. It wouldn't matter much, though, if those boys did wise-crack. They've rubbed out plenty of mugs on their own."

"Yeah," agreed Kip. "They wouldn't squawk. It wouldn't be a bad stunt to sound them out, though, just to find out what they've heard."

"I'm going to. You stick here while I handle the poker session. After that, we can head for the hide-out down near old Tully's pawnshop."

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Nick was about to start back to the poker room, when Kip stopped him. In a low tone, the rattish crook queried:

"Say, Nick who d'you think the lug was down at the office? The one you was tellin' me about?"

"He might've been anybody," growled Nick. "That is, anybody except a bull. I figured that he was casing us, but maybe I was wrong. He could have been looking for that bookbinding office, like he said."

"You don't think he was from The Shadow?"

Nick started a snort; then curbed it. Kip's words made him glare angrily; but the suggestion was one that could not be laughed off. The threat of The Shadow was always imminent to men of crime.

"They say The Shadow has stooges workin' for him," insisted Kip. "Guys that get aroun' everywhere, an' don't let nobody lamp 'em too close. That bird could've been one maybe he was The Shadow, even!"

"Cut it!" rasped Nick, his voice low with its harshness. "You'll be telling me next that The Shadow is in this joint!"

"Maybe he is. They say he gets in anywhere he wants."

Nick indulged in a harsh guffaw.

"I'll pipe that to Jake Prenzel and his crew," he promised. "It'll give them a laugh! If you spot The Shadow, Kip, hop into the poker room and tell us!"

Kip subsided. Weakly, he tried to excuse his fears with the remark:

"I was only thinkin' about to-morrow, Nick. Remember, you gotta swing that deal with old "

Nick gestured savagely, in time to prevent Kip's mention of Cyrus Brockbright. Kip caught the cue and broke off. He chewed his lips nervously and went back to his game of solitaire. Nick watched him, with contemptuous eyes.

If Kip had not mentioned The Shadow so specifically, Nick would never have noticed a peculiar manifestation that occurred beyond the solitaire table. There, upon the floor beside the connecting door, Nick spied a splotch of blackness that bore a striking resemblance to a silhouette.

The black patch was creeping slowly away when Nick spotted it. Looking slightly above, Nick thought that he observed a motion of the door.

FOR a moment, the racketeer felt the grip of nervousness; then, with a well-faked grunt of contempt at Kip's worriment, Nick went out into the main gaming room. This time, he gave the roulette table a closer look. Nick noticed a gap among the observers at the end.

Nick had a recollection of a face. He recalled a tall individual in evening clothes, who had caught his passing attention. That personage was gone. His absence gave Nick a decided hunch. Nick intended to go through with his mention of The Shadow to Jake Prenzel; but not as a jest.

Back at his solitaire, Kip Farrick was oblivious to the tokens that Nick had seen. Kip's shoulder was toward the connecting door. The rattish crook noted nothing as the barrier opened farther. He caught no sight of the

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shrouded figure that edged slowly into the patch of light.

There was a curtained recess by the windows. The Shadow preferred it as an observation post before Nick returned. An hour's vigil would be worth while, if crooks made mention of the man whom Nick intended to meet to-morrow.

Once The Shadow learned the name of Cyrus Brockbright, he would be in a position to thwart plans of crime. For the present, all depended on a stealthy trip past Kip; and that was the reason for The Shadow's slow-motion tactics.

Two minutes passed before he was through the door. He began to close the door so skillfully that its motion was almost undetectable. That move was to require a full minute more. All the while, The Shadow watched the outer door of Kip's room to make sure that it did not move. Nick had closed that door on departure.

Fully within the room where Kip sat, The Shadow had little chance to keep track of the darkened room behind him. He was not watching it as he began to close the connecting door; nevertheless, his ears caught a sound that occurred there.

Instantly, The Shadow removed his hand from the door, slipped it to a deep-pocketed holster under his long-tailed coat.

At that instant, a light blazed on in the other room. Nick Shoyden had reached through to press the switch. The poker-faced racketeer was springing through, aiming a revolver. As Nick took a bead for the spot where The Shadow stood, the crook saw the muzzle of an automatic whip into view.

The Shadow had overtaken Nick's advantage. His aim was gun to gun with the crook's.

"GET him, Kip! The Shadow!"

Nick howled the order instinctively, knowing that Kip would respond. Nick sprang out into the main gaming room, firing as he went. The Shadow feinted toward Kip's room, using his own gun in Nick's direction. Both shots went wide. The Shadow, like Nick, had seen that the most pressing need was to avoid the other's aim.

The Shadow, though, glimpsed the door where Nick went through. Beyond it were other men: Jake Prenzel and his murderous followers. All had come to that one door, because Nick had told them that The Shadow was watching Kip. Swinging back into the room where Nick had turned on the light, The Shadow jabbed quick shots toward the crooks. The door slammed shut.

The Shadow wheeled to the connecting door; made a sudden side shift as Kip came through. He had allowed the rattish crook time, knowing that Kip would not be ready on the instant. As Kip arrived, The Shadow swung in upon him; caught the fellow completely off guard.

It would have gone badly with Kip at that moment, if The Shadow had been dealing with him alone. Fortunately for Kip, The Shadow had other plans, which made it necessary to let him live.

Coming in from Kip's very elbow, The Shadow stroked the crook's gun arm upward. Catching Kip in a quick grip, he whirled him, sprawling, to the very door of the empty room. Kip came to hands and knees; half dizzy, he did exactly as The Shadow hoped. He turned toward the connecting doorway and began to blaze wild shots as fast as he could pump them.

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The Shadow was through the doorway before Kip started his fire. Passing the solitaire table, he made for the outer door. He wrenched it open, came squarely upon the scene that he expected.

Nick and Jake, hearing Kip's shots, were invading the room where the battle had commenced. They had left only two guards at the door of Kip's room. One of those was turned away.

The Shadow met the only watcher with the force of a thunderbolt. He sledged the rowdy with a single stroke; sprang across him as he dropped and fell upon the second guard. Catching the crook as he turned, The Shadow pinned his arms behind him, using only one hand and forearm for the grab.

Beyond the snagged crook's shoulder, The Shadow aimed the .45; began an instant fire as he staggered the shielding man sidewise.

Nick Shoyden was in the room where Kip Farrick was shooting blindly. It was Jake Prenzel who turned to see the side-stepping figure of his own henchman, with The Shadow's arm attached.

Jake fell wounded at the first shot. Other crooks, springing to gain flank aim at The Shadow, lost their chance to fire. The Shadow clipped the foremost pair, then hurled his human shield to the floor. The Shadow was at the roulette table, from which the players had scattered.

FOES still remained plenty of them, even though The Shadow had handled most of Jake Prenzel's outfit. The attendants in the gambling room, from roulette croupiers to bouncers, were thugs to a man. They had heard the cry: "The Shadow!" They wanted their chance at the superfoe whose name all gangdom hated. But their chance for victory was gone.

The Shadow flung his emptied automatic straight for the head of the nearest enemy, the only thug who had started fresh aim. As the man ducked, The Shadow grabbed the roulette wheel, yanked it upright and hauled it toward the wall. One hand no longer needed to drag the massive wheel and its frame, The Shadow pulled out a fresh automatic.

Crooks had resumed their fire. Their slugs splintered the thick mahogany of the roulette wheel; clanged from the metal trimmings. The bulwark resisted the barrage; it was tougher than they supposed. Barking guns ruined a wheel that had cost Morridy two thousand dollars; but The Shadow remained unscathed.

Crooks wasted precious seconds in trying to shoot through the roulette wheel. They learned that, when The Shadow's .45 began to speak.

Each flash from the big gun dropped a foeman. One crook staggered; then another; as a third jolted, clawing at a wounded shoulder, some one shouted:

"Douse the glims!"

The suggestion was instantly approved. The lights went out. Guns barked wildly, uselessly, as crooks tried to find the spot where The Shadow crouched. Every time his automatic answered, its flame tongued from a new location.

Gun crackles ceased suddenly. Pounding footsteps from the stairway told that the police had arrived. They were crashing at the door when The Shadow turned on a flashlight. Except for the wounded crooks and scared customers in the corners, the gaming room was empty. The Shadow saw a wide-open door beside the poker room. It showed a stairway that fleeing men had taken.

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The Shadow chose that exit. One flight down, it led into another house; then to the ground floor, where an open door gave exit to an alleyway that the police had not yet invaded. Crooks were gone, so The Shadow made his own departure.

MEN of crime had been routed at the Lucky Seven Club. The Shadow had conquered overwhelming odds. The result, though, was barren; for Nick Shoyden and Kip Farrick had been the first to gain the clear. To find them, The Shadow would have to begin a new trail.

At this moment, such a task did not appear to offer complications. The fight at the Lucky Seven seemed but a temporary delay. The future was to prove otherwise.

The Shadow would have to cover a range of unexpected territory, with new problems rising on his way, before he finished the quest that this night had begun.

CHAPTER III. NICK TALKS TERMS

AT three o'clock the next afternoon, Nick Shoyden arrived at the Wall Street offices of Cyrus Brockbright. While waiting to see the millionaire, Nick read a newspaper. It told of the raid at the Lucky Seven Club. Jake Prenzel and some of his outfit had been captured, charged with starting the gunfray. This didn't please Nick, for he didn't want to incur the enmity of crooks of his own sort.

Klauden, Brockbright's secretary a frail, spunkless-looking man interrupted to say that the millionaire would see Nick now.

The interview was a peculiar one filled with humor on Brockbright's side and with anger on Nick's. For the millionaire denied completely that he knew of the farm near Midvale that Nick wanted to sell him. He stated that he drove around in his car a good bit for pleasure, picked out picnic spots here and there but that he never remembered where most of them were, for he slumbered in the back of the car.

It tickled him to think Nick suspected him of attempting to gain property near Midvale. And he laughed till tears came when Nick asked him for sixty thousand dollars for the farm. He had been inspecting the deed Nick had handed him.

Nick, letting his temper overrule his original judgment of price, in desperation offered the farm for thirty thousand dollars.

Brockbright chuckled, handed back the deed.

"Here is your deed, Mr. Shoyden or Burlow, if you prefer to use your alias. Our interview is ended. I begin to understand why you wished to see me privately. I may add, I am pleased to see a swindler tricked by his own game. Good day, Mr. Shoyden. My secretary will show you out."

Nick came up angrily from his chair. His hard eyes were fixed on Brockbright. Forgetting himself, Nick started a threat:

"There's been other guys who tried to cross Nick Shoyden! They never got away with it. I'm going to get my dough out of this buy" he flourished the titled deed beneath Brockbright's nose "and I'm going to show a profit on it, or else! You heard what I said. Or else! That means I'll find a way to make you cough up a lot more dough than what I've asked for "

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Brockbright was jabbing a bell-button, ringing lustily for Klauden. Though contemptuous of the secretary, Nick gained the sudden thought that the frequent bell jabs might be an alarm. If others came with Klauden, it might go bad for Nick.

The crook saw that Brockbright was trembling; but anger accounted for his shakiness as much as fear. Nick began to lose some of his own self-confidence. He made a quick effort to smooth things over before Klauden and the others arrived.

"I guess you've put it straight, Mr Brockbright," gruffed Nick, in a rueful tone. "I want too much for the property. It's worth money, though." Nick paused, hearing the door of the office open behind him. "I looked the place over before I bought it, and it struck me as a good buy."

Brockbright cocked his head slightly. Always a shrewd buyer in the matter of real estate, the millionaire was analyzing what Nick had said. The crook must have seen some signs of real estate activity in Midvale, otherwise he would not have jumped to the conclusion that Brockbright was after property there.

Nick saw the effect that his words had created. Smoothly, he put a double-edged argument.

"You'd better think over what I've told you," he said to Brockbright. "You'd win two ways on this deal. You'd make money and you'd save it."

By "make money," Nick indicated that Brockbright might find the development a profitable one if he went into it. By "save it," Nick referred to his hasty threat, but in a milder way. Nick turned toward the door, saw no one there but Klauden. He shot a quick glance back to Brockbright. The millionaire was stroking his chin.

"I'm leaving town to-night," concluded Nick. "Suppose I give you a call out at your house. Maybe I could come out there; or send Mr. Farrick. That is, if you decided to buy the property "

Brockbright nodded an interruption. He told Klauden to give Mr. Shoyden the private telephone number of Brockbright's Long Island home. Nick waved a cheery good-by and went out with the secretary. Klauden gave him the unlisted telephone number.

OUTSIDE the office building, Nick made a call to Kip's hide-out; but received no answer. He took the subway to Times Square and decided to take in a Broadway movie. It was darkening when Nick came from the show. He called Kip again, received no reply, so he called Brockbright's home instead.

The millionaire had arrived there. The news that he gave Nick pleased the crook. Nick Shoyden was grinning with satisfaction when he went into a restaurant for dinner. It was after seven o'clock when he finished his meal.

Leaving the restaurant, Nick shuffled through the Times Square crowds and entered a drug store that had a long line of telephone booths. This time, he managed to get Kip on the wire.

"The deal started off sour," informed Nick. "It turned out that Brockbright don't want the farm... No, he wasn't bluffing; but I gave him an earful that made him kind of jittery. I had to ease it at the finish... Yeah, I played it too strong; but I softened it. Told him to think the deal over..."

"Sure. He thought it over. I just called him. He said something about thirty grand. Said he might talk terms starting from there. I'm to come out to his place on Long Island... Yeah, I want you to be there..."

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"Eight o'clock, a block from Brockbright's. You bring the coupe... Yeah, I'm taking one of those Long Island rattlers. The station's only a couple of blocks from the old guy's house... Yeah, we'll get that dough and lam afterward..."

Nick finished the call, left the telephone booth. Halfway out of the drug store, he shot a glance back toward the telephones. The booths were crowded; a woman was entering the one that Nick had left. Nick scowled as he noticed that persons were still in the booths on each side of his.

He remembered that the walls of telephone booths are very thin. He had made a slip, he figured, in mentioning Brockbright's name and referring to the pending transaction. In his conversation, he had indicated that he had threatened Brockbright. That was bad.

Nothing could be gained, though, by staring at the telephone booths. The persons in them seemed glued there. Probably they were so busy with their own conversations that they had not bothered to listen to Nick's. The best thing to do was forget them, particularly as there was just time to catch the train to Long Island.

Stepping from the drug store, Nick hailed a taxi. Riding to the station, he shifted his hand to his hip, felt the revolver that bulged there; Nick was pleased because he had the gun with him.

Things might be easier at Brockbright's to-night. On the other hand, they might prove tough. Whether the millionaire planned a deal or had laid a trap, was a question.

With the property deed in one pocket, a gun in another, Nick Shoyden felt himself prepared for either eventuality.

CHAPTER IV. DEATH AFTER EIGHT

FROM the time that he had left Cyrus Brockbright's office, Nick Shoyden had been too concerned with real-estate problems to worry about persons on his trail. Nick was confident that the flight from the Lucky Seven Club and his subsequent sojourn in Brooklyn where he had hidden out after the fight had been sufficient to shake off any one, including The Shadow.

Nick's opinions, however, were not shared by Kip Farrick.

When Kip came out of the hide-out near Tully's pawnshop, his rattish eyes were alert. Moving along a street in the direction of the Bowery, Kip watched every one whom he passed. He paused to peer suspiciously at a taxicab that was parked near a corner. Seeing that its driver was absent, Kip hurried along to his coupe, confident that the cab meant nothing.

Darkness stirred within that taxi a few seconds after Kip had gone. A gloved hand appeared at the window, gave a signal that was noted by a keen taxi driver who was lounging just inside a shooting gallery. The driver waited a few seconds, then came to his cab.

The gloved hand had disappeared into darkness. A whispered voice spoke instead. Behind the wheel, the taxi driver spotted Kip's coupe and took up its trail.

The course led northward. Kip chose a quiet avenue, as soon as he could reach it. Driving along, he had opportunity to observe any cars that might be following him. From the rear seat of the taxi, The Shadow saw Kip's tactics.

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A mile northward, the taxi neared the vicinity of the exclusive Cobalt Club, where The Shadow held a membership under the name of Lamont Cranston. Parked near the club was the expensive limousine that The Shadow used when he appeared as Cranston.

Kip had been lucky in choosing this quiet avenue; but The Shadow had matched the crook's luck. He spoke a quick order to the taxi driver. The cab passed the limousine and veered into a side street.

Promptly, The Shadow deserted the cab. Clad in cloak and hat of black, he was an almost invisible figure as he strode back to the corner and entered the limousine. Through the speaking tube, he told the drowsing chauffeur: "Drive northward, Stanley."

Up ahead, Kip was still ambling along the avenue. In the mirror of his coupe, he had seen the cab turn off. He thought nothing of the limousine that started from the Cobalt Club. Wild though his notions might be, Kip could not have pictured a trailer who traveled in a six-thousand-dollar automobile.

Crossing one of the East River bridges, Kip saw a big car ride past him. He identified it as the one that had started from the Cobalt Club; but he was wrong. It was a car owned by a wealthy Long Island resident. Fancy limousines were not uncommon on this bridge. Hence Kip was not at all concerned when he reached a boulevard and happened to notice a limousine among the cars that still followed him.

Kip was looking for taxis, particularly the one that he had seen before. It happened that the very cab was tailing him; but it was too far back for Kip to see. The Shadow's cab was keeping sight of The Shadow's limousine.

WHERE a road cut off at an angle, Kip took the turn and drove down beneath a concrete railroad bridge. A Long Island electric train slithered over the bridge as Kip went beneath. Noting the red cars, and knowing what division they were on, Kip decided that it must be Nick's train. If so, Kip was late. He had dawdled along, too concerned with thoughts of followers.

Increasing speed, Kip tried to make time on the curving road ahead of him. A taxi suddenly came up behind him; it was The Shadow's, relieving the limousine. Worried over the cab's presence, Kip went off his route.

The cab followed him, but took a different turn. Relieved, Kip headed back toward the right road. He passed a corner, not noticing the limousine that was parked there, its lights out. The big car resumed the trail that the cab had dropped.

By this time, The Shadow was convinced that Kip's destination was the secluded suburb of Folsom, just within the New York City limits. The Shadow was right. Kip slowed down as he neared a corner not far from the Folsom station.

The Shadow ordered Stanley to stop the car. Stepping into darkness, the cloaked investigator moved toward the road where Kip had gone.

Within half a block, The Shadow came upon Kip's coupe, halted, dark and empty. Off to the right among the trees, The Shadow saw the only lights that marked a house in this vicinity. It was a large building, surrounded by huge grounds; probably Kip's objective.

Whether the crook intended to visit the house alone, or had merely come to pick up Nick Shoyden, The Shadow could see advantage in reaching the place before Kip did. Choosing the darkness of the lawn, The Shadow made quick strides across the grass, a shorter route than Kip could possibly gain by keeping on the road.

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The Shadow's footsteps were crunchless when he reached a gravel driveway. He crossed it, came to a side door of the house. There he stopped, noting a flagstone walk that ended at the side door. Through tiny glass panes of the door, The Shadow could see a dim interior light. Above the door were the shaded windows of a second-story room, with a glow at their edges.

It was quite apparent to The Shadow that the owner of this mansion expected a visitor, and had left the side door unlatched so that the person could enter unannounced. A stairway showed inside the door. It was probably the route to the lighted room on the second floor.

If the visitor was to be Nick Shoyden, he could have arrived some time ago. That would account for Kip Farrick coming here to meet Nick afterward. If Kip happened to be the man expected, The Shadow had overtaken him. On that account, The Shadow decided to take his own route to the room upstairs.

THERE was a porch just past a corner of the house. Its trellis showed white in the darkness. Using the trellis as a ladder, The Shadow made his way to a darkened window on the second floor. The window was latched; The Shadow loosened it promptly with a thin strip of metal that served him as a wedge.

Somewhere off from the house, The Shadow heard the start of a motor that sounded like Kip's coupe. Listening, The Shadow waited until the sound had faded. Two minutes of quiet followed; then came the clickety-clack of an electric train riding into the Folsom station. From the direction of the sound, The Shadow knew that the local was inbound.

Promptly, The Shadow pictured possibilities; for he remembered the outbound train at the railroad bridge.

Nick Shoyden had come out here by train, to see the owner of the house. Kip Farrick had arrived at least fifteen minutes afterward to contact Nick near the building. Nick had probably finished his business here; had been waiting a block away, for Kip. The Shadow had missed their meeting by cutting across the lawn.

Probably, Nick had driven away with Kip, although he could have taken the train instead. Whichever the case, The Shadow was too late to witness Nick's interview with the house owner. Even worse, the trail The Shadow was following was lost.

The only chance to regain it would be through some clue here. Because of that, The Shadow entered the window; he closed it part way behind him and made through darkness toward a door that showed a lower edge of light. Placing a hand upon the knob, The Shadow turned it and edged the door inward.

The Shadow looked into a lighted room, which had a closed door on the other side. The room was a study, although it bore some resemblance to an office. It had comfortable chairs, a couch, thick Oriental rugs; but in a far corner was a desk, with a swivel chair beyond it.

There was a fair-sized safe, also; and the empty swivel chair was swung toward it. The Shadow could see only the top of the chair back, for the desk was solid built and cut off full view.

At first sight, it seemed that the owner of this study had probably stepped from the room, through the door on the other side. If so, the scene indicated that he would return at any time. There was one point, however, that did not fit the picture.

The chair was too far away from the desk. No one would normally have pushed it clear to the corner. Nor was it close enough to the safe, which stood in a little alcove.

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Grimly, The Shadow closed the rear door behind him. Silently, he glided toward the desk. Resting both hands upon the nearer edge, he craned forward to see the floor beyond. Between the desk and the revolving chair, The Shadow saw the sight that he expected.

A man lay crumpled there; a pitiful figure. His smoking jacket was hunched over his stooped shoulders; the face above it peered upward. Lips were strained, contorted as they peered from the beard and mustache that surrounded them. Ruddy cheeks had lost their color. Eaglelike eyes were glazed as they looked blindly toward the ceiling.

The Shadow knew that face; with recognition, he realized whose mansion this was. It belonged to the dead man on the floor, Cyrus Brockbright. The millionaire was the man whom Nick Shoyden had come to see. Whatever the deal between the crook and Brockbright, death had been the prompt sequel.

LONG was the gaze that The Shadow gave toward the dead face below the desk. Grim, mirthless was the laugh that sounded low from the hidden lips of the cloaked visitor. The Shadow had not anticipated murder at the end of this quest. Though he knew Nick Shoyden to be capable of such a crime, The Shadow had supposed the racketeer to be after some one's money; not his life.

The Shadow saw crossed purposes behind the murder of Cyrus Brockbright. He foresaw conflict before a killer could be brought to task. The Shadow's trail was one that must continue without delay. His plan was to pick up quickly whatever clues he could obtain; then take up the path of Nick Shoyden.

Chance, however, was to delay The Shadow's search for clues. Circumstances were to bring opposition from the very persons who should have aided The Shadow's course.

CHAPTER V. SHOTS IN THE DARK

CYRUS BROCKBRIGHT had been shot to death; murdered by a single bullet.

The Shadow learned that when he stepped beyond the desk and lifted a limp arm that stretched across the millionaire's chest. The bullet wound showed from Brockbright's shirt front.

Singed cloth told that the shot was fired from close range. The report had certainly been muffled; closed doors and windows added to its quiet. A risky job but one that had gone through. The shot had not been heard either inside the house or outdoors.

The Shadow turned to look at Brockbright's desk. Its surface showed nothing but a blotter pad, pens and ink. As The Shadow examined those articles, he was interrupted by a chance sound within the room.

A telephone bell began to tingle from the wall beside the door.

The noise disturbed The Shadow only momentarily. Since a revolver shot had not been heard from this study, the chances were that the ringing of the telephone would also pass unnoticed; unless the bell of a downstairs extension was ringing also. In that case, the call would be answered below. The Shadow would know if that occurred, by the sudden ending of the ring.

The ringing did not finish. It kept on persistently. Between its short pauses, The Shadow gained a sudden impression of a footstep on the stairs outside the front door of the study. He listened; watched the doorknob as he edged toward the front wall. He saw the doorknob turn.

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Some one had happened to come upstairs. That person would have passed the study, except for the ringing of the telephone bell. The person had failed to hear the revolver shot at a time when keen ears would have been useful. At this moment, when an entrant could only cause trouble, some one had chanced to come along.

Pressed by the door of the room, The Shadow waited while the barrier opened. It swung in his direction, blocked view of Brockbright's body from the doorway. The hasty man who entered was Klauden, the same pale, bespectacled secretary whom Kip Farrick and Nick Shoyden had met singly.

HURRIEDLY, Klauden went to the desk and lifted the cradle telephone. Coming at an angle, he did not see Brockbright's body. The secretary spoke:

"Hello... Yes, inspector, Mr. Brockbright did call your office. He wanted information regarding a man named Shoyden, who appeared to be a swindler. Not hearing from you, he decided to handle the case personally... Yes, I can call Mr. Brockbright to the telephone. He is no longer here in his study; but he has not had time to retire "

Klauden broke off with a gulp. Shifting at the desk, he happened to glance beyond it and catch sight of Brockbright's shoulder. Craning, the secretary saw the dead face. His voice raised to a shriek:

"Murder! It's murder, inspector! Mr. Brockbright dead on the floor!"

Dropping the telephone, Klauden began to shout for others who were close at hand. He was calling servants.

"Lewis! Calloway!" Klauden swung toward the doorway. "Come quick to the study Mr. Brockbright "

The secretary was turning straight in The Shadow's direction. The half-opened door was no longer coverage, for it pointed straight inward. The Shadow lost no time with it. He flung the door shut; sped his hand across it toward the light switch.

The Shadow's fingers were instant with their task. Klauden gained three impressions that were simultaneous and therefore a confused medley in his mind. He heard the door slam; saw the sweep of a swift figure; heard the click of the light switch. With that, stifling blackness blotted the shape that the secretary had seen.

The quick change procured a bad sequel for The Shadow.

Klauden, had he stopped to reason, would have dived for cover, thinking The Shadow to be an enemy. That was the move The Shadow wanted, in order to gain quick exit. Klauden, however, acted frantically. The startling belief that he was in a darkened room with a murderer drove the secretary berserk.

Howling madly, Klauden made a prodigious bound for the doorway and encountered The Shadow turning in the darkness. An instant later, The Shadow was locked with a combatant whose stark terror made him formidable.

Klauden locked The Shadow with a grip as tight as a drowning man's. The Shadow swung him about and half flung him to the floor, hoping that the fellow would take to the door. Losing all sense of direction, Klauden came back to the fray with greater fury, thinking that his sole safety lay in battle.

JUST as The Shadow gained a proper grip upon his frantic adversary, the door burst inward. From the dim light of the hallway came a pair of husky servants: Lewis and Calloway. One was armed with a big cane that belonged to Brockbright; the other had a revolver.

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They did not see The Shadow in the darkness. Instead, they received Klauden as The Shadow sent the secretary diving toward them. The secretary's shoulders bowled over the man with the gun; his legs tripped the fellow with the cane. The Shadow sprang for the rear door of the room and gained it.

The man with the revolver was firing as The Shadow made through the rear room, but the shots were late and useless. The Shadow ripped open the window, sprang to the roof and leaped for the ground, without benefit of the trellis. As he thudded the dry grass, there were shouts from the window above.

A spotlight gleamed from a garage at the rear. The chauffeur, Parkins, had heard the shots. He caught a fleeting glimpse of The Shadow's rising form. Parkins started gunfire, as The Shadow blended with the darkness beyond the spotlight's fringe.

That race across the lawn was a risky one. Parkins was firing blindly, but with surprising accuracy. So was the servant who was gunning from the rear window of the house. Bullets whistled past The Shadow, dug up turf almost beneath his feet. His zigzags almost threw him into the path of fire.

Because of the size of his estate, Brockbright had supplied those two servants with revolver permits; and some of his near neighbors had copied the idea. As The Shadow crashed through a rear hedge, a big electric lantern opened its beam from the rear door of another house. There was a shout, as another amateur marksman spied the twisting figure in black. A new gun began to rip pursuing shots.

Brockbright's neighborhood seemed remote; but it proved otherwise. Houses were thick, back along the route that The Shadow's limousine had traveled. There were private watchmen patrolling empty houses. A police car was in the vicinity. The whole neighborhood came to life as The Shadow reached the street where his car was parked.

Carving through a corner hedge, The Shadow came squarely upon a bulky watchman who was running toward the direction of the shots. The husky heard the hedge crackle. He made a leap, swinging a big nightstick. All that he saw was a surge of black that hit him like an avalanche.

With a powerful rip, The Shadow caught the hand that swung the cudgel. One shoulder dropped, The Shadow gave a terrific back snap. The tricky heave added to the watchman's momentum. He went upward, forward over The Shadow's shoulder, headlong across the hedge.

As the attacker thudded the lawn, all that he heard was the closing crackle of the hedge as the bushes pulled together.

LONG strides beside the sidewalk brought The Shadow to the limousine, where Stanley was peering from the window beside the driver's seat. The Shadow entered silently; in the even tones that suited Cranston, he gave an order to the chauffeur through the speaking tube:

"Lights, Stanley. Let us see where the trouble lies. Drive the car ahead a short distance."

Lights on, the limousine started toward the corner. Men were pounding along the sidewalk from the direction of Brockbright's. Some pursuer, fancying he saw a figure, fired wildly toward a far corner. The Shadow gave a prompt order to Stanley.

"Your revolver, Stanley," he said. "Shoot toward the trees beyond the mail box. Stop the car."

Stanley had a revolver permit, for the limousine frequently traversed lonely roads. The chauffeur tugged the gun from a door pocket beside him. Thinking that his employer had seen some one in flight, Stanley fired at

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the spot indicated.

The illusion was perfect. Chasers had stopped when one of their number fired at an imaginary target. Stanley's shots, directed at The Shadow's order, indicated a runner who had passed farther on. A barrage began toward the trees near the mail box. Some of the pursuers halted to reload, while others ran for the trees to see if they had crippled their imaginary quarry.

Among some unarmed men who halted beside The Shadow's car was Klauden. The bespectacled secretary was puffing. The hard run, after the fray with The Shadow, had winded him. Staring at the limousine, Klauden saw Stanley jump out to run with the pursuers. A moment later, the rear door opened and a tall figure in evening clothes stepped forth.

Klauden was doubly impressed. Not only had the tall stranger pointed the pursuers after an imaginary fugitive; but he looked like a person of importance, the sort who would be coming to visit Cyrus Brockbright. Klauden introduced himself as Brockbright's secretary.

The Shadow announced himself to be Lamont Cranston, and added that he was acquainted with Brockbright. He stated casually that his limousine had merely happened to be in this vicinity, when the gunfire commenced.

Pathetically, Klauden told of Brockbright's death; how he had found the body in the study.

"I clutched the murderer," expressed the secretary, earnestly, extending his hands as he spoke. "I was as close to him as I am to you, Mr. Cranston! Yet he broke away from me and escaped!"

The Shadow pretended regret because of the supposed killer's escape. Men were returning; with them, Stanley. The chauffeur told them how his employer had pointed out the direction in which to continue the pursuit. Even though no fugitive had been captured, thanks were given to The Shadow. Continuing his part as Cranston, he agreed to go to Brockbright's house with Klauden.

They entered the limousine for the short ride. The back seat contained no signs of The Shadow's guns or black garb. All were packed away in a special compartment beneath the seat itself.

When he had discovered Brockbright's body, The Shadow had two choices. One was to remain and study the scene of crime; the other was to take up a murderer's trail. He had hoped to do both. For a short while, a run of bad luck had made it seem impossible for him to adopt either course.

New circumstances had bettered the situation. The Shadow held the opportunity to study one phase of the crime, to investigate at Brockbright's. It was better to remain there and learn all that was possible, than to attempt pursuit of a killer who had already gained too good a start.

Such was The Shadow's decision, as he rode back to the mansion from which he had so recently fled.

CHAPTER VI. THE LAW LEARNS

WITHIN a half hour after The Shadow's second arrival at Brockbright's, a swarthy, stocky-built police inspector reached the dead millionaire's home. He was the man to whom Klauden had talked by telephone, acting Inspector Joe Cardona.

For years, Joe Cardona had been an ace detective. As a police inspector, he was the star investigator of

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homicide cases. Good at tracing clues, quick at gaining hunches, Cardona believed in covering every detail of the ground where murder had been done.

In fact, Cardona had figured in this case from the moment of Klauden's call. Hearing shouts of murder across the telephone, Joe had called the precinct that included the suburb of Folsom. That was why police cars had arrived just after The Shadow's forced flight. When Cardona reached Brockbright's, police were everywhere, waiting to report and take orders.

Cardona had expected to find things that way. His one surprise came when he found Lamont Cranston at Brockbright's home. Cardona knew Cranston as a friend of the police commissioner; but had never identified him as The Shadow. When he heard the story of a fugitive's flight, Cardona smiled in congratulating fashion.

"Good work, Mr. Cranston," he said The Shadow. "You've been Johnny-on-the-spot several times that I remember. Too bad you didn't have a chance to use that revolver, instead of your chauffeur. With the way you've bagged big game on your world travels, I'll bet you'd have clipped the fellow!"

In reviewing the case, Cardona worked backward. He learned first that the supposed killer had made a complete get-away, leaving no traces; that no one had a good description of the man. He heard the testimony of Brockbright's servants; then came to Klauden's tale of finding the body when he answered the telephone. When he reached that point, Cardona made a decision that The Shadow expected.

"That's enough," declared the ace. "The man we want is gone. We don't need any more details about his flight. What we've got to find out is how he happened to come here; who he could have been "

KLAUDEN was anxious to speak. Cardona had observed it all along; he saw that the secretary's impatience had reached an absolute limit. Cardona liked that sign. He halted his own statement; nodded for Klauden to begin.

"Can I tell the whole case?" queried Klauden. "Just as it happened in order?"

Another nod from Cardona. Klauden's tired face showed a satisfied smile.

"About a week ago," said the secretary, "Mr. Brockbright received a letter from a concern called the Interstate Resort Development Co. It was signed by the president, a man named Nick Shoyden."

Cardona came up in his chair.

"Nick Shoyden!" he exclaimed. "Say this sounds like it was a racket! That's Nick Shoyden's specialty, and he goes the limit with it." Joe turned to The Shadow, to add: "Tell me, Mr. Cranston do you remember a murder that happened about a month ago Jim Kildean, the gambler?"

A nod from The Shadow.

"I've had some tips," declared Joe, "that Nick Shoyden was in back of that killing. I'd been promised more evidence; that's the only reason why I was marking time."

The Shadow's disguised lips showed the faintest flicker of a smile. He had supplied the mysterious information to which Cardona referred.

"Yes, sir," added Cardona. "Nick Shoyden headed out of town; so did a pal of his, Kip Farrick "

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Klauden exclaimed at mention of the second name. Eagerly, the secretary spoke:

"Kip Farrick was supposed to be Shoyden's secretary! Farrick came to see me after I had written Shoyden!"

"When was this?" demanded Cardona.

"Yesterday," replied the secretary. "Farrick wouldn't say a word about where the property was located the property that Shoyden wanted to sell to Mr. Brockbright. So I arranged an appointment, so that Shoyden could see Mr. Brockbright to-day."

"This evening?"

"No. This afternoon, at three. Shoyden came, and tried to sell Mr. Brockbright a property. Mr. Brockbright refused to buy. Shoyden may have become threatening, for Mr. Brockbright rang very hastily for me. When I entered the office, I gained the impression that there had been a heated discussion."

Klauden paused. Cardona questioned promptly how the secretary knew that property had been discussed, since Klauden was not in the office at the time. The secretary explained.

"The letters spoke of property," he said, "and so did Farrick. Moreover, after Shoyden had gone, Mr. Brockbright mentioned that the fellow had tried to sell him some land. He asked me some odd questions, too."

"Mr. Brockbright wanted to know what I would do in his position. He said that for thirty thousand dollars he could gain some land that might have possibilities, even though it had been overpriced. He also said that the purchase would relieve him from some future worry."

"Since thirty thousand dollars meant little to Mr. Brockbright, I told him that I would buy the property. Mr. Brockbright thought a while; then told me to come home with him for dinner. During dinner, he had a call from Shoyden."

Cardona was about to ask how Klauden knew who the caller was, when the secretary answered the unspoken question.

"I gave Shoyden this telephone number," explained the secretary, "at Mr. Brockbright's order. That was at the office. Out here, I answered the telephone and recognized Shoyden's voice. Mr. Brockbright talked to Shoyden and arranged to see him here at about eight o'clock."

"Alone in the study?"

"Yes. Mr. Brockbright wasn't sure which one was coming Shoyden or Farrick; so we left the lower door unlocked. I remained downstairs with the servants."

"Do you know when Shoyden came?"

"I heard some one enter at about ten minutes of eight. Later a little after eight I thought I heard the door open and close twice, with a short interval between. As though the visitor had gone out and sneaked in again. About three or four minutes after that, I thought some one went out. But I couldn't be sure about it."

CARDONA decided to check these details. Klauden led the way to a big living room; showed where he had been seated, reading a book. There was a closed door between the living room and the little side door.

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Taking Klauden's chair, Cardona had a detective work the side door. Klauden was right; sounds were audible, but vague, especially when the door was handled stealthily.

"It could have been both Nick and Kip," decided Cardona. "One came first and talked about the deal. Brockbright decided not to buy the property. So the other came in and killed him. Or it could have been just one most likely Nick Shoyden coming out to make sure all was quiet. Finding it that way, he had nerve enough for the murder.

"Tell me, Klauden: did Mr. Brockbright have thirty thousand dollars here in the house?"

"He had more than that," replied the secretary. "He kept the money in his safe."

Cardona led the way upstairs. The safe was closed and locked; but the murderer could have seen to that. Klauden knew the combination. He opened the safe. In it, Cardona found a bundle of cash that totaled a little more than ten thousand dollars.

"He had thirty thousand out in sight," decided Joe. "That's where Mr. Brockbright made his mistake. Nick saw the money, decided to bump him and keep the title deed for himself. There're no property deeds here in the safe."

Search proved that Cardona was right. It was certain that Brockbright had been relieved of a large sum, Nick keeping the deed. One detail caused discussion; that was Klauden's recollection of the second departure. Since the secretary had encountered an intruder in the study, it did not seem likely that Nick had gone out that time.

To The Shadow, the facts fitted. Klauden had actually heard two entries and two departures. The discussion did not last long, however, as Klauden became less and less sure about having heard the second exit. So it was decided that the murderer had not gone out at all.

After questioning the other servants, to find that their stories did not conflict with Klauden's, Cardona began a thorough search of the study. He did not uncover a single worth-while clue. The only evidence upon which the law could work was the bullet that had slain Brockbright. That would probably be useless, for the murderer could easily dispose of the gun.

Cardona came logically to the subject of Brockbright's enemies. He learned that the millionaire had none. It was plain that the whole cause for murder lay tied up with the sale of property; and there came the snag. Klauden could supply no clue whatever to the location of the land that Nick Shoyden had offered.

IT was nearly midnight when Cardona completed his investigation. He accepted an invitation to ride back to Manhattan in The Shadow's limousine. As they rode, Cardona discussed the case.

"Nick and Kip are in it together," declared Joe. "They've always been in cahoots, that pair. I figure, though, that Nick would have handled this job alone. Kip never went up to Brockbright's study at all. His only part was to meet Nick outside."

With that, The Shadow agreed, although he made no comment. The Shadow knew that Kip had not reached Brockbright's in time to figure in murder. The most that he could have done was contact Nick somewhere near the house and take the racketeer along in the coupe.

"We've got to pick up a trail to Nick Shoyden," decided Cardona. "That's certain, Mr. Cranston. If I could only find out some places where he'd been while he was here in town!"

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"What about the Lucky Seven Club?" inquired The Shadow, casually. "I read to-day that there had been trouble there. Maybe Nick Shoyden was in it."

"Why would he be around a gambling joint?"

"He probably frequented them. You suspect him of having murdered Jim Kildean."

"That's right. A good link, Mr. Cranston. I'll quiz some of those hoodlums who were at the Lucky Seven with Jake Prenzel."

The limousine had reached Manhattan. Cardona, about to transfer to a subway, paused as the car stopped. Joe had a last comment.

"One thing is sure," declared the ace. "Nick Shoyden pinned it on himself, this time. He's changed policy since he murdered Jim Kildean. Then he was foxy; we haven't yet got proof that he even met Kildean. This time, though, he killed openly. All that he can count on is keeping out of sight. I'll find him, though, if it takes me a hundred years!"

With that promise, Cardona departed. Riding alone, The Shadow sat silent in the limousine. He was thinking more deeply on the subject that Cardona had classed as Nick Shoyden's change of policy. To The Shadow, Brockbright's murder was illogical. He had not expected it. Nick Shoyden's campaign, beginning with the opening of a fake real estate office, had indicated that the crook was out to swindle only. Murder did not fit.

Something odd had happened at Brockbright's to-night. Something that neither Nick nor the millionaire had foreseen when they arranged their appointment. The key to it could be gained only by learning the full story of Nick Shoyden's real estate game. To do that, it would be necessary to trace back to the cause of Nick's well-planned swindle.

Joe Cardona certainly intended to look into the past. So did The Shadow. Like the law, the master sleuth planned to learn the basic facts beneath the murder of Cyrus Brockbright.

CHAPTER VII. CARDONA'S VACATION

THREE days after the murder of Cyrus Brockbright, Joe Cardona was seated glumly at his desk in headquarters. Before him lay a sheaf of report sheets; to his right, a stack of newspapers.

In a sense, the two were connected, for it was from Cardona's reports that the newspapers gained their facts. Reporter's took Cardona's statements in the raw. Rewrite men stepped them up to sensational stories. The copy desk added the heads. Finally, big presses pounded out the newspapers and copies of the daily journals reached Cardona's desk.

Sometimes, thanks to the efforts of reporters, or added items of out-of-town news, Cardona profited when he read the newspapers. In many cases, though, he gained nothing. Essentially, the printed news of crime cases matched Cardona's report sheets; and usually in Cardona's opinion the facts were distorted or garbled.

In this instance, the newspapers had done a rather incomplete job. Reporters had grabbed up the sensational details of Brockbright's death. They pinned the murder on Nick Shoyden and his accomplice, Kip Farrick. They told of the furious chase outside of Brockbright's home. They ran photographs of Brockbright's house; showed a map of the lawn and grounds adjoining it, with zigzag lines to show the course that Nick had followed in his race for freedom.

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All this, in Cardona's estimation, was froth.

The most important work, as Cardona saw it, was the investigation that he had conducted since the murder. During the past few days, Joe had been painstaking in his efforts to run down any clue that might give him a former connection between Nick Shoyden and Cyrus Brockbright.

Servants, friends, relatives, business acquaintances every one who knew Brockbright had been questioned. Cardona had neglected nothing. Every statement was recorded. Those papers were among the report sheets; and Cardona had included duplicates, in case reporters wanted them. There had been no bites.

To the news hawks, Cardona's questionnaires were junk, for they had not produced a tangible result. The newspaper stories covered them all with the simple statement that the police questioning had uncovered nothing.

There was another reason why Joe Cardona was glum. The ace had postponed a long-awaited vacation, on the hope that something would break in the Brockbright case. Joe had counted on a few new leads at least. None had arrived; so he was at a standstill.

To add to his misery, Cardona had just received a note from the police commissioner, stating that since the case showed no developments, Joe was to turn it over to other hands and leave on his vacation. Perhaps the note was kindly meant; but Cardona read sarcasm between the lines.

In fact, Cardona was taking another scowl at the note when a man stepped into the office. Joe looked up to see the friendly face of Detective Sergeant Markham, his most trusted subordinate.

IF there was anything Markham liked, it was to bring good news to Cardona. The detective sergeant seldom had that opportunity, hence he always displayed it when the occasion did arrive. One look at Markham's eager face gave Joe the cue.

"Yeah?" queried Cardona. "What is it, Markham?"

"A stoolie just showed up," replied Markham. "You know him Gink Luddy, that used to be a dip."

Cardona remembered "Gink" Luddy. The fellow had been a mediocre pickpocket, when the police had offered him amnesty if he turned stool pigeon. As a stoolie, Gink had shown no improvement in technique. Cardona had intended to find Gink some day and chase him out of town, under threat of arrest for vagrancy. Hence, Markham's announcement concerning Gink promised little.

"Gink's got something," assured Markham, noting Cardona's indifference. "It's about Kip Farrick."

To Cardona, mention of Kip Farrick meant Nick Shoyden. With a sudden show of interest, Joe ordered Markham to bring in the stoolie. When Gink showed up, Joe closed the door and locked it. He surveyed the pasty, withered-faced wreck of humanity that called itself Gink Luddy.

"Gone hophead, eh, Gink?" queried Cardona, gruffly. Gink's appearance had become that of a dope addict. "I guess that means you've come here to spill some pipe dream."

"I ain't," whined Gink. "Honest, Joe! Dis is on the level. I heard the harness bulls was huntin' me, to ride me outta town. I don't wanna be driv out, Joe."

"So what?"

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"Dat's why I come here. To show you dis."

From the frayed pocket of a shabby jacket, Gink produced a folded picture post card. It was addressed to the stoolie; it bore the postmark, "Midvale." It lacked a message; on the front, Cardona saw a colored photograph of trees and cabins, entitled: "Bungalows along the Muskatiny Creek." The postmark showed a date two weeks old.

"It was from Kip," whined Gink. "Onct he told me dat if I got a picture post card, it'd be from him. So's I'd know where he was, in case de right guys asked me."

"And did anybody ask you about him?"

"No. Dat's why I been carryin' de card. I didn't know dat you was lookin' for Kip until to-day, when I got readin' a newspaper dat was lyin' on de park bench. I seen in de bladder dat Kip had been in town an' took it on de lam wid Nick Shoyden."

Gink's story was an earnest one. The stoolie's condition indicated that he might not have been interested in newspapers for the last few days. Cardona nodded his belief. Gink began a plea:

"You ain't goin' to chase me, are you, Joe "

"No. Get back to a park bench and hang a 'Don't Disturb' sign on it, if you want to. If anybody wants to run you in, tell him to see me about it."

MARKHAM unlocked the door and showed Gink out. When the sergeant returned, Cardona was seated at the desk. Joe had pocketed the post card. He expressed his thanks to Markham, thought a while, then brought out the commissioner's letter in place of Kip's post card.

"I'm going on my vacation, Markham," decided Joe, in a significant tone. "If anybody asks you where I went, just tell them you don't know. This Brockbright case looks dead. Maybe it won't be, when I get back."

Cardona listened a moment; he heard footsteps in the hall.

"Two weeks vacation," he continued. "You can call the commissioner and tell him I've gone. Let him put anybody on the case who wants it."

A wiry young man strolled into the office while Cardona was speaking. He was Clyde Burke, a reporter on the New York Classic. His grin showed that he had heard Cardona's comment.

"Hello, Burke," greeted Joe. "You're just in time to say good-by. I'm taking two weeks off. On account of this."

Cardona handed Clyde the commissioner's letter, then went to the locker room. When he returned, he was wearing hat and coat. Taking back the letter, the ace motioned toward the report sheets on the desk.

"Take all you want from them," he offered. "The next inspector who handles this case probably won't make a lot of carbon copies for a bunch of reporters who don't appreciate them. You're as bad as the rest, Burke. You passed up those questionnaires I put to people who knew Brockbright."

"I was only waiting, Joe," protested Clyde. "I wanted to be sure they were complete."

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"They're as complete as they'll ever be! So long, Burke. Don't forget to call the commissioner, Markham."

Joe Cardona had completely sold Clyde Burke on the idea that he was taking an actual vacation. The reporter never suspected that the ace had just received new evidence. Clyde had arrived too late to witness Gink's departure.

Remaining in Cardona's office, the reporter picked out copies of all the statements that concerned Cyrus Brockbright. About to leave, Clyde questioned Markham:

"Where was Joe going on his vacation?"

Markham shrugged his shoulders.

"Don't ask me," he replied. "You know how Joe is. The commissioner asked where he had gone. I couldn't even tell him."

In some ways, Markham could put up as good a bluff as Cardona. He did on this occasion. Markham was confident that the ace had gone to Midvale; and his guess was right. At the very time that Clyde was leaving the office, Joe Cardona was boarding a train for the town from which Kip had sent the post card.

IT was a long, slow ride to Midvale. Cardona started early in the afternoon; it was almost five o'clock when he reached the little town. During the trip, Joe came to a definite conclusion.

To Joe, Kip Farrick meant Nick Shoyden. Since Nick was the murderer of Cyrus Brockbright, the job was to find the missing link between the killer and the victim. That link concerned a title deed to some property. The question of the land's location was therefore most important.

Joe had a hunch that the town of Midvale might be close to the land that Nick had purchased.

Therefore, Joe's first move upon reaching Midvale was to find a real estate office. He found one in a small office building that adjoined the general store. Entering, he began a conversation with the middle-aged realtor whom he found there.

"I'm from New York," announced Cardona. "I stopped off here to see if there were any good buys in real estate."

"House in the town?" queried the realtor. "Or a farm outside? Or maybe a bungalow down on the Muskatiny?"

Mention of the creek brought a prompt response from Cardona. It chanced to fit with Kip's post card. He inquired about the prices of bungalows; learned that they were reasonable, although property prices had recently increased. Joe asked if any had been sold recently. The realtor shook his head, then added:

"There was creek property sold, though. Most people would call it a farm, only it has a fine creek frontage that may be valuable some day. A little too far down the Muskatiny to be valuable just yet."

"How large was the farm?" queried Cardona. "Maybe that would give me an idea of how ground runs around here."

"Two hundred acres. Rented by a mushroom grower named Jorridon. Tried to buy it, Rex Jorridon did, but he didn't have the money. It was bought by a city chap; he paid the bank spot cash for it. J. J. Burlow, his name

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was; it cost him around eight thousand dollars, which was a bargain."

Cardona inquired the way to the farm. The realtor offered to drive him there, but when Joe learned that it was only three miles, he decided to walk. After leaving the realtor's office, Cardona had an early dinner, then started on his tramp.

The route that he took was on the near side of the creek. It took him past the entrance to the old Hawkins Estate, that Kip had pointed out to Nick as a good place for kidnapers to use as their headquarters. From there, the road went down a hill, to a bridge that led across the creek and allowed a short-cut over the fields to Jorridon's farmhouse.

Dusk had settled as Cardona neared the bottom of the hill. It was almost dark at the bridge; but a quick climb would allow sufficient daylight to find the way to Jorridon's. Cardona quickened his pace across the bridge, reached the other side just as an automobile swung in his direction.

For a moment, the headlights blinded Cardona. To escape their glare, Joe sprang to the side of the road; he was there as the car whizzed by across the bridge. Scrambling up the road, Cardona found the path that led to Jorridon's, and started on his trip across the fields.

Hardly had Cardona gone from the road before the automobile returned. It was a coupe; that probably accounted for the ease and swiftness with which it had been turned about, somewhere beyond the bridge. As for the cause of the car's return, that was explained by the fact that the two men riding in it had sighted Joe Cardona.

The occupants of the coupe were the very crooks whose trail Cardona sought: Nick Shoyden and Kip Farrick.

CHAPTER VIII. AMONG THE MISSING

KIP FARRICK was driving the coupe; he shifted it to second gear as he reached the hill on Jorridon's side of the creek. Eyes alert, Kip watched along the road for signs of Cardona; while Nick Shoyden, gun in hand, was ready to take a shot at the New York police inspector.

By their manner, crooks expected to bag their game. It was not until the car neared the top of the hill that they acknowledged that their chance was gone. Cardona's finding of the path to Jorridon's had been a fortunate one.

"What next, Nick?" queried Kip, anxiously. "Down the hill again, to see if we missed him?"

"Not a chance," growled Nick. "He must have cut through to Jorridon's. I figured he was going there, the minute I saw he was Joe Cardona."

"We should 'a' stopped right then."

"We couldn't. You were hitting it too fast for the bridge. We did the right stunt turning around and coming back like we were another car. Only we thought Cardona would be coming all the way up the hill."

"Where'll we go, Nick? To Jorridon's?"

Nick considered. Finally, he ordered Kip to drive to the crossroad and follow the old dirt road that went past the farmhouse. He added, though, that they would not stop at Jorridon's. Nick's plan was to drive into Midvale and make a circuit back to the Hawkins Estate. The crooks had chosen the old mansion as their hide-out.

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Nick's conversation explained why.

"We knew there could be two leaks," summed Nick. "One was that chauffeur of Brockbright's the fellow he called Parkins. Only he didn't seem likely. The one I worried about was this Rex Jorridon. You were sap enough to give him your right name, Kip.

"It looks like Parkins must have blabbed. So Cardona came to Midvale. They think my name was Burlow, down at the bank; but maybe Cardona guessed that the name was phony. Anyway, finding out that Jorridon's farm was bought, Cardona has gone there."

Nick paused, considering the possible consequences. Kip put in the comment:

"We should 'a' snatched Jorridon. That's what we came here for, wasn't it?"

"No," retorted Nick. "We came here because I figured Midvale was where nobody would look for us. My idea was to snatch Jorridon only if it came to a pinch."

"And Joe Cardona being here is a pinch "

"Sure! But we're not strong enough to snatch Jorridon, yet. He's got too many big hicks hanging around his place. We've got to wait until we get a crew big enough to handle them."

There was a spell of silence as the coupe continued along its rough roundabout course to the Hawkins Estate. Finally, Nick came to a decision.

"With what few of us there are," he declared, "we'll try to bag Cardona after he leaves Jorridon's. Whether we get him or not, we'll go ahead as we planned. Pink Latham is handling that chauffeur, Parkins. He'll be here later, with the crew we need. We'll take care of Jorridon then. So if Cardona slips us, he won't have either of the witnesses he needs. No Parkins to say that Brockbright came out here; no Jorridon to testify that you stopped at the farmhouse."

With those arrangements settled, Nick added a reminder that was understood by Kip.

"There's something else," declared Nick, "that we're going to find the answer to before we're through with Midvale."

IF Joe Cardona had suspected the near presence of Nick Shoyden and Kip Farrick, he might have hurried faster toward the safety at Rex Jorridon's. Not that Cardona ever avoided conflict with crooks; on the contrary, he generally welcomed it. But Cardona was after evidence, and he believed that Jorridon had it.

The price of Jorridon's farm, slightly overstated by the Midvale realtor, fitted with Cardona's picture of Nick Shoyden's efforts to swindle Cyrus Brockbright. Thirty thousand dollars was about the lowest that a swindler would go, in selling something that cost him eight. Such crooks generally figured fourfold profit as an absolute minimum.

In fact, Nick had figured it to exactitude, since he had paid only seventy-five hundred for the property.

Crooks, too, were smart buyers. Cardona was sure that either Nick or Kip had visited the farm. Therefore, this visit to Jorridon's looked like a sure ten-strike.

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Light from the darkening sky gave Cardona the outline of the shedlike mushroom cellar, with the farmhouse beyond it. Using a flashlight, Cardona tried to find the house door. His blinks were seen; a man came out with an electric lantern and threw a huge flood of light in Joe's direction.

Cardona approached; found a second man beside the first. One had the lantern; the other a shotgun. Finding that Cardona had come alone, they ushered him into the farmhouse.

There, Cardona came face to face with Rex Jorridon. He picked the man at once, because the others looked like farm hands. Jorridon had the marks of an educated man; the sort who would experiment with mushroom crops. His sharp eyes and square-jawed face made an instant impression on Cardona.

Jorridon, in turn, recognized that Cardona must be an unusual visitor. He showed no surprise when Joe drew back his coat lapel to exhibit a badge. What seemed to puzzle Jorridon was not the fact that Cardona was a police inspector; but the exact nature of the mission that had brought him to this lonely farm.

"YOU seem to be a long way from your territory," remarked Jorridon, with a smile. "What brings you up into this country?"

Cardona pulled a newspaper from his pocket, spread it on the plain table in the center of Jorridon's simply furnished living room. He pointed to the details of the Brockbright case. Jorridon nodded.

"I've read about it," he said. "But I never heard of Cyrus Brockbright."

"What about Nick Shoyden?"

A headshake from Jorridon. Cardona pointed to another name, and questioned.

"Kip Farrick?"

Jorridon started to shake his head, stopped suddenly, to utter:

"Farrick! Yes, I remember that name! But I hadn't noticed it in the newspapers. All the news I read named Nick Shoyden. I guess these local newspapers of ours didn't count Farrick as being important."

"You've heard of Farrick, then?"

"Heard of him? I've seen him! A rat-faced sneak with a slimy handshake, worse than a water snake! He was out here, about ten days ago, to ask about buying this farm."

Jorridon nodded toward the side door, to indicate the yard outside.

"I met him right by the barn," he told Cardona. "The fellow said his name was Farrick. His car was around the corner of the house. I didn't see it, but Hector said there was another fellow in it."

"I was down at the bank, a few days later. They told me the farm was sold to a man named J. J. Burlow. I never connected him with Farrick. Could Burlow have been the fellow in the car?"

"My hunch is that Burlow is Nick Shoyden," replied Cardona. "And that this farm was the property that Nick tried to sell to Brockbright."

Jorridon whistled. A little later, his surprise gave way to doubt.

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"This property couldn't be worth much," he told Cardona. "Not for a few years, anyway. There's always a chance that the bungalow resorts will keep on building down along the creek."

Cardona remembered the picture post card and produced it for Jorridon's benefit. Oddly, Kip had sent that post card at a time when thoughts of real estate had never entered his mind; but subsequent events had fitted with it.

Both Cardona and Jorridon agreed that the post card was significant. A millionaire like Brockbright could have been interested in buying cheap land in a resort district.

"This is my vacation," chuckled Cardona to Jorridon. "I'm going to cut it short, though, and go back to New York to-morrow. There's something I'd like right now: a statement from you regarding Farrick's visit."

Jorridon obliged. He went to an old writing desk in the corner, found a sheet of writing paper and wrote out the information that Cardona wanted. Hector and another farm hand witnessed it. That done, Cardona prepared to leave. Jorridon restrained him.

"I'm wondering just how safe things are around here," said Jorridon. "Hector reported prowlers last night. That's why my men were so alert when you appeared. Ezra is overhauling the truck and has the head off the motor, so I can't send you back to Midvale in it. Wait a short while, though, until my men have a look around."

CARDONA waited. He talked with Jorridon on the possibility of Nick and Kip being somewhere near by. Both rejected it. Jorridon decided that the prowlers were chicken thieves; while Cardona was sure that Nick would remain far from Midvale.

"Nick's wanted for murder," declared Cardona. "If he didn't worry about killing Brockbright so openly, why should he bother about a few loose witnesses? Of course, you never can tell what crooks of that type will do. But I'd say the chances were a hundred to one against his being around here."

Hector arrived to state that Jorridon's other men reported the way clear. Jorridon told the husky farm hand to accompany Cardona by the shortest route, which led along the creek to a tiny foot bridge. It was even shorter than the way that Joe had come, for it led up toward the bungalow settlement.

Cardona had his own flashlight; but he went by the glow of Hector's larger lantern. A quarter mile from the house, they neared the very glen where Kip Farrick had spotted Cyrus Brockbright. Satisfied that Jorridon's men, four or five in number, had scoured the premises, Cardona was quite agreeable when Hector stopped and asked if he could go back to the house. The hired hand pointed out the path, saying that it led directly to the foot bridge, a hundred yards ahead.

As Hector's lantern moved upward toward the house, Cardona used his flashlight. Its glow seemed feeble after the lantern's glare; but it was sufficient. Cardona crossed the flattish glen; took a leap over the brook that trickled into the creek. He headed toward the big rock that had once hidden Nick Shoyden from Cyrus Brockbright's gaze.

The rock loomed oddly; it seemed grotesque, misshapen in the flashlight's glare. Shadows of bushes moved across the light, almost like living things. Just beside the rock, Cardona fancied that he heard whispers; but they could have been the brook's trickle, or the sigh of a slight breeze through the heavy trees.

As Cardona paused to listen, the depth of silence impressed him. So did the darkness. Hector's light was out of sight behind him, and the blackness was like an engulfing mass.

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A feeling of uneasiness made Cardona grip his gun, draw it half from his pocket. He flashed his light along the path, shouldered beyond the rock and went straight ahead. He could feel the dark behind him; it seemed alive, creeping, closing in upon him.

The sensation was more than mere imagination. Cardona swung about, swinging his revolver as he pointed his small flashlight.

A surge of attackers piled upon Cardona. Men sprang from the high ground beside the rock; others came up from the bushes below the path. How many hit him, Cardona could not have guessed. One thug had his gun, and wrenched it away before Joe could fire. Joe's flashlight went from his grasp as the others swarmed over him.

Joe went down fighting; a solid blow upon his skull left him almost senseless. Cardona was a prisoner.

JOE was very vague about what happened afterward.

He knew that men were lugging him bodily; that they carried him across a creek and piled him aboard a car. There was a trip along rough roads that had many turns and took a roundabout direction.

Bound and gagged, Cardona was carried from the car through darkness, down into the cellar of a house, then through a trapdoor to a greater depth. He was finally shoved into a stony room that seemed like a vault. There he was flung on a couch; a door was shut and clamped to keep him captive.

Through Cardona's aching brain thrummed one hopeless thought. He had guessed wrong in not picturing Nick and Kip in this vicinity. Those crooks had evidently done the unexpected returned to Midvale. They had spotted Joe and planned to trap him.

Cardona thought of Rex Jorridon, who had men enough to offset Nick and Kip if it came to battle. He realized dully that he had passed beyond Jorridon's protection when he had dismissed Hector as his guide. Joe had said nothing about returning to Jorridon's tomorrow, or at some near date. Jorridon would have no reason to think that Nick and Kip had trapped Joe after his visit to the farm.

The future looked hopeless to Joe Cardona. He was a prisoner, his fate doubtful. Crooks were in the clear, their very location unknown. The law would make no move to rescue its captured representative. Joe Cardona was among the missing; but he had gone on a vacation and would not be missed.

Beyond that, Cardona did not speculate. Therefore, he did not consider a powerful rescuer from whom help might come. That potential rescuer was The Shadow. All that he needed was a clue to bring him on the trail.

Oddly, The Shadow had already gained the needed clue; and his link had come from Joe Cardona.

CHAPTER IX. WHERE CROOKS FAILED

THE solid darkness of Cardona's prison cell was matched by the thick darkness of a strange room that lay miles away. That room was The Shadow's sanctum, a secret abode known only to its mysterious owner. The Shadow's sanctum was located in New York, the city that Joe Cardona was sorry he had left.

A slight noise broke the silence of the sanctum. The same sound ended the obliterating blackness. A gloved hand had pressed the switch of a hanging lamp. A bluish light cast its glow upon the polished surface of a table.

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Into the light came hands that were no longer gloved. From one glimmered a deep-hued fire opal. The gem was The Shadow's girasol, the rare stone that he wore as a symbol of identity. Long fingers opened an envelope; spread an array of papers upon the desk.

From amid a collection of various sheets, The Shadow brought the duplicate reports that Clyde Burke had obtained in Cardona's office.

The Shadow, through various agents, had been seeking all information that concerned chance incidents in the life of Cyrus Brockbright. The Shadow had tapped sources that Cardona had not touched. Despite his exhaustive search, he had not gained all he required. To complete his data, The Shadow had added Cardona's questionnaires. Clyde Burke, the reporter, was one of The Shadow's agents.

Cardona's information furnished very few facts that The Shadow did not have. The first details that Joe's reports showed were unimportant. When The Shadow came to a later one, however, he discovered something that interested him. This was a quiz that Cardona had conducted with Brockbright's chauffeur, Parkins.

It was plain that Parkins knew nothing about Brockbright's business affairs. His job had been to drive the car wherever he was told; and the chauffeur had recalled no unusual incident on any journey. In fact, Brockbright had used the limousine chiefly for trips between his home and his office; and it was seldom that any one rode with him, except Klauden.

Twice a week, Parkins mentioned, the millionaire had gone on rides outside the city; but he had always been alone and had never made a business call. The trips had been mere outings. Cardona's report classed them as unimportant.

To The Shadow, those trips were more significant.

The complete survey of Brockbright's affairs showed no possible loophole except those rides in the country. The fact that they had taken Brockbright from New York was important, in The Shadow's opinion; for he knew that both Nick Shoyden and Kip Farrick had been somewhere outside the city just before they began to work on Brockbright.

This was the first time that The Shadow had learned of the outing trips. Parkins had previously limited his testimony to accounts of The Shadow's flight from Brockbright's house.

THE SHADOW left the sanctum. Soon afterward, he appeared at the Cobalt Club as Lamont Cranston. He called Brockbright's home and talked with Klauden. He told the secretary that he had learned of a good position for a chauffeur of Parkins's ability. Klauden was pleased with the news; he said that Parkins would be glad to hear it when he returned from Philadelphia.

It appeared that the chauffeur was visiting relatives in that city, and would be back to-night. He was driving his own car, which Mr. Brockbright had given him a year ago. Klauden knew the address in Philadelphia; he promised to call by long distance and tell the chauffeur to stop at Mr. Cranston's home on his way through New Jersey.

Soon afterward, The Shadow left the club and went to Lamont Cranston's New Jersey home by limousine. His trip took him along secluded roads, to a mansion that was large and isolated. Seating himself in the living room, The Shadow ordered his valet, Richards, to be waiting when Parkins arrived.

It was nearly midnight when Parkins appeared. The fellow apologized for his lateness. He had been out when Klauden's long-distance call came. Afterward, he encountered trouble on the road.

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"It was at the underpass near Princeton," explained Parkins, "on Highway No. 1. A sedan passed my light car, cut in and almost drove me against the wall beneath the bridge. Fortunately, I am quick with the brake pedal; I had to be, to suit Mr. Brockbright."

"What happened to the other car?" queried The Shadow, in the casual tone of Cranston.

"Nothing, sir," returned Parkins. "It slowed after it had passed me; it seemed to be loitering, expecting me to come along. But I turned off toward Princeton, thinking that I could find a better route there. That was the last I saw of it unless "

The Shadow's expression was a question. Parkins laughed apologetically and added:

"There was a car that started to overtake me, right near here, sir. Somehow, its headlights the way it was handled well, they reminded me of the other car. So I kept ahead of it. When I turned into your gateway, it was coming along the road outside."

THE SHADOW dismissed the subject. He came to the matter of a new job for Parkins.

"I have a friend in Miami," remarked The Shadow, "whose chauffeur was taken ill, a few days ago. I promised to find him a suitable man instead. The job can be yours, Parkins."

"I appreciate this, Mr. Cranston. If references will be needed, I can obtain them."

"You have all that are required. Klauden has spoken well of you. I can do the same. I admired your quick work the night you took up the pursuit of the man who escaped Klauden."

Parkins showed dejection on his frank face.

"I'd like to have dropped that rogue," gritted the chauffeur. "I did my best, Mr. Cranston."

"I know you did," returned The Shadow, dryly. "That is one reason why I recommended you. Regarding your new position, Parkins. I would like you to leave for Miami to-night."

Parkins looked surprised; then hesitant. The Shadow produced an envelope and gave it to the chauffeur.

"Here is your employer's address in Miami. Also a ticket for the Havana Special. Stanley will drive you to New Brunswick. We will send your car to Long Island and have Klauden ship your luggage by express."

Parkins did not have to leave immediately for his train. Richards brought sandwiches and coffee. While The Shadow ate with Parkins, he remarked:

"Your new employer Mr. Billings likes leisurely rides in the country. Since Mr. Brockbright enjoyed such trips, I am sure you will be the right chauffeur for my friend."

Parkins smiled; then sobered.

"Poor Mr. Brockbright," he said. "He did use to like those trips. He slept while he rode, though, except when he stopped. Sandwiches and coffee" Parkins shook his head "it sort of reminds me, sir, of those rides in the country."

Again, The Shadow showed a quizzical expression.

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"We always took a picnic lunch," explained Parkins. "Mr. Brockbright had his basket, and I had mine. He'd pick the places, not knowing where they were; and it was up to me to remember them. The best, I'd say, was the one we went to all last month."

"Was it far out in the country?"

"Yes and no, sir. It wasn't near any city; but it was close to a town. A little place called Midvale. Hard to get to, on account of the rocky road."

Parkins pulled out a heavy pencil, drew a rough diagram on a paper napkin.

"Here was Midvale; and this is the Muskatiny Creek. The glade was down this road. There was an entrance to a farmhouse just before the rocky, road. Who owned the farm, I don't know; but the little piece of woods belonged to it."

The reference to the past month was sufficient. The Shadow knew that those thirty days were the only ones in which either Nick or Kip were absent from New York, hence able to spot Brockbright in his travels. The mention of picnic baskets told that the millionaire had spent considerable periods in the glade; long enough to be observed.

RICHARDS arrived, to state that it was time for Parkins to leave. He took the chauffeur to a side door, where Stanley was expected with a car from the garage.

The Shadow pocketed the paper napkin; he went to the front door and picked up a small suitcase in the corner. He went out through the front.

Parkins, waiting outside the other door, heard the starting of his own motor and supposed that Stanley was first putting that car away. Parkins was wrong. The Shadow had boarded Parkins's coupe and was heading it out toward the gates. Stanley was tarrying in the garage, under orders.

Reaching the gates, The Shadow slowed to don black garments from the bag. Guns beneath his cloak, he took the direction opposite New Brunswick, so as to be on another route when Stanley drove out with Parkins.

As he passed a widening of the road, The Shadow saw a large car halted, half hidden beneath the trees.

The car was the one that Parkins had so luckily dodged. It started as soon as The Shadow passed it. Within half a mile, it was tailing the coupe. The Shadow took a winding road that led to a bridge. The sedan crowded close behind him; The Shadow prepared for the move to come.

Just as the big car roared up beside him and crowded the coupe toward the bridge abutment, he applied the brakes. Like Parkins at the underpass, he avoided the crash. This road, however, was no through highway. The sedan stopped squarely on the bridge.

A man bounded from it and came angrily toward the coupe, as though to blame the driver of the crowded car. Others were stepping from the sedan. The first man took hold of the coupe's door handle, gave it a sudden yank with his left hand. His right suddenly jabbed a revolver inward.

"Move over, mug!" growled the attacker. "I'll drive this buggy! You're takin' a ride with a guy that knows how to drive "

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A gloved hand was through the window of the half-opened door. The threat-giver felt the coldness of an automatic muzzle against the side of his neck. He realized that his own gun was pressing nothing but a satchel, propped inside the door. He heard a whispered voice, close to his ear. The crook knew the author of that commanding tone. He stood speechless.

A call came from the sedan: "All set, Pink?"

The answer did not come from "Pink" Lathan; the crook who had followed Parkins from Princeton was dumfounded to find The Shadow in the chauffeur's place. The response that was given was The Shadow's a weird, mocking laugh that announced his identity to the thugs by the sedan. Crooks dropped back, chilled by realization that they faced The Shadow.

Only the sedan's driver, safe behind the wheel, was willing to answer the challenge. He raised a shout:

"The Shadow! Get him!"

TWO thugs came up with sawed-off shotguns. Before they could fire, The Shadow's .45 whipped from Pink's neck, stabbed two shots that whistled mercilessly through the darkness. One crook slumped, losing his gun as he fell. The other staggered, firing into the air as he went backward.

Pink Lathan made a dive from the side of the coupe. Ducking across the road, he fired back with his revolver; on the run, his shots were widely aimed. The Shadow jabbed a response in his direction, then fired for the sedan. Alternating shots, bringing out a second automatic, he had his foemen at bay.

Only Pink was shooting. The wounded men were crawling for the sedan, where another was helping them into the car. The fuming driver was ready to start in flight, abandoning Pink Lathan. It was luck alone that saved Pink. He had dived beyond a culvert on the other side of the road. The Shadow's bullets found concrete instead of Pink.

Firing a wild last shot, Pink bobbed up just as the sedan was starting. He reached the running board on the far side. The sedan launched off across the bridge. Its rear took a sudden drop just as The Shadow directed his cool aim for the gas tank.

The last shot from the .45 was inches too high. It drilled the spare tire instead of the tank. Curving past the far abutment, the crook-manned car sped off to safety, with two of its five occupants crippled.

The Shadow put away his guns; wheeled the coupe about for a homeward return. Parkins was by this time near New Brunswick. Pink Lathan would never guess that Brockbright's chauffeur had taken a train to Florida. The chauffeur's safety was assured. Crooks, thwarted in their attack, had merely served The Shadow. Their presence was proof that Parkins was a link to facts that concerned Nick Shoyden and Kip Farrick.

The Shadow had no need to track down those who had fled to-night. He had gained a trail that promised completion to his investigation. To-morrow, The Shadow's destination would be the town of Midvale.

That piece of news would have pleased Joe Cardona; for only The Shadow could find the hidden prison where the ace sleuth lay.

CHAPTER X. CROOKS BY THE CREEK

AT two-thirty the next afternoon, The Shadow entered the Midvale real estate office where Cardona had gone

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the day before. Guised as Lamont Cranston, he chatted with the realtor regarding local property; but The Shadow played the part of a purchaser seeking a large estate.

He learned that the only place of that sort was the deserted Hawkins mansion, which the realtor frankly classed as a bad buy. The mansion had been long abandoned; it was antiquated and in poor repair. Not only was it off the main roads, but portions of its land had been sold until only a small acreage remained.

From that information, The Shadow gleaned two facts. First, that the Hawkins Estate was too poor a property to have been used in a real estate swindle; second, that its location and condition would make it an ideal hideaway for criminals.

The realtor suggested that a farm could be purchased and converted into a country place. The Shadow seemed disinterested, so the man tried to convince him. By the time the realtor was through, The Shadow learned all about Jorridon's farm and its sale to J. J. Burlow. He also heard the realtor's description of a New Yorker who had stopped in the office the day before.

When he had finished with the realtor, The Shadow had come to Cardona's conclusion that J. J. Burlow was Nick Shoyden. He also knew that the man who had come to Midvale yesterday was Joe Cardona.

Leaving the real estate office, The Shadow went to the depot and sent a long telegram to New York. It referred to the purchase of securities and was addressed to an investment broker named Rutledge Mann. Coded in that message was an order for Clyde Burke to check fully regarding Cardona's vacation.

Driving to a town near Midvale, The Shadow stored his car in a garage. He rented a junky, topless roadster that was priced at fifty dollars, saying that he wanted it to drive through a hilly region where roads were bad. The Shadow paid the full price of the old car as a deposit. In a small store, he bought some cheap farm clothes. Heading toward Midvale in the old car, he changed his attire on the way.

When the old roadster rattled up to the crossroad near Jorridon's farm, its driver looked like a hill-billy in from the sticks. The Shadow had changed his facial make-up. A long, weak-chinned countenance replaced the molded face of Cranston.

TAKING a roundabout course to Midvale, The Shadow gained a good idea of the terrain. He located Jorridon's farmhouse, the road to the glen near it. He spotted the Hawkins Estate beyond the winding creek. All that The Shadow needed was a knowledge of the ground that lay between.

Two tires went flat before The Shadow reached Midvale. It took him considerable time to repair them. At the depot, he said that he had come to get a telegram for Mr. R. K. Adams, the name under which The Shadow expected a reply to his message.

The telegram had not come, so The Shadow lounged around the station for half an hour. The message finally came; from it, The Shadow learned definitely that Cardona had neither returned to New York nor sent a message to police headquarters.

The Shadow considered these facts, as he drove toward Jorridon's. He did not like them. Knowing Cardona's direct tactics, he was sure that Joe had gained clues; and therefore would have at least reported to headquarters that he intended to remain on the Brockbright case. It looked as though there had been trouble for Cardona.

There could be trouble, too, for The Shadow; but he was better prepared for it. His rural disguise was an asset upon which he could depend. Events were to prove that fact.

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In his previous ride, The Shadow had observed the same turn that Nick and Kip had taken from the road near Jorridon's, the day when they had spied on Brockbright. Coming back along the same road, The Shadow drove the rattletrap car into the small field. He proceeded farther than Kip had in the past.

The Shadow parked his car beyond a cluster of trees, where bushes almost concealed it. Breaking tree branches, he added the necessary screen to hide the car completely.

It was nearly dusk when The Shadow walked back into the field. There, he discovered faint traces of tire tracks; located the spot where Kip had parked in the past. Looking across the creek, The Shadow saw the old Hawkins manor. It was high enough to be plain in the sunset. The Shadow observed a moving object that could have been an automobile, going into the grounds.

Armed only with a flashlight, The Shadow ambled down the path toward the creek, convinced that it would lead him to the glen. His course was cautious until he reached the creek; from there, he did not try to muffle sounds of his walking. Playing the part of a gawky farm hand, The Shadow preferred to encounter persons openly.

DIMMING light played odd tricks along the creek bank. At spots, the gloom was almost complete; in other places, patches of ground were plain in the afterglow. One such spot lay beside a large rock; there, The Shadow noticed scuffed turf. He used his flashlight; to his keen scrutiny, the marks along the ground were proof that there had been a struggle at this place.

Approaching the rock, The Shadow saw that it could have served a double purpose either as a lurking spot to trap some one on the path, or as a lookout toward the little glade ahead. The cleared trees allowed light to reach the glen. Looking over the rock, The Shadow gained his first view of Brockbright's former picnic grounds.

The Shadow had found double evidence. He saw the wooded nook from which the chain of crime had begun. He was beside the spot where the latest important stroke Cardona's capture had been completed.

Darkness settled thickly. To go through the glade and beyond, The Shadow was forced to use his flashlight frequently. He decided to follow the creek until he reached the dirt road, where the bridge crossed below Jorridon's premises. The route was a logical one, but it furnished unexpected obstacles.

To begin with, the creek twisted more frequently than the contour of its valley indicated. Keeping along Jorridon's shore, The Shadow completely reversed direction time and again. The going was also slow, because at this stretch rocks jutted everywhere. Massed together were craggy chunks of stone, bigger and sharper than the boulder above the glen.

Throwing the flashlight's beam across the creek, The Shadow saw that the opposite shore was the same. The stream ran through a miniature gorge, where matted turf, wedged between the rocks, supported clusters of overhanging trees. The lower stretch of shore was heavily fringed with alders.

Those smaller trees blocked The Shadow's path. To avoid them, he scaled the rocks to the right, arriving upon a ledge twenty feet above the creek. Here, thick turf ended, forming an earthen brace that gripped the upper rocks. Below, The Shadow's flashlight showed large rocks massed among the alders. Ahead the ledge ended, tapering off into lesser stones that indicated soft ground beyond.

A SOUND murmured from the darkness ahead. The Shadow extinguished the flashlight and listened. It was a ripple from the creek, which formed a short rapids at the end of the tiny gorge. The water's gurgle varied, but from it came the same noise that had caught The Shadow's attention before. The sound was a sharp splash.

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Perhaps rocks slipped frequently into the rapids, but the duplicated sound was unnatural. It was more likely that some one was using a course of stepping stones across the shallow creek; that a foot, slipping in darkness, had twice loosened bits of stone. The Shadow waited, but the sound was not repeated.

If persons were crossing this creek, they could have reached the other side, to take to darkness. If so, their probable destination was the Hawkins Estate. The abandoned mansion was not far up the hill, for the creek, at this point, had veered toward it.

Conversely, creeping men could have spied The Shadow's light and come from the other side. If so, their approach would be plain when they reached the beginning of the rocky ledge. It would be possible, however, for them to scale the softer bank and approach the ledge from above.

What The Shadow needed was evidence regarding the number of persons in the darkness. That gained, he could decide upon his best course. This early in the game, the smartest step would be to depart before prowlers arrived. The question was the choice of routes.

The quickest way to leave was by the embankment above the ledge. The surest would be back along the ledge itself. The one that offered trouble and hazard was down among the rocks by the alders. Nevertheless, it was the one upon which The Shadow decided.

The alders offered a hiding spot; sufficient camouflage even in The Shadow's present attire. His trousers and shirt were dark blue; they would be difficult to spy by flashlight. If prowlers had heard The Shadow's unguarded approach, they would first search the ledge and the path back toward the glen. They would imagine that they had guessed wrong when they thought they heard some one; or they would decide that a blunderer had retraced his course before their arrival. Meanwhile, from the alders, The Shadow could check the number of the prowlers; perhaps overhear their conversation. The one problem was to reach the vantage point he wanted. That, to The Shadow, was not formidable.

Easing over the ledge, The Shadow groped in noiseless fashion for a foothold below. No matter how precarious the descent might be, he was confident that he could complete it without discovery.

A tiny pebble slipped beneath The Shadow's fingers; it made a slight clatter on the rocks below. The sound was not loud enough to be heard more than a dozen feet away. It served The Shadow, instead of hindering him; for from the sound he could gauge that he would have to lower himself about five feet before he could swing to a toehold under the ledge.

Oddly, the pebble seemed to answer with an echo. For a moment, The Shadow was puzzled. A repetition of the sound, slightly louder, gave him the sudden answer.

While The Shadow was planning to glide downward from the ledge, someone was scaling up from below!

EVIDENTLY that man had seen The Shadow's flashlight glints, a short while ago, but had not heard the approach of the prowlers whom The Shadow detected. Why the man had lurked among the alders was a puzzle, for the embankment above offered a much better spot under ordinary conditions. The Shadow had decided on the alders only because of emergency.

It was dangerous to descend the ledge with the unknown man coming up. It was better to goad that fellow into quick action, so that he like The Shadow could combat the creeping men from the creek.

Edging back upon the ledge, The Shadow waited until he heard the other man reach the top. With that, The Shadow suddenly turned on his flashlight in the fellow's direction.

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In the shaft of light, The Shadow gained his first sight of Hector, the farm hand who had served as Cardona's guide. Spotted on the ledge, Hector was too startled to use his own flashlight, or to grab up the shotgun that he had just dragged from the brink. Holding the gun barrel, the hired hand started a dive along the ledge in the direction of the glen.

In that instant, The Shadow gained warning of what was to come. Men swooped suddenly from the embankment; slugging with revolvers, a pair of ruffians fell upon Hector. The Shadow doused the flashlight, to give the farm hand a chance in the darkness; but before he could wheel away, he was met by a surge from above.

Crooks from the creek had advanced far in their course above the ledge. The first pair had fallen upon Hector, when the flashlight showed up the farm hand. The rest of the thuggish crew four in number had launched a massed attack upon The Shadow.

CHAPTER XI. STRANGE BATTLE

THANKS to his quick extinguishing of the flashlight, The Shadow gained a temporary respite as the fray began. Gun-bearing fists were slugging for his head. Twisting in the darkness, he escaped the first blows.

Slashing his own arm upward, The Shadow cracked a gun hand with his flashlight. Driving his hand downward, he bashed the thin-shelled electric torch upon an attacker's head. One crook slumped away. The Shadow plunged among the other three.

The Shadow had no doubt as to his adversaries. He was fighting men who served Nick Shoyden and Kip Farrick. Their ranks had been increased by Pink Lathan and the thugs who had escaped The Shadow the night before.

Bare-handed, The Shadow put up an amazing struggle. Plunging into the slugging trio, he gripped one rogue by the throat, drove him toward the embankment and wrenched him roundabout. A slugging revolver missed The Shadow's head, found the skull of the choking crook instead! The Shadow had decreased the opposition to two.

Grabbing a gun barrel that glanced from his shoulder, The Shadow delivered a hard punch in the dark. His fist landed; The Shadow wrenched the revolver from the sinking thug who held it.

The last enemy grappled. The Shadow locked with him. The crook tried to dispatch a revolver shot, but could not get his gun muzzle toward The Shadow's body. The best that the thug could manage was to ward off a stroke from the handle of the gun that The Shadow had captured.

A powerful flashlight threw an unexpected beam. The crook who had first dropped out of the fray was back again, this time as an observer. He saw The Shadow wrestling with one adversary, while two others lay sprawled on the ground. Savagely, the crook shouted encouragement. He thought that The Shadow by appearance and attire was merely some local husky who had been lucky enough to put up a good fight.

Beyond, another fight was in progress. Hector, battling two crooks, was showing himself their equal. Swinging the shotgun like a bludgeon, Hector downed one slugger and gripped the other. Across the crook's shoulder, Hector saw The Shadow. He, too, took the tall battler to be a powerful yokel.

Hector shouted his own cry of alliance. With it, the hired hand jabbed the butt of his shotgun against the jaw of the grappling crook. The thug dropped away. Hector was free to aid The Shadow.

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The ruffian with the flashlight saw it; he aimed quickly and fired at Hector. The big fellow was in a bad spot. He swung himself over the ledge with his shotgun, to gain the safety of the rocks below. Other crooks were rising; some would have pursued Hector, had The Shadow not prevented it.

With a knee jab, The Shadow doubled the last crook who grappled him. Coming across the sprawling man, he pounced in upon the thug who handled the revolver and the flashlight. Before the fellow could fire, The Shadow dropped him with a side swing.

The crook fell; lost his flashlight. The Shadow swung about, to drive shoulder-first for the two who had battled Hector. They were coming hard along the ledge.

One slumped when The Shadow hit him. The other stabbed shots in the darkness. The crooks had intended to avoid gunfire; but since one had already used a revolver, shots were in order. The new marksman, however, had no target. His aim for The Shadow was blind. Bullets whistled above the alders. The Shadow, coming in hard, caught the crook and swung him toward the outer limit of the ledge.

For a few moments, there was a silent grapple in the darkness. It ended when a glow burst from the path. Oaths sounded behind an electric lantern. The voice was Nick Shoyden's. The murderer had arrived with Kip Farrick and Pink Lathan.

GUNSHOTS had attracted them from a spot across the creek. They saw the remnants of their gang some slugged, others sprawled or crawling on hands and knees, while one lone thug wrestled with The Shadow. They saw The Shadow plainly; took him to be a fighting farm hand. Rather than risk more gunshots, Nick snarled to the men beside him:

"Go and get him!"

Kip and Pink bounded toward The Shadow, shouting for the last crook to hang on until they arrived. The struggling thug did his best; but he failed. The Shadow gave a hard wrench and released him. The clawing attacker went over the ledge, hit shoulder-first upon the rocks below. The Shadow turned to meet Kip and Pink.

If The Shadow had lunged at that moment, his defeat would have been certain. He had lost the revolver in the fray; bare hands were his only weapons. They were sufficient, as The Shadow had proved during this battle; but there was another factor that had to be considered.

Kip and Pink were driving forward shoulder to shoulder, guided by Nick's high-held lantern. Their momentum, alone, would be sufficient to pitch The Shadow off the ledge, to follow after the thug whom he had flung below. The Shadow had a scant second in which to side-step the attackers. He took the opportunity.

The bound that The Shadow took was an awkward one, for he had to make a sharp turn. He sprang toward a chunky knob of stone that projected beside a slender, leaning tree. The move was a good one. It made Kip and Pink spread. They saw The Shadow grab the tree; the sapling bent like a bow. Swinging, The Shadow reversed as the pair outran him.

A moment later, his awkward action would have ended. Nick was dashing up with the lantern; The Shadow planned a long leap squarely toward the murderer. By sprawling Nick, he could douse the electric lantern; gain a gun to clip Kip and Pink before they could turn about. Crooks were due for a total surprise, that would be astonishing enough to reveal The Shadow's true identity.

That quick-planned finish never came.

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The sapling crackled, as The Shadow gave it his full weight. Turf ripped upward from the knobby stone. The jagged projection was a loose piece of rock. It broke loose when the tufted ground yielded.

The Shadow retained his hold on the tree, but it was useless. His footing was lost. His lithe twist turned into an awkward dive, more cumbersome than his first spring. Nick Shoyden, stopping short, saw the gawky, rough-clad figure go floundering over the ledge, carrying the uprooted sapling.

There was a crash as The Shadow flattened on the rocks below, close by the thug whom he had pitched ahead of him. The branches of the sapling crackled as they settled. The loosened stone struck near The Shadow, bounded farther and plunged into the creek, followed by smaller stones.

SILENCE followed that clatter. A rising henchman clutched Nick and pointed farther along the ledge, gulping the news that Hector had escaped in that direction during the fight.

Nick snapped an order to Kip and Pink. The lieutenants started up the creek; where the path lowered to the water line, they turned and came back along the rough rocks.

The two had flashlights. They were thorough in their search of the alders, but they found no sign of Hector. They reached a spot below the ledge where Nick stood. Nick gruffed an order down to Kip.

"Forget the guy that got away! What about Bodie?"

Nick's question referred to the thug whom The Shadow had pitched from the ledge. Kip found the sprawled crook.

"He's cold," informed Kip. "But he ain't croaked. It was his shoulder hit the rock. His head's in a pile of mud."

"What about the big hick?"

Nick's inquiry concerned The Shadow. It was Pink who gave reply. He was pushing back the branches of the uprooted tree, while he glimmered his flashlight toward a stretched figure on the rocks.

"He took it on the konk!" called Pink, basing his statement upon a bloody gash that adorned The Shadow's forehead. "He ain't croaked, though, neither!"

"I'll be down to look at him!"

With that announcement, Nick Shoyden roused his half-dazed crew and started a course to reach the rocks below. With sheepish men close at his heels, Nick planned to view the captured fighter whose efforts had ended with a chance spill from the ledge.

The Shadow, unarmed and unconscious, lay prisoner; his only benefit the disguise that he had donned before the fray.

CHAPTER XII. THE SHADOW MAKES FRIENDS

"ONE of Jorridon's farm hands."

Nick Shoyden voiced that contemptuous verdict as he studied The Shadow's bloodstained face. Kip Farrick and Pink Lathan nodded their agreement. The Shadow's disguise had, so far, stood the test.

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For the moment, Nick forgot the prisoner. Turning to his crew, he demanded:

"What kind of mugs are you, to let a couple of rubes show you up? I thought you were supposed to be gorillas not a bunch of monkeys!"

One of the thugs protested.

"It was on account of not usin' our rods," he told Nick. "Them hicks is good wid their dukes. The one guy had a shotgun, to begin wid –"

"And this guy had nothing!"

"He ducked us. We'd have bagged him, though, if it hadn't been for the other bird. He got loose. While he was scammin', this lug got a new chanct. It was the breaks, Nick they was against us."

The rest of the gang were quick to agree with the spokesman. None was willing to admit the prowess that The Shadow had shown. One added another explanation:

"The rube grabbed a rod! That's why we had to let go of him. He might 'a' drilled somebody! Since he was goin' to start shootin', we figured on usin' our own heaters."

The talk partly satisfied Nick. Though he himself had classed the prisoner as a farm hand, Nick was beginning to have doubts. If the thugs had told a straight story, Nick's suspicions would have gained ground.

As it was, Nick discounted The Shadow's fighting ability on the two scores mentioned. He gave undue credit to Hector's reported share in battle, and he accepted the excuse that the thugs had been handicapped because they tried to avoid revolver fire.

Nick remembered the almost ludicrous plunge that The Shadow had taken when the sapling gave. The Shadow's sprawled position was still a gawky one. Nevertheless, Nick decided not to be too easy with this prisoner.

"You were over here to spot Jorridon," Nick told his crew. "Instead, you go after a couple of the guys who work for him. One of them's gone back to spill the news. We've got to lam out of here!"

"Maybe we ought to leave this lug," put in Kip, indicating The Shadow. "Then Jorridon won't come lookin' for him."

"We want Jorridon to come looking," retorted Nick. "That's why we're taking this hick along with us! We'll put the heat on him and find out all we can about Jorridon."

Glowering toward the alders where Hector had last been seen, then staring at his men, Nick rasped:

"It beats me how that other guy got away. He may have crawled in among some of those rocks. We haven't time, though, to look for him. He's probably done a sneak, by now."

NICK'S words were heard by another than his crew members. The Shadow's eyes had partly opened, to blink at the glare of flashlights. They closed again. No one noticed that the prisoner had regained consciousness, for the crooks were watching Nick's lantern play among the rocks.

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There were gaps among the boulders, but none looked large enough for a hiding place. Nick forgot Hector and came back to the subject of departure. He detailed two of his men to carry Bodie across the stepping stones; another pair to take The Shadow.

"I'll lead the way up to the house," announced Nick. "You stay here, Kip, with Pink. Cover until we're gone."

Bodie's carriers were taking the unconscious thug toward the stepping stones. The other pair hoisted The Shadow between them, intending to follow Nick shook his head.

"Take the guy down by the bridge," he ordered. "Put him in Kip's car and drive around before you come to the house. I want to be there when you show up."

It was only a half dozen minutes to the bridge, for there was a good path below the gorge and the thugs made progress by propping The Shadow over their shoulders. His aching head tilted forward; The Shadow let his feet drag, so that the carriers would not know that he had regained consciousness.

His right leg was numb, but The Shadow believed that it would soon stand his weight. He intended to test it very shortly. Despite his weakened condition, The Shadow did not plan to go submissively to Nick's hide-away at the Hawkins mansion.

He hoped for a chance at battle when they reached Kip's car. A struggle with both thugs at one time would be futile, for The Shadow's strength was sapped. His one chance would come if the pair were unwise enough to separate.

The crooks shoved The Shadow into the coupe. One took the wheel; the other opened the door on the far side of the car. Dully, The Shadow saw his opportunity fade. The second crook hesitated, however, before boarding the car.

"Wait'll I slide back to the path," he told the driver. "I'll take a gander to see if Nick's blinkin' wid the light. The rube's cold. You won't have no trouble wid him."

With that, the thug rounded the back of the coupe. The driver craned from the window, to listen. The Shadow slid his right arm downward, groped for the pocket just in front of the door. He found what he wanted: a monkey wrench. Straightening, The Shadow leaned toward the crook at the wheel.

The thug felt the shift of the prisoner's shoulder. With a quick oath he twisted toward his own door, pulled a revolver from his pocket and shoved the muzzle toward The Shadow's ribs. The monkey wrench was already swinging. It landed before the crook could pull the trigger. Thwacked above the ear with the flat side of the wrench, the crook subsided.

THE SHADOW found the silenced thug's gun. He opened the door on the right. Steadying himself against the fender, he limped around in back of the car, to deal with the second thug. Coming to the driver's side, The Shadow found the fellow there. The crook had just discovered his unconscious pal.

The Shadow lunged, swinging the revolver, for he wanted to avoid a gunshot. His right leg gave; his stroke fell short as the crook swung to meet him. The Shadow managed only to reach the gorilla's neck. That was sufficient to stagger the crook for the moment.

A grapple followed. The Shadow was driving ahead, using his good leg, throwing his weight on his enemy. The crook gave ground, savagely trying to get in a slug with his upraised arm. One stroke would have finished The Shadow's clinch. The Shadow knew it and fought to keep the crook's arm up.

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The coupe was in the space at the near end of the bridge. It was nosed toward the bridge itself; the grade was slightly downward. As The Shadow kept up his surge, he and his opponent reached the bridge. The crook flattened against the low rail; wrenched his gun hand free.

The Shadow's loosened fingers sped to the crook's throat and tightened there. The descending gun just grazed The Shadow's head. The crook did not bring his hand up again.

It seemed as though The Shadow's last ounces of fighting strength had been gathered into the clutching fingers that held the crook's throat. The Shadow was swaying back and forth; his legs were buckling beneath him. His hands held tight, it kept him erect, for the crook was half across the bridge rail and served as a counterbalance.

Suddenly, the gurgling thug slumped backward, his resistance ended. The Shadow's hands relaxed. The crook did a back dive over the rail. He landed flat, a dozen feet below, in the shallow water at the creek's edge.

The few inches of water did not break the crook's plunge. The Shadow, lurching forward half across the rail, heard nothing from below. Another foeman had reached the state of temporary oblivion.

SLOWLY, The Shadow limped back to the path. He followed the creek toward the ledge, stumbling over stones and roots, pausing to rest against an occasional tree. All was blackness; The Shadow's ears seemed deadened. He could not have battled a single foeman. Even the weight of the crook's revolver was superfluous. The Shadow feebly flipped the gun into the creek.

The Shadow was confident, though, that Nick and the others would be gone. He staggered onward; heard the ripple of the rapids very dimly. The torrent seemed distant, even though it was at The Shadow's side. Then came the rocks below the ledge. A few more stumbles brought The Shadow to a floundering finish. He sank to the rocks, rolled to his back and lay there.

Silent minutes followed. The sound of the creek was insufficient to reach The Shadow's deadened eardrums. There were sounds, though, that The Shadow expected. His eyes, half opened, were looking for lights from the ledge above. The Shadow was sure that Jorridon would be here with others, after Hector reported the battle beside the creek.

At last a token came but not from the ledge. A light appeared suddenly from rocks near the alders. Footsteps were audible to The Shadow, as a man with a flashlight spotted his stilled form and came closer. The Shadow's eyes closed as the glow struck his face. They opened again, as soon as the light no longer brightened his eyelids.

The man with the flashlight was signaling. Another light came along the rocky creek bank. An electric lantern appeared on the ledge above. A deep voice questioned:

"Who is he, Hector?"

"The fellow I told you about," reported Hector gruffly, from beside The Shadow. "Looks like he belongs around here. That gang must have left him."

"Start him up here," came the command from above. "You and Ezra can hoist him to the ledge. We'll do the rest."

Hector and Ezra pocketed the lights and lifted The Shadow. The pair had power. They raised their burden at arm's length. From the ledge, another pair of huskies gripped The Shadow and drew him into the light. There was another command. The Shadow's carriers picked a path that led higher up the slope.

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The trip ended when they reached a farmhouse. There, The Shadow opened his eyes when he was propped in a chair. Oil lamps gave a good light. The man with the electric lantern extinguished it and approached The Shadow.

Eyes upward, The Shadow saw a square-jawed face, with keen eyes above its straight lips and well-formed nose. The man was in his early thirties; his features were intelligent, his manner alert. Most important of all, his expression was friendly. So were the faces of the two husky hired hands who had carried The Shadow from the rocky creek.

The Shadow had reached his expected destination. He had gained a meeting with Rex Jorridon, the man whose rented property had become a cause for murder and a battleground of crime.

CHAPTER XIII. BETWEEN THE CAMPS

Soon afterward, The Shadow began his story. Slouched awkwardly in a rickety easy-chair, his forehead patched with bandage and adhesive tape, he looked the part that he was playing. Jorridon and the other listeners were convinced that he was in from the hills.

Hector and Ezra appeared to join the farm hands. They came in from another room, just as The Shadow started his tale. Hector grunted to Jorridon that everything looked all right. He and Ezra had come up to the house by another route.

The Shadow recounted his adventures in a drawly style. He said that his name was Hiram Robinson; that he had relatives over near Yarmouth, the county seat. He worked on a farm just below the hills and another hired hand had invited him to spend a few days at a bungalow on the Muskatiny.

Hitch-hiking from Yarmouth, he had reached Midvale at sunset. Coming down the creek, he found the bungalows deserted and supposed there must be others farther down the creek. That was how he came to the ledge on Jorridon's property.

"That's where I a--heard them fellers," emphasized The Shadow, in his rustic drawl. "They was sneaking up on me. I knowed it from the splashing that I heerd. So I was starting back up to the cabins, not wanting to get in no trouble, when I spied this feller, plumb ahead of me."

The Shadow pointed to Hector. Jorridon nodded.

"It's Hector's job to patrol that creek path," said Jorridon. "That's why he was down there. He saw your flashlight while he was descending the hill."

"I reckon he did," grinned The Shadow, "'cause he was coming right along behind me. I seed he had a shotgun; and I was going to holler that I warn't looking for trouble, when I seed a couple of them fellers pitch onto him.

"I reckoned I was in for it. I was sort of ready for the ones that jumped for me. I've fit a lot and rassled, too. I give them all they was asking for. Only they had guns, and there was more of them come up.

"That's when I grabbed for a little tree; and it give, when I was jumping across to another rock. Next thing I knowed I was going head-first, plumb for them rocks alongside the crick."

The Shadow ended his story abruptly, as though he had reached the limit of his recollections. Jorridon was

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thoughtful as he lighted his pipe. At last, he asked:

"Would you recognize any of those men if you saw them again?"

The Shadow shook his head.

"Didn't see much of their faces," he informed. "I heaved one of them over the edge there, just afore the tree give away. But I didn't have time to take a look at him."

"Were they still around when you regained consciousness?"

"Reckon they was, because I seed some lights and heerd some mumbles, like folks was talking. Only I was dizzy and sort of sleepy. I don't remember much else, 'cept that I tried to get up and couldn't. Then you fellers come along."

THE story satisfied Jorridon. The square-jawed man puffed his pipe in reflective fashion. It was obvious that The Shadow could not be working with the crooks from the creek. Hector's story of the fight proved that; so did the fact that The Shadow had taken a bad fall to the rocks. Therefore, Jorridon knew that he was not dealing with a crook-sent spy who had engaged in a fake battle.

Jorridon's only doubt concerned The Shadow's own story of his original arrival; Jorridon had good reason to ask questions on that point. It was not the season when persons occupied the bungalows along the Muskatiny. The Shadow, himself, had mentioned that they were closed.

"Tell me something, Hiram," inquired Jorridon. "Who was this friend of yours who invited you to a bungalow party?"

"He warn't no friend," replied The Shadow, sheepishly. "Leastwise, he hadn't been. His name's Lem Curry, and he acts like a city feller. Always trying mean jokes, like giving you a terbaccer chew with red pepper in it!

"That's why I pitched him outn the haymow last week. Nigh broke his arm for him; but I told him I was sorry. So Lem, he says he was wrong about giving me the terbaccer chew. Says we ought to be friends, and invites me over to the cabin. That's why I come to Midvale."

Jorridon repressed a smile. It struck him that Hiram did not yet see the point of Lem's invitation. Jorridon believed the story of the practical joker, and supposed that the imaginary Lem had faked the bungalow invitation to get even for his fall from the haymow.

"There are no bungalows down this direction," declared Jorridon, briskly. "The best thing you can do is go back to Yarmouth. There's a late bus that goes there. Do you have any money?"

The Shadow unbuttoned a shirt pocket and produced two one-dollar bills, with some change wrapped in them.

"I'll have Hector go along with you," stated Jorridon. "As far as the bungalows, at least. By the way, there's something you can do for me when you reach Yarmouth."

Jorridon went to the writing table. He found a sheet of paper, but it did not suit him. He thrust it into a drawer and hunted for a writing pad instead. Finding one, he wrote a brief note and sealed it in an envelope. Inscribing the address and affixing a stamp, Jorridon gave the letter to The Shadow.

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"For Sheriff Clayborne," said Jorridon. "Maybe you know the sheriff, Hiram?"

"Know him when I see him," replied The Shadow. "I been sworn in as a depitty, couple of times. Guess the sheriff wouldn't remember me, though."

"Mail this letter when you reach Yarmouth. It will be delivered to the sheriff in the morning. I've asked him to come down here to-morrow. I'm going to tell him about the trouble we've had. Meanwhile, I intend to keep my men on guard duty."

LIMPING somewhat, The Shadow left the farmhouse with Hector. The husky farm hand did not use a light until they were nearly down to the creek, for he knew the way well. When he did produce a flashlight, The Shadow saw that they were almost at the glen.

With danger from attackers recognized, Hector did not halt when they reached the lookout rock beyond the little glade. Instead, he showed the way a hundred yards farther; crossed a foot bridge and took a path on the far side of the creek. After a quarter mile, he gave The Shadow an extra flashlight.

"The bungalows ain't far, Hiram," informed Hector. "I brought you over to this side because it's shorter. Don't fergit that letter Mr. Jorridon gave you."

"S'long, Hector," returned The Shadow. "I'll remember the letter."

The Shadow limped a short way forward. Looking back, he saw Hector's light disappear beyond the foot bridge. Snapping off his own flash, The Shadow turned and retraced his steps toward Jorridon's. When he neared the lookout rock, he risked a light close to the ground. He found the path up the hill to where his old car was hidden.

In total darkness, The Shadow worked the old flivver out to the road. Turning on the feeble lights, he drove away from Jorridon's. His first stop was the town of Midvale. There he posted Jorridon's letter, knowing that it would go out on the late bus, for there were lights beyond the frosted windows of the post office.

From Midvale, The Shadow took another road. It brought him to an isolated spot on the hill across from Jorridon's. The Shadow parked in back of the old Hawkins Estate. From the back of the roadster, he brought a bag containing hat and cloak. Donning the black garb, The Shadow crept downward toward the old mansion.

The Shadow's limp had lessened. He made stealthy progress, although his course was slow. When he reached the ancient house, he saw lights through battered shutters. Creeping along the wall, The Shadow found a doorway.

The door was wedged shut from inside, but The Shadow worked prying fingers through and released the cleat that held it. He entered, closed and wedged the door behind him.

The Shadow was in a small, darkened hall. He shifted behind a half-opened door as he heard footsteps. A patrolling crook passed, inspecting the outer door as he went by. When the guard had gone, The Shadow moved farther into the hallway, to a doorway through which he could hear the mutter of voices.

NICK SHOYDEN was in conference with Kip Farrick and Pink Lathan, while their crew kept guard duty. They must have discussed a great deal since their return, for The Shadow heard fragments of conversation that referred to previous subjects.

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"Whatever Jorridon told Cardona," Nick was saying, "he can tell to anybody else. That's why we've got to snatch Jorridon. Only it's tougher, on account of to-night."

"If the hick hadn't got away," began Kip, "we'd be sittin' pretty –"

"How do you figure that?" snapped Nick. "We could have put the heat on him, but what could he have told us that we don't know?"

"He might have slipped us the set-up inside of Jorridon's place."

"We don't need it. We can get Jorridon without it. It's just as good the hick did get back to Jorridon. The other guy was in the fight. Maybe Jorridon would have started up here, if he'd lost one of his men."

"Thought you wanted him up here, Nick?"

"Not with all that crowd of hicks. We've got to figure the right way to handle them."

Suggestions followed. None suited Nick. The buzzed conversation continued for a while. Kip and Pink concurred in the idea that a mass attack on the farmhouse would be the only course. That impressed Nick; finally he formed a definite plan.

"We lay off Jorridon's to-morrow," decided the ringleader. "We won't even case the place. Those big yaps that work for him can go anywhere they want. We'll be on our side of the creek. They'll think we're just some outfit that was passing through here.

"The next night will be different. We'll have more in our gang by that time. We'll go over to Jorridon's, but we'll do a sneak. A couple of us can go up ahead and get close to the house. The rest will be off farther, but ready.

"When it looks right, one of us can flash the old signal; the one we used to use, Kip. Two quick blinks and a long one; then count five and give it backward. Long first; then two shorts. That will mean to pile in and snatch Jorridon. While some of us are staging that, the rest mop up the rubes."

THE SHADOW shifted away, along the darkened hall. He could hear the footsteps of another patroller. He found a doorway ajar, edged through and almost lost his footing. The Shadow was at the top of a cellar stairs.

The noise that The Shadow made was slight; but it must have attracted the patrolling crook's attention, for the footsteps quickened. Soon, a thug arrived outside the door, listened a short while and yanked it open. He flashed a light down the steps.

The stairs showed vacancy. The Shadow had profited by the interval. His downward creep had continued during the guard's arrival. The rowdy went away, closing the door above.

The Shadow had learned enough to know that his own escape was reported by the crooks that he had left by the bridge. He had gained complete information regarding Nick Shoyden's coming moves. Since he had reached the cellar, The Shadow decided to search there.

Using a flashlight, he examined piles of rotted boxes; the remains of coal bins; dusty stacks of yellowed newspapers. He inspected the interior of an old rusted furnace. There was a chance that this cellar might conceal an opening to a pit below; but The Shadow had not uncovered one by the time that he reached some short, steep steps that led to a slanted outside door.

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Just then, a light shone from the stairs that The Shadow had first descended. The Shadow heard Nick Shoyden, growling to a thug. Nick was angered because the fellow had been slow in reporting a suspicious sound from the cellar.

The Shadow eased out through the slanted door. As he lowered it, he held it ajar; slipped one hand through and forced a wabby inside bar into a half broken staple. The Shadow was confident that the door would pass Nick's personal inspection.

Skirting the mansion, The Shadow moved downhill through the darkness. He gauged the correct direction; he soon came to the rocky stretch of creek. On this side, he found big boulders and clumps of alders that offered as good coverage as those on the other bank.

Darkness hid all further signs of The Shadow. The tumbling echoes of the rapids covered any sounds he made. Complete seclusion was offered at this spot near the recent battleground.

The Shadow had chosen temporary abode between the camps of Rex Jorridon and Nick Shoyden.

CHAPTER XIV. VISITORS BY NIGHT

EARLY dawn revealed the rocky banks of the low-rimmed gorge. The only startling proof of last night's fray was the uprooted tree that lay on the rocks below the ledge. Its position indicated that it might have fallen from its own sheer weight; for the sapling had been supported by a precariously balanced stone.

Daylight could not quite filter through the clumps of alders. That testified to The Shadow's opinion that the trees would make a good hiding place. Moreover, the crevices among the rocks showed opportunities for concealment.

There were places where a person could crawl through narrow crevices; others, where shift of a single boulder would allow passage. Both banks were alike in this particular. The only distinction between the two was the rocky ledge that topped the rocks on Jorridon's side. The other side had an embankment of turf above its rocks.

The creek narrowed at the rapids. Flat stones showed in that turbulent stretch. They were the natural stepping stones by which crooks had crossed the creek. They formed an easy passage, even in the dark, for the spaces were not great between them. There were many loose stones beside the larger ones; such slivers of rock were the sort that The Shadow had heard splash.

Neither Jorridon's farmhouse nor Nick's mansion hide-away could be seen from the creek. Nor were the two buildings visible to each other. The hillsides here were bulgy and wooded. Actually, the houses were not far apart, for neither was more than a few hundred yards from the creek. The low gorge was the approximate midpoint between them; but neither hillside had a direct path to the creek.

The creek was low at this season. Drainage pipes along the banks above the gorge showed that provision was made for flood waters from the hills. Old logs, along the rocks, were proof that the creek sometimes rose high enough to flood the thickets of alders; hence high water would have deprived The Shadow of his lodging place.

Amid this scene, there was no sign of The Shadow. He had departed with the first touch of dawn.

IT was ten o'clock when The Shadow arrived in Midvale, again wearing the guise of Lamont Cranston. He

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made a long-distance call at the railroad station; visited the real estate office and chatted there a while. After that, he drove away in his own car.

At two, he returned. He met a young man who alighted from a train. The arrival was Harry Vincent, one of The Shadow's agents. Harry delivered a package to The Shadow and waited in the car while the supposed Cranston went into the Midvale Title Trust Co.

Introducing himself to the president of the bank, The Shadow stated his intention of buying real estate near Midvale. He opened an account at the bank, producing United States treasury certificates in addition to cash. He retained some certificates, that crinkled as he placed them in a small portfolio.

The bank had real estate that it wished to sell, so the conversation naturally turned in that direction. Mention was made of another New Yorker, J. J. Burlow, who had bought the farm occupied by Rex Jorridon. From the description that he received of Burlow, The Shadow knew that the man was certainly Nick Shoyden.

That information was somewhat superfluous, as The Shadow had already linked Nick with the farm purchase. Nevertheless, it fitted with facts and fully established them.

When The Shadow left the bank, he saw Jorridon's truck across the street. Hector and Ezra had brought some crates of mushrooms to town for shipment; but were placing a small supply with a local store. Both of the farm hands saw The Shadow when he entered his car, but neither could have guessed that he was the Hiram Robinson of the night before.

The Shadow watched the truck drive to the station, where Hector and Ezra expressed the crates of mushrooms.

There was a sedan parked near the depot; in it were two men who saw Jorridon's truck drive away. The pair might have been members of Nick Shoyden's crew; but it seemed that they were not. When the truck drove away, they remained; and when a train arrived, one of the pair boarded it. Apparently, his friend had simply brought him to the station.

Nevertheless, The Shadow instructed Harry Vincent to observe the stranger during the trip to New York; for Harry went aboard the same train.

The sedan drove in the direction of a through highway; but The Shadow did not follow it. Instead, he drove to the town of Yarmouth. He stopped at the courthouse; looked into the sheriff's office; then went to the town where he had left the old roadster. Transferring to that vehicle, The Shadow headed for Midvale. On the way, he changed to his attire of the day before.

It was dusk when The Shadow took up watch outside the entrance to Jorridon's farmhouse. He was cloaked in black; for he did not intend to be seen as Hiram Robinson, although he preferred that guise to Cranston's, should emergency force him to discard his black garb.

An hour after he began his vigil, The Shadow saw lights appear on the dirt road. A car turned into Jorridon's place. The Shadow followed on foot.

Nick Shoyden was right in his guess that Jorridon's men would be at large. They were all about the house when The Shadow neared it; they showed lights because of the arriving automobile. The Shadow gained an opportunity to reach a corner of the farmhouse. He huddled beneath a window that Jorridon had left open in order to keep in touch with his men.

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Peering over the window ledge, The Shadow recognized Jorridon's visitor as Sheriff Clayborne. The Shadow had seen the county official when he had glanced into his office when in Yarmouth.

Jorridon was giving the sheriff brief details of the battle the night before. The sheriff was listening, intently.

"It was a stiff scrap," concluded Jorridon. "That fellow Robinson was in a tight spot. He was lucky when we found him alive."

"Hiram Robinson," mused the sheriff. "I don't place him. Cousin, I guess, of Hank Robinson, that lives about a dozen miles from Yarmouth. There's lots of Robinsons over there."

"He said you'd used him as a deputy."

"That's likely enough. I've sworn in deputies by the dozen, sometimes, when I've made up a posse. But tell me more about those attackers, Mr. Jorridon. Any sign of them around here to-day?"

Jorridon shook his head.

"We've kept a good watch," he claimed, "but we've seen no one. Hector and Ezra were on the lookout, when they shipped some mushrooms, to-day. I'd say that the crowd was just a lot of hoodlums, passing through here. There's something, though "

Jorridon hesitated, then spoke in lower tone:

"This is confidential, sheriff. Two days ago, a New York detective stopped here. He said his name was Cardona. He's looking for a murderer named Nick Shoyden."

The sheriff's ears pricked up when he heard this news.

"Shoyden had a pal named Kip Farrick," continued Jorridon. "When Cardona told me that, I remembered that a fellow named Farrick had stopped here to ask if the farm was for sale."

"How long ago?"

"About ten days. Neither Shoyden nor Farrick made the buy, though. The farm was sold to a man named Burlow."

"Have you heard from Cardona since?"

"No, I haven't."

The sheriff arose and picked up his hat. He looked disappointed as he sauntered toward the door. He stated:

"I can't see why those crooks would have come back here. I've read about the case. Shoyden and Farrick were so well recognized that their only game would be to take cover somewhere. They certainly wouldn't come to a place where Farrick had appeared openly a short while before.

"So many witnesses told about them that they would have no reason for harming you, particularly since you haven't testified against them. At the same time, you can have protection if you want it. What would you like? Some deputies for duty here?"

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Jorridon smiled at the suggestion.

"That's hardly necessary, sheriff. My own men can guard this house. If there's trouble, though, they may have to shoot."

"Let them. They're in their rights."

"I wanted to be sure on that point, sheriff. What's more, I'd rather leave it up to you about the deputies. If you want to send a man over here, just to keep track on whatever happens, he will be welcome."

"I'll consider it, Mr. Jorridon."

THE sheriff left. Lights bobbed while he drove away. The Shadow edged off through the darkness. Once clear of the farmhouse, he had no more need for stealth. He knew that Nick Shoyden's gorillas would not be down at the creek to-night. That crew of crooks would be close to the old Hawkins mansion. Nick had guessed right when he decided to lay low to-night.

Circling downward to the lower path, The Shadow turned upward along the creek and came to the spot where the stepping stones formed a crossing. There, his lips whispered a weird laugh that was lost amid the surging roar of the short rapids.

From that moment, no sound betokened The Shadow's presence at the creek. Wrapped in darkness, silent in motion, The Shadow had chosen a new quest while crooks idled.

CHAPTER XV. CARDONA REPORTS

THROUGH Jorridon's conversation with the sheriff, The Shadow had gained proof positive of Joe Cardona's visit to Midvale. It gave The Shadow a trace of Cardona's actual travels after the star sleuth had left the realtor's office.

It was simple to picture the events in regular order. Joe's visit to Jorridon had produced an identification of Kip Farrick as the man who had inquired about the farm. Jorridon had probably shown Cardona along the shortest route to Midvale, sending Hector as Joe's guide. Under normal conditions, it would be unnecessary to conduct a visitor farther than the glen. That accounted for the marks on the ground indicating a struggle beyond the lookout rock.

Hence The Shadow knew many details of Cardona's capture; more, in some ways, than Joe himself had guessed. That would have pleased Cardona had he known it. For Joe had passed through a very gloomy period, and rescue seemed more remote the longer his imprisonment continued.

At present, Cardona was seated on the edge of a shaky cot, in a stone-walled room lighted by a dull kerosene lantern. So far, Joe had been visited only by two ruffians who served as his jailers; apparently it was their duty to remain underground all the while.

That had scarcely seemed necessary, considering the stoutness of the prison. The stony room resembled an old wine cellar, buried deep beneath some forgotten mansion. Three steps led up to the only door, which was constructed of rusty iron. The dampness of the place accounted for the rust. The walls were sweated with dewlike moisture that oozed through cracks between the mortared stones.

Sometimes, when Cardona pressed his ear against a far corner of a wall, he could hear the faint trickle of

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water. It was not the Muskatiny Creek, for Joe was sure that he had been carried to higher ground. The trickle was probably from some underground stream that flowed down from the hillside.

Although his captors had taken him a long distance by car, Joe had a hunch that his trip had terminated near Jorridon's farmhouse. He placed the location somewhere on the opposite side of the creek, for he dimly recalled the clatter of bridges that the automobile had crossed.

If Joe Cardona had known the location of the old Hawkins Estate, he would have definitely decided that his cell was beneath that abandoned mansion. Even without that knowledge, Cardona was positive that he had been captured by men belonging to Nick Shoyden.

The two jailers were thugs whom Joe had never seen before, which made him decide that they had been brought in from Chicago. Nick Shoyden had connections with Mid–West crooks. Any who had reason to hide out would willingly have accepted an invitation to join Nick and remain as guards of an underground prison.

The thuggish jailers had provided Cardona with food; also with the lantern. The fare had not been bad. Joe's intention was to stick it out without complaint, on the hope that his release would come when Nick Shoyden finished with the hide–out. Since the law was already on Nick's trail, the crook might decide it unnecessary to do away with his prisoner.

That point seemed logical to Joe Cardona; he formed the conclusion from the fact that he was still alive.

NEVERTHELESS, the future offered no pleasant prospects. The more Cardona thought about it, the less he liked it. He was trying to forget the subject when he heard a faint sound outside the cell. Thinking that a jailer was coming, Joe stretched on the couch, to pretend that he was half asleep.

A half minute passed, but the door did not open.

The sound was repeated. Cardona tilted his head closer to the wall. The thing that impressed him was the silence.

He wondered what had happened to the water trickle that he had heard in the past. Suddenly, it came with a gurgle. That gave Cardona his key to the mysterious noise.

There must be a passage running close beside his cell; the water channel followed it, but the tunnel was large enough to admit a human being. Some one in the passage was using stones to stop the water's flow, hoping that the sound would carry far beneath the ground.

It was possible that the intermittent signal was meant to reach Joe's cell. If so, it was a clever one. Other noises would bring an investigation on the part of Joe's captors; but not this one. The only person who would suspect its purpose was Joe Cardona. His brain was keyed to a tension of high strain.

Gauging the sound's direction, Cardona decided that it was from a safe spot. If raps were given, they would be heard only within Joe's cell. Raps might come if Joe answered the call. All that was needed was a suitable implement; and Joe found one. He took the wooden cross brace from one end of his rickety cot.

Using the stick end first, Cardona pounded a suitable stone. The signal that he gave was dull, but it could carry. He repeated the strokes; after a few moments, he heard a response. Slight poundings came above the water's trickle. They sounded like taps given by the handle of a gun.

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The taps were in Morse code. Cardona made out a few letters. Unfortunately, he found himself at a loss. Though he had once memorized the code, Cardona was hazy in his recollection of it. He tried to tap back a coded answer, but botched it badly.

An interval; then slow taps, that Cardona recognized as the letter "A." A pause; next the dash and three short dots of "B." The signaler was going through the alphabet, letter by letter. Intently, Cardona noted the letters and recalled them. When the taps had finished, Cardona repeated the alphabet back. He could remember the few forgotten letters.

A message came through; it was like a brief query, chopped short:

"Your name..."

"Cardona," tapped Joe. "Yours..."

"The Shadow..."

A FLOOD of elation swept Joe Cardona. Until this moment, he had not been able to hazard a guess regarding the identity of the mysterious tapper. Joe needed no more proof; once the token of identity was given, he realized that only The Shadow could have penetrated to this underground prison.

The Shadow had questioned Joe regarding his name on the chance that there might be other prisoners. Cardona was the one whom The Shadow wanted to contact.

More taps came from The Shadow. Cardona halted them by sudden pounds. He signaled one word:

"Wait."

Shoving the wooden stick beneath a blanket on the cot, Cardona went to the door of the cell. Joe had a hunch that a jailer might be due. He was right. Half a minute after he reached the door, a key grated in the lock. Cardona hopped to the bottom of the steps just as the door groaned open on its heavy hinges.

One of the jailers stood at the top of the steps, holding a leveled revolver. An electric light globe, glowing from a socket in the ceiling beyond the door, showed a square-walled anteroom that Cardona had not previously observed. That room, like Joe's cell, was a low underground cavern.

Looking at an angle to the left, Cardona saw the doorway of an upper passage. It was open; the second guard stood there, also holding a gun. Obviously, they had come from a room above. Their arrival, though, was a chance one. There was nothing to indicate that either of the ruffians had heard Cardona's raps.

The first rowdy delivered an ugly leer. He came down the steps. Cardona shifted to the wall opposite his couch. The move gave him what he wanted a view of the right side of the anteroom. There, Cardona saw another door; it looked low, because it was at the bottom of some steps.

The crook eyed Cardona, then spoke jeeringly:

"Gettin' jittery, huh? It won't do you no good. You're here to stay a while! Maybe you're wonderin' what time it is, so I'll tell you. It's nine o'clock at night an' that's bedtime for you, dick. You ain't goin' nowhere!"

The crook picked up the kerosene lantern, as indication that he intended to take the illumination with him. Cardona no longer had a flashlight. Everything had been taken from his pockets, including the signed

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statement that Jorridon had given him.

"You'll get this glim to-morrow mornin'," grunted the crook, referring to the lantern. "That's how you'll know it's daylight. An' when I come for it, you'll know it's nine p. m. again. A cinch, ain't it, keepin' track of time around here?"

THE second crook had arrived at the door. The first rowdy was passing him the tin plates and cup that had served Cardona as dinner dishes. The two held a brief confab. The first faced Cardona suddenly and rasped a question:

"What's on your mind, dick? Think you're goin' to pull somethin'? Spill it an' talk fast!"

Cardona decided it was time to talk.

"I've got something I want to tell Nick Shoyden," he announced, gruffly. "That's why I'm up and around. Nick's getting nowhere by holding me. Tell him I can prove that, if he talks to me."

The nearer crook glared; then grinned to his companion:

"Hear that, Tinker? The dick wants to talk to Nick Shoyden. Maybe we ought to pass that along to Nick, huh?"

"Sure," snorted "Tinker." "Dat sure would be de nuts! Only maybe Nick wouldn't take none of dem verballum messages. An' maybe he wouldn't want to come all de way down here, Bogo."

Both crooks shook their heads, half seriously, half contemptuously, as though they could not approve Cardona's proposition. Joe decided to press the point.

"Suppose you take a note to Nick for me."

"Maybe Nick wouldn't bother to read it," put in "Bogo." "Only there's no harm writin' it. Me an' Tinker would get a laugh outta it."

"Sure," agreed Tinker. "Go ahead, dick. Scrawl it!"

Cardona had no paper and pencil, and said so. Bogo spoke to Tinker. The latter went out through the anteroom. He came back with a few pieces of crinkly paper that looked like sheets from a bridge pad, except that they were blank. Writing crosswise, Cardona inscribed a short note to Nick Shoyden.

Bogo took the note, but left the pencil and the other sheets with Cardona, remarking that if Joe had any other ideas, he could write them in the dark. Taking the lantern, Bogo departed with Tinker. They locked the door behind them.

CARDONA listened at the steps. When he was satisfied that the pair had gone, he went back to the cot and began to tap the wall. The Shadow responded. He called for whatever details Cardona could give.

Briefly, Joe tapped that he had visited Rex Jorridon; had been captured after leaving the farmhouse. He announced that he was held prisoner by Nick Shoyden and Kip Farrick. He described his jailers and gave their names.

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When Joe mentioned the note that he had sent, The Shadow called for every detail. Cardona responded in full, adding that he still had the pencil and the small sheets of paper. Joe wished that he could get a written message to The Shadow, particularly because he could then draw a diagram of the cell.

That being impossible, Cardona described the layout instead. He said that the crooks had come from an outer passage at the left of the anteroom. He mentioned the doorway on the right, remarking that it might lead to a lower passage or another cell like his own. A passage, Joe remarked, would lead in The Shadow's direction.

The Shadow's taps responded, questioning if Cardona sensed immediate danger. Cardona responded negatively. He explained that he would have a lantern until nine o'clock at night; that his meals had been regular. Joe declared that he could stick it out as long as The Shadow required.

The answer that came was emphatic:

"Twenty-four hours."

With that promise, The Shadow signed off. Joe Cardona, alone in pitch darkness, wondered. He could not understand how The Shadow could give such a definite promise. To Joe, it seemed that rescue would have to be either immediate or indefinite, depending on whether or not The Shadow could find a route to this closed cell.

Yet The Shadow's statement had carried a final note that gave Joe Cardona a feeling of great confidence. Cardona was sure that there were factors in this case that only The Shadow had uncovered.

Cardona would have been totally amazed had he learned how much The Shadow knew.

CHAPTER XVI. THE NEW HEADQUARTERS

MORNING dawned pleasant above ground. It was a fine day for The Shadow's plans, even though Joe Cardona was forced to subsist on the feeble light of a kerosene lantern. The deal was a tough one for Joe, but the ace would forget it if all went as The Shadow intended.

Nine in the morning showed The Shadow driving his old flivver to the town of Yarmouth. He looked the part of a countryman as he rolled into the county seat. Stopping at the post office, The Shadow drawled a query regarding any letters for Hiram Robinson. There was one. It came from Harry Vincent.

The Shadow drove to the Yarmouth station and sent a telegram to Harry. He worded it in crude fashion, paid for it in small change, mostly pennies. The telegram simply said that he would drive over to Midvale to meet the early afternoon train. The Shadow signed it "Hiram."

That done, The Shadow went to the courthouse. He strolled into the sheriff's office and chewed absentmindedly on a straw until the sheriff finished with another visitor. After that, the sheriff looked in The Shadow's direction and asked what he wanted.

"Howdy, sheriff," greeted The Shadow. "I'm Hiram Robinson."

The name puzzled the sheriff, so The Shadow added:

"The feller Mr. Jorridon was a-telling you about. I got into trouble over on his farm t'other night."

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The sheriff nodded; then demanded: "You've seen Jorridon to-day?"

"Sure enough, sheriff. I was down to Midvale with a load of milk and stopped off to talk to Mr. Jorridon. He told me you'd been there, and he says he reckons there won't be no more trouble. So there ain't any need to send a depitty."

"Humph. Just when I was going to telegraph New York." The sheriff looked disappointed. "Is Jorridon sure everything is all right over there?" Couldn't those trouble-makers still be around?"

"He says he'll let you know," replied The Shadow. "He reckons his men could visit around some old houses better'n any depitties could. If they see any places that looks suspiciouslike, you'll get a call from him."

The sheriff looked pleased. He folded a list that was on his desk and put it in a drawer. The Shadow knew that the list carried names of men who could be called immediately if the sheriff needed a posse. The chance that Nick Shoyden and Kip Farrick might be in this vicinity was something that had appealed to the sheriff the more that he considered it.

"I'll wait to hear from Jorridon," decided the sheriff. "Thanks for bringing, the message, Robinson."

SOON after ten o'clock, The Shadow's old car bounced in through Jorridon's gate. It wheezed up to the farmhouse, where Hector appeared promptly, lugging a shotgun. The hired hand recognized the driver of the flivver, but looked puzzled when The Shadow waved a greeting.

"Where's Mr. Jorridon?" drawled The Shadow. As he looked beyond Hector, he saw the house door open. "There he is! Hi, Mr. Jorridon! Lookit!"

Scrambling awkwardly from the old car, The Shadow pulled back his ragged coat to show a badge that shone on the vest beneath. The badge showed the words: "Deputy Sheriff."

Jorridon removed a pipe from his lips. His square face showed a smile, as he asked:

"You've seen Sheriff Clayborne?"

The Shadow nodded.

"Sheriff sent for me," he explained. "Said he'd been a-talking to you and was going to send a depitty over here. I told him I'd been a depitty; he didn't remember it, but he looked up my name and there 'twas. So I'm the feller he sent."

"Excellent, Hiram," approved Jorridon. "The sheriff made a good choice, considering the fight you put up the other night. Park your car in the barn and come on into the house."

Soon, The Shadow came from the barn, lugging a shotgun that he had bought second-hand in a town near Yarmouth. He put the gun in the corner, looked toward Jorridon and queried:

"Hain't there no chores I kin be doing by daytime? You won't be needing me for much else until after sunset."

"Not much farm work here, Hiram," smiled Jorridon. "We're specializing on mushrooms. Take a look at the mushroom cellars, if you want to."

"Thanks, Mr. Jorridon."

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Hector conducted The Shadow to the low-roofed building. Descending into the gloom, The Shadow walked among the long rows of coffinlike tiers that formed the mushroom beds. He gawked at the men who were choosing mushrooms for the day's delivery. After he had been there a while, he began to take lessons in mushroom picking from Hector. He drawled his admiration of the shelves that enabled the growers to produce a large crop in a limited space.

At lunch, Jorridon inquired how Hiram liked the mushroom business. The Shadow produced a laugh by inquiring how they could sort the toadstools from the mushrooms. It took Jorridon a while to make it clear that they only planted mushroom spore in the cellar; hence toadstools were absent.

Jorridon suggested that, after lunch, Hiram could ride to Midvale on the truck, to amuse himself.

That made The Shadow remember something. He had to write a note to Sheriff Clayborne, stating that he had taken up his duty at Jorridon's. When lunch ended, Jorridon conducted The Shadow to the corner writing desk and gave him pen, ink and paper.

While The Shadow was finishing a slow-written note, Jorridon went out to tell Hector to wait with the truck. Reaching into a pigeonhole, The Shadow fished for another piece of paper; found a small one that he wanted and hastily wrote another note. He found a blotter also, and planked it on the second note just as Jorridon returned.

The blotter completely covered the smaller piece of paper. Hence while Jorridon was reading and approving The Shadow's letter to the sheriff, it was easy for the supposed Hiram to slide the second note from beneath the blotter. The Shadow had it tucked in his pocket when Jorridon handed back the message for Clayborne.

RIDING into Midvale on the truck, The Shadow reviewed what he had accomplished. He had fixed matters so that Sheriff Clayborne would not bungle things by sending deputies to Jorridon's. Trouble was due there by to-night. The Shadow could handle it best by making Jorridon's farm his own headquarters and working alone for a while.

The note to Sheriff Clayborne was simply a bluff to fit with the story that The Shadow had told Jorridon. It was important, of course, that Jorridon should not wonder why the sheriff had not acted. The Shadow had handled that by reappearing as Hiram. His anxiety to send the sheriff a letter simply increased Jorridon's belief that The Shadow otherwise Hiram Robinson had actually been sent as a deputy sheriff.

At the same time, The Shadow had accomplished something else of vital importance. He had written a special note that carried an urgent message. That note would bring results, if delivered promptly to the right person. The man who was to receive it happened to be in New York, only a few hours ride from Midvale. The Shadow was confident that it would reach him in time.

When the truck reached Midvale, Hector and Ezra unloaded crates of mushrooms at the depot. Again, a car was waiting near by; but it did not contain occupants of a suspicious-looking sort. The car was a speedy coupe; the man behind its wheel was Harry Vincent.

The Shadow's agent had driven to Midvale; but he was at the station at train time. Harry was on the lookout for The Shadow. Hence he was annoyed when a tall, gawky, rough-clad fellow came over and leaned on the window ledge to inquire:

"Kin you tell me the time, stranger?"

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Harry drew his watch from his pocket. As he glanced at the timepiece, he heard the whispered word: "Report!"

Even with that token of identity, Harry found it hard to picture Hiram Robinson as The Shadow. In low tone, Harry reported:

"The man on the train was James Medloe. Wholesale produce shipper, in New York. His business looks small enough to be a phony one. I saw his truck at a market, but it didn't load on a great deal. Medloe lives at the Zenith Apartments; keeps his truck at the Bridgeside Garage."

"Deliver this note anonymously," ordered The Shadow. "Then send one of your own to the same party, giving information about Medloe."

Harry glanced at the small note that The Shadow gave him. Not only did its message amaze him; he was thunderstruck by the name of the person to whom the note was addressed; also by the signature it carried. A flood of understanding came to Harry; along with it, certain bewildering features.

The Shadow was ready to crack down upon men of crime. But how The Shadow had managed to gain all the facts he wanted, how he intended to complete his present plans were still matters of mystery to his agent.

WHEN Harry looked up, The Shadow had gone back to Jorridon's truck. Hector and Ezra appeared; the truck rumbled away.

Harry Vincent smiled grimly; started his coupe and made for the road to New York. He passed a car near the outskirts of the town and believed that it might belong to Nick Shoyden. That did not matter. Harry was unrecognized; he had a mission that required speed. New York city was his goal.

The Shadow, too, had seen the car that Harry noticed. If its occupants were members of Nick Shoyden's increased crew, they would probably return to their leader with the news that Jorridon had gained a new recruit. That, however, would be a laugh to Nick; particularly if he received the report that Jorridon's new farm hand was the big fellow who had made trouble a few nights ago.

Nick Shoyden would certainly be pleased to take another whack at the supposed Hiram Robinson.

Afternoon passed slowly at Jorridon's. The Shadow spent most of his time dawdling around the mushroom cellars. Tension began at dusk. The Shadow noticed that all of Jorridon's hired hands a full six in number were present at dinner; that all had their shotguns beside them.

Jorridon inquired if The Shadow had mailed the letter to the sheriff. The Shadow nodded, and was supported by Hector and Ezra. They had seen the supposed Hiram go toward a mail box at the station.

"There may be trouble to-night," declared Jorridon. "If those crooks are still about, they may approach the house, just to show their spite toward us. Our policy is to sit tight, and give them a massed reception if they come. We'll take shifts outside; but all stay close to the house. Get inside in case of trouble. We can hold this place like a fort.

"If there is an attack, we'll have enough evidence to bring in the sheriff to-morrow. It's better, though, and more manly, to be on our own for the present."

The Shadow's disguised countenance showed eagerness for battle. His expression hid the real thoughts that were in his mind. Strategy, as much as conflict, was part of The Shadow's game. He had chosen his present

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headquarters with the confidence that strategy would be possible.

All The Shadow's plans were hinged upon that prospect. They depended upon Jorridon taking the proper course for his own protection. The Shadow had foreseen how Rex Jorridon would prepare.

The way would soon be open for The Shadow's strokes against crime.

CHAPTER XVII. CARDONA TAKES A HAND

THE tension at Jorridon's began to wear off as the evening progressed. Hector, Ezra and others took brief turns outside the doors, listening for approachers in the dark. They reported none, even though they moved out as far as the rear of the barn and the end of the mushroom shed.

It was nearly nine o'clock, when The Shadow stretched himself from a chair and approached Jorridon, who was playing solitaire. Jorridon looked up from his cards, removed his pipe from his lips and inquired:

"What's the trouble, Hiram?"

"It sort of cramps me, this setting around," drawled The Shadow. "Purtickerly after doing nothing all the daytime. I thought mebbe I oughta be going outside a while."

"Not a bad idea, Hiram."

Jorridon looked around, saw Ezra and two other men on duty with shotguns one at the front door, the other two at windows. They had finished previous spells at sentry go.

"Let's see," considered Jorridon. "Hector is handling the barn; we've got Elisha down toward the mushroom shed; and a man out front, so either can send him any alarm. Which do you want, Hiram? The barn or the shed?"

"Reckon the barn would be better," returned The Shadow. "I can pick up some spare cartridges I left under the car seat."

"All right, Hiram. The barn it is. You relieve Hector."

There was a connection between the house and the barn. The Shadow went through it, gave a drawled signal in the tone of Hiram. Hector answered from a little door at the back of the barn, where he was listening in the darkness. The Shadow explained that he had come to relieve the hired hand; he asked Hector to wait until he had gotten his cartridges from the car.

Hector waited. In the darkness, The Shadow placed his shotgun under the car seat and brought out his cloak and hat, along with automatics. Bundling these, he approached Hector and took over the outpost duty. He listened while Hector made his way back into the house.

From then on, The Shadow's part of Hiram Robinson was ended.

The Shadow knew that Jorridon would not worry if no report came from the barn. Jorridon would take it that all was well. As Hiram, The Shadow had shown himself a powerful fighter. His faked appointment as a deputy gave Jorridon an added trust. Moreover, Jorridon logically figured that Hiram as a representative of the law should be given preference if he wished it.

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The Shadow, too, had his own information. He knew that Nick Shoyden's spies would be slow at approach; that they would not flash the signal for an attack upon the house unless they thought the way was clear. They were counting on Jorridon's men to be on wider patrol duty. Unless they heard the hired hands some distance from the house, the spies would be reluctant about forcing the issue.

The barn, therefore, would remain vacant as The Shadow left it, providing he did not waste too much time. The Shadow's zero hour had arrived; therefore, his moves were to be swift ones.

DONNING his cloak and hat, The Shadow moved swiftly away from the barn. He reached the path to the glade; he followed it rapidly, guiding himself by slight starlight that showed between the tree branches overhead.

Though the ground was pitch-black, The Shadow could see the slight outline of the barn when he looked back. House and mushroom shed were obscured; but the barn bulked up enough to mark an easy path to the guard post that The Shadow had deserted.

The glade was completely dark. Crossing it was easy, however, for the ground was flat and The Shadow had the ripple of the entering brook to guide by. The neat work came, when The Shadow picked the exact spot where the upstream path began. Following the path, The Shadow reached the lookout rock.

There, The Shadow listened. All was quiet here. Nevertheless, The Shadow sensed human presence. He gave a low, sibilant hiss, weird in the blackness. It was an unmistakable signal for any who expected it.

Turning, The Shadow headed downstream. He took the path that led toward the ledge. He neared the spot where he had once had choice of either following the water's edge or going above the high rocks. Again, The Shadow listened. This time, he heard creeping sounds.

There were men on the ledge and the embankment above it. One man was coming along toward the very place where The Shadow stood. They were Nick Shoyden's men, looking for stray patrollers from the farmhouse. They hoped to knock off such fellows as Hector, one by one. So far, they had encountered none; and they would be disappointed when they forayed farther. Jorridon's policy was not helpful to Nick's plans.

Nevertheless, crooks were accomplishing something without knowing it. They were closing in upon The Shadow in the darkness. A groper, coming closer, reached the very spot where The Shadow had been. Oddly, he encountered no one.

The Shadow was gone. Knee deep in water, he was wading the creek, his motion noiseless.

Feeling his way through the water, The Shadow avoided deep spots. At times, his course carried him along sandy shallow stretches that went straight across the creek. On occasions, he fringed one bank; later, his zigzag course carried him back to the other. Always, The Shadow was soundless; at no time did he slip toward a deep pool.

The Shadow was closer to the rapids. The creek was faster, speeding among many stones. Footing was more precarious; but a few slight sounds did not matter. The water's rush drowned them. The Shadow had not reached the stepping stones. He was using stones that stood isolated; others that were just beneath the surface of the stream. More than before, his course varied. Any follower would have found it impossible to guess the turns of the creek, or which bank was which, amid the darkness cast by low lying alders. Yet The Shadow gauged direction as well as distance. He gripped a shore rock, seemed to recognize it by touch.

The Shadow came out from the water, to creep along a lane of stones.

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A BIG rock blocked The Shadow's course. He wedged half past it; braced against it and levered upward. The rock gave a toppling movement, then stopped. It was halted by a crevice. The Shadow went past. The rock eased back to its former position.

Stooping, The Shadow raised a large stone to his left. The space it provided enabled him to wriggle beneath an overtopping boulder. Once through, The Shadow drew the lower stone back to its concealing position. He followed a rocky passage, guiding himself by its walls. At last, he turned on a flashlight.

The Shadow was in a passage that led at an upward angle. It was narrow and low, but dry. Though it had once been an old watercourse, flowing through a rough limestone formation, the underground stream no longer came this way. It was more than a hundred yards before The Shadow found traces of the water.

He had gone a good way upward. Here were stone steps, fashioned by man; beside them, the missing stream. It was blocked near the bottom of the steps and diverted into a pipe that ran through the hill. There had been little difficulty in the formation of this tunnel. Water had been the greatest obstacle; it had been handled by piping it through the ground to the creek below.

At the top of the stone steps was an iron door. It was the door that Joe Cardona had seen on the right of the anteroom; the one that Joe had guessed might lead to a passage. At The Shadow's left were mortared stones. They had given him the clue that a cell might be hidden beyond.

The Shadow stooped beside the stream, blocked it with loose stones. He lifted the stones to let the water gush. That sound reached Joe Cardona. Raps came back; Cardona was telling that Bogo and Tinker had just left with the light, in accordance with the nine o'clock regulation. The Shadow signaled back for Cardona to be ready.

Ascending to the iron door, The Shadow began expert work upon the lock. It was a large one, strongly made; but The Shadow expected to open it within five minutes of noiseless effort. The only objection lay in the fact that the lock might be ruined when it gave way. That was why The Shadow had not attacked it on the previous night. Much had depended upon postponing this entry until the right time.

MEANWHILE, Joe Cardona was listening tensely in his cell. The Shadow's final taps had told him to expect immediate delivery; but Joe feared that even The Shadow might have difficulty in breaking through two doors. There was a chance that The Shadow might return to tap a more disappointing message.

Cardona was seated on the cot, holding the wooden brace, ready to pound more signals if necessary.

It was Cardona's concentration that prevented him from hearing a scrape at the door of his cell. Before Joe realized it, the door swung open. The light from the stony anteroom revealed him listening at the wall with the stick of wood in his fist. Cardona shot a quick look toward the doorway and saw Bogo bounding down the steps.

The guard was murderous. He had guessed Cardona's game and was coming to put a quick end to the detective's signals. Gun thrust before him, Bogo was aiming point-blank. Cardona's only chance was to meet the attacker before he could fire.

Springing up, Cardona used the cot brace as a cudgel. He swung hard for Bogo's fist, whacked the barrel of the aiming gun and jolted it from Bogo's hand. The crook scrambled after the weapon. Joe would have gone after him, but a clatter intervened from above.

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Tinker was in the doorway, pulling a gun. A race for Bogo's weapon was useless. It was up to Joe to stop Tinker.

Cardona leaped for the steps, swung his club for Tinker's head. The second crook had his gun half from his pocket. He sped his hand upward, clashed the revolver against the descending stick. Cardona's improvised club cracked squarely in half. Dropping it, Joe grappled with Tinker.

Bogo had his gun again. He fired from the cell room, but his bullet whistled wide; for he could not get Cardona without clipping Tinker. It was Tinker's cue to shove Joe into the path of fire. He tried to accomplish it, but Cardona rallied. He dragged Tinker sidewise, half across the anteroom, while Bogo was hurrying up the steps.

Tinker fired meanwhile; his shot meant nothing, for Cardona had the crook's gun hand. The grapplers floundered against the wall. Tinker, sprawling backward, thrust out his foot to trip his opponent. Wrenching away to go after Bogo, Cardona was hooked by the projected foot. He took a headlong dive in Bogo's direction.

Two seconds more, and rescue would have been impossible for Joe Cardona. The Shadow was still beyond the iron door of the lower passage. He could not possibly come through before Bogo fired. Yet The Shadow made a move that turned the tide. He had heard the blast of guns. He knew that Cardona had no weapon. Dropping his noiseless tactics, The Shadow performed an action that accomplished two results.

He settled the door lock; and at the same time diverted Bogo's attack to another direction. The Shadow did it by jamming the muzzle of an automatic to the door lock and giving the lock a blast from the big gun.

THE report of the .45 was muffled in the anteroom, but it was loud enough for Bogo to hear. Forgetting Cardona for the moment, Bogo wheeled to the iron door to see smoke wreathing through from the lock. A moment later, the door swung outward. The Shadow's first shot had finished the lock springs that he had intended to pick.

Beyond the door, Bogo saw The Shadow. The crook swung viciously and aimed with his revolver. The Shadow was shifting toward the half-opened door. Bogo followed with his weapon, aiming high. All that he forgot was the fact that The Shadow's position lay below a short flight of steps. That was enough to forget; but Bogo had very little time remaining to think it over.

As Bogo fired, The Shadow was taking a forward sprawl. His dive was timed a split-second ahead of Bogo's trigger tug. The Shadow hit the steps as the crook's bullet sizzled above the rear brim of his slouch hat.

Bogo, elated, thought for the instant that he had dropped The Shadow. His gleeful shout changed to a snarl as he saw a hand come up from the top step.

Bogo aimed again; got off a shot in a hurry. All that the revolver slug found was the stone of the step. The Shadow's reply was better timed. The boom of the big automatic was calculated to beat Bogo's shot, if the crook took careful aim. Only by haste did Bogo fire ahead of The Shadow; and that haste made Bogo's effort worthless.

The Shadow's shot tongued flame straight for Bogo's heart. The bullet that came with it followed the arrow course that the gun spurt marked. Bogo clattered to the floor; pitching forward, his dead body became a bulwark for The Shadow's next defense.

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Tinker had seen The Shadow. Against the wall, the second crook was aiming, more carefully than Bogo. Cardona saw the menace. Coming to his feet, Joe leaped madly to stop Tinker's shot. He was too late. Tinker fired before Cardona arrived.

Tinker was spotting The Shadow as Bogo fell; but Bogo was a flattened figure when his pal fired. Tinker's bullet found its mark in Bogo's body. Before Tinker could shoot again, The Shadow shoved an automatic over Bogo's huddled shoulder and gave Tinker a return shot.

To Joe Cardona, the result was amazing. He heard the blast of The Shadow's gun; felt the wind of a bullet sizzling past his face. Cardona pounced upon Tinker; the crook crumpled away from his grasp. The Shadow's timely stabbed bullet had finished the second of Cardona's jailers.

THE SHADOW was across the stony room. Plucking keys from the floor near Bogo's body, he unlocked the upper door. He swung the iron barrier open, motioned for Cardona to go through. The Shadow gave Joe the keys as he passed. Jubilantly, Cardona led the way.

To Joe Cardona, The Shadow was giving him opportunity to rise from his dungeon and deal surprise to the men of crime who had held him prisoner. Backed by The Shadow, Cardona was headed toward the capture of the murderer who had slain Cyrus Brockbright.

Joe Cardona could already picture himself coming unannounced upon Nick Shoyden. All seemed certain of success, since The Shadow had prepared the way. Cardona did not guess the new surprises that lay in store, after he had passed that iron door.

Along the coming route, Joe Cardona was to encounter facts that only The Shadow had been keen enough to uncover.

CHAPTER XVIII. CRIME DISCOVERED

THE upper passage was a short one. It ended abruptly at another door. Cardona unlocked it. Armed with a revolver in his right hand, a flashlight in his left, Joe stepped through into a darkened room.

Joe had picked up the revolver and the flashlight from beside Bogo. He also had Tinker's revolver in his pocket. The ace was well equipped for any trouble from the gloomy room he entered. With the Shadow still close beside him, Cardona flicked a beam of light across the room.

What Joe saw, amazed him.

Instead of an ordinary cellar, of the sort that would lie beneath an abandoned house like the Hawkins mansion, Cardona was in a compact, concrete room. The place was deserted; but beside one wall stood a machine that Cardona recognized as a printing press. Approaching it, Joe saw stacks of printed paper that he first thought were currency.

Looking closer, Cardona saw his mistake. These sheaves were treasury certificates, of thousand-dollar denomination. An immediate estimate told Cardona that their total must run close to a million dollars; yet the huge values were a sham.

The treasury certificates were counterfeit. This underground room was the secret factory where the false certificates were made!

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Beside the printed stacks, Cardona saw blank sheets, ready for the press. He recognized the paper, by size and texture, to be the sort that Bogo had brought the night before to let Joe write his note to Nick Shoyden.

The Shadow suggested that Cardona help himself to samples of the false certificates. Joe approved the suggestion by following it. He bundled a small packet into his pocket. With other work ahead, Cardona was not sure just how soon he would be able to return to this hidden print shop. It was best to carry along some evidence.

There was another doorway ahead. Cardona went through it, came to an abrupt flight of steps. He remembered that they were the ones by which his captors had carried him downstairs. Pushing to the top of the steps, Cardona ran into a solid barrier. He could not open it until The Shadow aided him. Joe's cloaked companion discovered the mechanism and pressed a small lever.

A heavy wall swung outward. Using his flashlight guardedly, Cardona stepped into a long, musty room that consisted of corridors. On each side were shelves; the place was silent as a tomb. To Cardona, it seemed like a sinister morgue, where coffins were arranged in layers.

Even while he moved ahead, Cardona did not guess the nature of the place that he had entered.

The answer came when Cardona reached a door at the far end of a corridor. Opening the portal, Joe found steps; he was greeted by clear air and the flicker of starlight. Only a few yards ahead, he saw the lighted windows of a house. Inhaling the fresh air, Cardona looked about and saw the building from which he had just come.

It was a low, shedlike structure that seemed to elongate into the darkness. Instantly, Cardona guessed the nature of those shelved corridors that he had passed.

Joe and The Shadow had come up through Jorridon's mushroom cellar!

REX JORRIDON was the owner of the counterfeiting plant. His mushroom cellar was a blind to cover it. The path through which The Shadow had reached Cardona's cell was an underground channel designed for emergency.

It was Jorridon not Nick Shoyden who had arranged Cardona's capture. Jorridon had sent men down through the underground route to be waiting at the glade when Joe came along with Hector. No wonder Bogo and Tinker had laughed when Cardona wrote a note to Nick.

Bogo and Tinker were thugs whom Jorridon always kept underground; they thought it a great joke that Joe had figured them as Nick's men. They had kept up the bluff, probably at Jorridon's order.

Cardona's immediate reaction was to forget Nick Shoyden, for the present. The thought struck him that Nick was probably far from Midvale; and Kip Farrick likewise. All treachery here as Cardona saw it could be attributed to Rex Jorridon. Cardona had a score to settle with the counterfeiter.

Heading toward the lights of Jorridon's house, Cardona made for the nearest door.

Oddly, no alarm headed Cardona's approach. The Shadow, stalking through the darkness close behind the detective, was on the watch for chance attackers; but none came. Apparently, The Shadow had expected this situation, and was merely checking to see that all was well. The mystery was solved when Cardona reached Jorridon's door and opened it.

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Swinging in from the darkness, ready with leveled revolver, Joe Cardona came upon a dozen men. Half of them were standing in the center of Jorridon's living room, their arms upraised, with shotguns and revolvers useless at their feet.

The helpless men were Jorridon and his fake hired hands. The others were businesslike fellows with revolvers. A pair of them turned quickly to cover Cardona when he entered.

Joe saw the leader of the raiders a swarthy, mustached man attired in brown, with a felt hat of the same color half tilted over one eye. Cardona recognized him instantly. The man was Vic Marquette, long of the secret service; at present, star investigator for the United States treasury department.

"HELLO, Cardona." Marquette gave the welcome in a tone that showed no surprise. "We've been waiting for you. This fellow Jorridon denies everything; he says your note must have been a fake. We figured you'd show up with the evidence."

"My note?" queried Cardona. "The one I sent to Nick Shoyden?"

"Hear that?" demanded Jorridon, savagely. "Cardona has no evidence, Marquette. We've got a right to be armed here "

Marquette waved an interruption. He handed Cardona a folded piece of paper. It was the note that The Shadow had given Harry Vincent to take to New York. That note was addressed to Marquette; crudely penciled, as if hurried, it bore the signature "Cardona."

Instantly, Joe understood. Though he knew nothing of the note, he realized that it was The Shadow's work. The note told that Cardona was a prisoner, but was ready to escape. It called for Vic Marquette to bring a squad of T-men to Midvale, to await a nine o'clock signal from the glade and enter by Jorridon's barn. It promised that Cardona would show up after the T-men arrived.

"This note didn't need any notary's seal," declared Marquette, grimly. "Its paper told that it was a real tip-off! This is the paper that was stolen from government stock! We've expected to find a flood of counterfeit treasury certificates coming into circulation. Some are around already. We've been hoping to nip the rest."

Cardona produced the samples from his pocket and handed them to Marquette. The T-man's eyes opened wide.

"Where did you find these?"

"In the fake money plant," replied Cardona. "It's under Jorridon's mushroom cellar. The way's open, Marquette."

"Good work," returned Vic. His smile broadened. "It looks like everything has broken right. We found a clear path through the barn. We grabbed Jorridon here; and covered his outside men when they came in.

"Well, Jorridon" Vic turned to the glowering counterfeiter "you were too careless with the way you left that paper around. Maybe you'll be more cautious next time say, twenty years or so from now. That's the soonest you'll be at large again!"

JORRIDON had no reply. He was still trying to figure the whole thing out. He knew that Cardona could not possibly have sent the note to Marquette. The only person who could have arranged this climax was Hiram Robinson. Yet Jorridon was loath to give the gawky visitor credit, even though he knew that the supposed

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Hiram must have left the route open through the barn.

Marquette did not understand the reason for Jorridon's silence. Vic prodded the counterfeiter with some further statements.

"Smart stuff, Jorridon," declared the T-man, "the way you shipped out those treasury certificates with your mushroom crates. You had your pal Medloe watch them at the Midvale depot, and pick up the shipments, later, in New York. A friend of mine spotted something phony and tipped me off to it. We'll bag Medloe in New York."

Marquette had reference to facts that he had received from Harry Vincent. The Shadow's agent had tipped off the T-man, shortly after sending The Shadow's note. Cardona, hearing Marquette mention "a friend," thought instantly of The Shadow.

In a sense, Joe's conjecture was right; for The Shadow had actually spotted Jorridon's outside man, Medloe. Harry had merely continued with the trail.

Rex Jorridon looked disgruntled; he seemed ready to issue a defiant challenge. Suddenly, his manner changed. A flicker of shrewdness came to his squarish face.

"Suppose I come clean," he suggested. "Will it go easier with me, Marquette?"

"Not much," returned Vic. "There's nothing you can tell us, Jorridon."

"There's plenty!" insisted Jorridon. "Not for you, Marquette, but for Cardona. Since he eased the way for you to get me, you ought to return the favor. If it will mean anything to me, I'll tell Cardona how he can get Nick Shoyden."

The statement brought an immediate response from both Marquette and Cardona. Jorridon saw that they were interested.

"I had to grab you, Cardona," he declared, "even though I didn't want you. I'd have helped you, if I could. You were after the crook who murdered Cyrus Brockbright. There's an easy way that you can get him "

JORRIDON'S lips suddenly became soundless. Looking past Cardona, the crook saw a figure at the opened door. Others turned; Marquette spoke a quick order to halt the T-men, as they swung to cover the cloaked form that stepped into view.

Marquette knew The Shadow; he had long since guessed that the cloaked investigator had aided Cardona. Vic had simply followed The Shadow's cue in giving full credit to Cardona.

The Shadow's eyes burned toward Rex Jorridon. They had lost all the listlessness that The Shadow had faked while passing as Hiram. Hidden lips spoke their accusation:

"There stands the murderer!"

Jorridon wilted; half covered, he waited for the statements that were to follow. Joe Cardona was totally amazed by The Shadow's words; but one glance at Jorridon told him that the counterfeiter was the real killer.

"Nick Shoyden would never have murdered Cyrus Brockbright," declared The Shadow, in a solemn tone. "Nick covered murder when he committed it. The case of Jim Kildean, the slain gambler, stands as proof."

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Nick, through his open dealing with Brockbright, made murder impossible.

"In planning his swindle, Nick unknowingly interfered with the plans of another criminal. That man was forced to retaliate, to protect his own game. He came to Brockbright's after Nick had been there. He was the second entrant.

"The facts were plain. Only a hidden killer could have done that murder. That was why I searched into Nick Shoyden's past, to learn whose trail he had recently crossed. I came to Midvale; I learned of Rex Jorridon. I marked him as a criminal and looked for his secret game. From the moment when he first hid away a sheet of that telltale paper, I had proof of his crime.

"There stands the murderer of Cyrus Brockbright." The Shadow's forefinger pointed straight to the cowering figure of Jorridon. "His confession can come from his own lips. He knows that further concealment is useless!"

LOWERING his hand, The Shadow turned. Stepping through the doorway, he blended with the darkness. From his lips came an audible laugh, a whispered sibilance of sinister mirth.

The Shadow was leaving Rex Jorridon, murderer and counterfeiter, in the hands of the law. He was going back through the secret tunnel to the creek. The Shadow had other scores to settle with another man of crime: Nick Shoyden.

Paths had changed. While Joe Cardona and Vic Marquette held the criminal that both wanted, The Shadow was undertaking a task of his own; one for which he had made individual preparation. Apparently Cardona and Marquette had seen the last of The Shadow in connection with this case.

Still, there could be causes for those separated paths to cross again. Surprise lay in store for both The Shadow and the law.

CHAPTER XIX. CRIME'S LAST THRUSTS

To Joe Cardona, the most pressing of all matters was to hear Jorridon talk. One look at the murderous crook told Joe that Jorridon had given up all hope of bluff.

Jorridon had good reason to quail. He knew that if he failed to blab, The Shadow would visit him at some future time, to jog his reluctant memory.

"Let's hear it, Jorridon!"

Cardona snapped the order, and Jorridon obeyed it. With a hopeless shrug of his shoulders, the murderer began his tale.

"It was Nick Shoyden who dug up Cyrus Brockbright," declared Jorridon. "Nick must have seen the old bird hereabouts and thought he could sell him this farm. I was renting the place, so I'd look poor. When we finished peddling the treasury certificates, I'd have been set to leave here."

Jorridon looked about, to see what effect his confession was having on his men. All looked dejected; none considered it worth while to halt their leader's talk.

"We stayed close to the house," resumed Jorridon. "I passed as an educated mushroom grower.

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Hector Ezra the rest of them, faked that they were hired hands. All except Bogo and Tinker. We had to keep them out of sight. They stayed below, in the printing room.

"One day, Kip Farrick popped in here and wanted to buy the farm. He looked like a crook; I thought maybe he was some stoolie working for the T-men. Down at the bank the next day, I learned that the farm had been sold to a J. J. Burlow. The fellow had given a New York address.

"I went there and finally spotted Kip Farrick. I trailed him to Nick Shoyden's fake real estate office. I overheard them mention a deal with Cyrus Brockbright. I ran into Nick in the corridor outside his office, but he didn't recognize me. He'd only seen me from a distance when he was out here with Kip; and my clothes were different in New York. I was faking a stoop, too, and I had glasses."

Jorridon managed a smile as he recalled his meeting with Nick Shoyden. He had tricked the racketeer on that trip.

"Nick saw Brockbright the next day," continued Jorridon. "By that time, I was keeping close; watching Brockbright's. After Nick came from Brockbright's office, I tagged him all around Times Square. I heard him telephone Brockbright. Nick was going out to Long Island by train. So I did the same.

"Outside of Brockbright's home, I saw Nick go in and come out. I sneaked in and went up to Brockbright's study. I found him sitting there, holding the title deed to this property. He'd bought it from Nick for thirty thousand dollars.

"So I murdered Brockbright." Jorridon shrugged as he spoke. "Why not? It was the one way to clinch things. It threw the blame on Nick. I took the title deed along with me. With it gone, the main link was missing. It meant that I could stay here, finish up and clear out."

Jorridon's eyes narrowed sharply, as they turned toward Joe Cardona.

"WHEN you came here," snapped Jorridon, "it showed that there'd been a leak! You were too close after Nick. I wanted him to stay in the clear for a while. So I grabbed you. Figured I'd keep you a while, then croak you or turn you loose, according to which looked best.

"The next day, Nick and Kip came around here. They've taken over the old Hawkins mansion. They've wanted to snatch me, either thinking I knew too much about them, or guessing that I'm the guy who bumped Brockbright and put them in bad.

"I've been waiting for them. My plan was to give them some fireworks! I figured that whether my crew killed them or simply drove them away, we'd be heroes in either case. I've got the county sheriff all primed to back me up, whatever I do.

"So there's the whole story. I was sitting pretty, just the way I wanted, when you hounds barged in and queered the set-up!"

Angrily, Jorridon kicked aside a chair; he stepped forward with arms upraised. His expression became a glower as he looked from Cardona to Marquette.

"All right," snarled Jorridon. "I'm ready to go! Which one of you monkeys takes me?"

BEFORE Cardona or Marquette could decide, a shout came from a T-man. Joe and Vic responded too late. The connecting door from the barn had sprung open. Framed there was a cunning-faced, squinty man with

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leveled gun. Behind him stood a pair of armed followers.

The T-men shifted to give battle. At that instant, the front door opened and another squad of invaders covered them.

Arms came up; guns dropped. Cardona and Marquette were helpless along with the T-men. Joe stood bewildered; he had never seen these fellows before. Vic simply thought that the squinty man was Nick Shoyden.

The truth dawned when Cardona and Marquette saw Rex Jorridon pick up a revolver from the floor.

"Great stuff, Medloe!" said Jorridon to the squinty man. "I hoped that you had wised to something in New York. Bringing your crew out here was the pay-off I wanted! Did you see anything of Nick Shoyden's outfit?"

Medloe shook his head; pointed backward with one thumb.

"We came in from the upper road."

"We're all set for a get-away," decided Jorridon. "You keep these scummy Feds in a corner, while I take my crew down to the den. We'll clear everything there. After that, we'll make a shambles of the mushroom cellar! Those boxes will make swell coffins for these boobs who tried to nab us!"

While Medloe and five others backed the prisoners to the wall, Jorridon led his own crew from the house. Hector and the rest of them had regained their revolvers. They stacked the shotguns in the corner before they left. Those weapons, though loaded, were merely part of Jorridon's bluff. It was more natural for farm hands to carry shotguns than any other type of weapon.

Medloe told two of his men to gather up the revolvers dropped by the T-men. Cardona's weapons were picked up also. Those two revolvers, formerly owned by crooks, were again in crooked hands.

ALL was silent outside of Jorridon's house when the murderer and his crew went toward the mushroom shed. Hector and Ezra remained outside, to make sure that no trouble came from the creek. They could not hear a single stir in the night air. But there were whispers, fifty yards away, too distant for them to hear.

There, in the darkness, two creeping men had met. They were the foremost of Nick Shoyden's spies, who had been approaching the house at intervals since dark.

"Looks like no go," whispered one. "Jorridon's got too many guys around to-night."

"Yeah," came the response. "We'd better go back an' tell Nick."

The two separated. Too far from the house, they knew nothing of the causes that had brought men from that building to the mushroom shed. There was another watcher, however, who could guess the truth.

That observer was The Shadow. He had come up from the creek, closing in to check on Nick's spies after he had noted the position of the assembled crew below. The Shadow lost no time in making his next move.

Swiftly, but silently, The Shadow approached the house. Unseen by Hector and Ezra, he reached a living-room window. He peered in upon the changed scene. The Shadow recognized Medloe; he knew instantly what had happened.

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Surprise attack was possible; but it introduced a terrific hazard. If The Shadow, alone, began gunfire, he could not draw away enough guards to free the prisoners. To make his thrust, The Shadow needed far more tumult than even a pair of automatics could produce.

There was a way to gain the effect he needed. Swiftly, The Shadow left the window, skirted through darkness past the mushroom shed. Rising, out of view from the house, The Shadow blinked a flashlight.

Two short blinks and a long one. The Shadow counted five. Then gave a long flash and two short ones. The signal given, The Shadow moved back toward the farmhouse.

He had not long to wait beside the window. His signal had been seen by Nick before the creeping spies had returned. Confident that an attack was possible, Nick's whole crew were coming up the hill. A thug stumbled as they neared the mushroom cellar. Instantly, lanterns glowed in the hands of Hector and Ezra.

Guns barked from the fists of Nick's full crew. Shots were blasting along a wide front. Hector and Ezra opened fire of their own, dousing their lanterns as they did. Up from the cellar came Jorridon and the others, to join the battle.

Inside the house, The Shadow saw Medloe wheel to the door. The squinty crook ordered three of his men outside. As they went, he turned toward the prisoners to yap:

"A move from any one of you we'll pump you full of lead "

MEDLOE'S threat ended as The Shadow crashed the window sash with a mighty sledge of an automatic. Coming through from darkness, he aimed a gun for Medloe. The squinty crook swung to fire. The Shadow's first shot dropped him.

Medloe's last pair of followers had the bead on The Shadow as he cleared the window sill. Viciously, they wanted to get the cloaked foe whom they recognized; but they never had a chance. The Shadow had counted on what was coming.

Marquette, Cardona and a flood of T-men landed on the crooks and bowled them to the floor. They pounded the thugs into complete senselessness; snatched away their guns, to prepare for coming fray. It was due. Medloe's other three men had heard the shots and were coming back through the front.

The Shadow halted them in the doorway. His quick barrage clipped one and sent the others scudding. Joe, Vic and the T-men were grabbing the stacked shotguns. Led by The Shadow, they sallied forth. The closest point of attack was the entrance to the mushroom cellar. The Shadow's automatics tongued an opening fire toward that spot.

Jorridon and his crew responded. They had no other choice, for the attack was a flank one. Until then, they had been shooting over the top of the shed, keeping Nick's horde at a distance. Revolvers barked in reply to The Shadow's first fire; but the crooks found their fusillade short-lived.

Marquette and his T-men let them have it with the shotguns. Those double-barreled weapons were loaded with solid ball cartridges. Crooks were easy targets, congregated at the doorway of the mushroom cellar. They sprawled all about the steps.

The Shadow led the dash that brought the T-men to the crippled crooks. Nick's outfit ceased its fire, thinking that some of their own men had outflanked Jorridon. Cardona and Marquette snatched up unfired revolvers; T-men did the same. The Shadow opened the next attack across the top of the shed.

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This time, Nick and his mobbies were the targets. Spreading, the crooks from across the creek withstood the first fire; then charged the low shed. T-men were out of ammunition; only The Shadow was keeping up the defense, with a spare brace of automatics. Crime seemed to have gained the edge.

Then came the counterthrust.

Lights blinked from the lower slope. Rifles began to crackle, as new marksmen spotted the driving crooks. Thugs dropped weapons, threw up their hands in surrender; all but three.

NICK, Kip and Pink were that trio. Savagely, they aimed for the new invaders, only to go sprawling as rifles drilled from closer range. Nick and Pink fell simultaneously. Kip was the last. The ratty crook's face showed an ugly grimace, as he toppled beside the flattened body of Nick Shoyden.

The Shadow was ready atop the shed when a move came from below. Up from the huddled forms of fake farm hands came one attacker. Rex Jorridon had dropped with his wounded crew. He was waiting for his one chance to get The Shadow.

He jabbed a revolver for the cloaked figure. Before he could fire, The Shadow stabbed a shot for the murderer's gun arm.

That bullet was The Shadow's last. He had reserved it for Jorridon. Snarling, the murderer sprang away; broke from the clutch of Cardona and Marquette, who sought equal shares in his capture. Springing from shelter, Jorridon came into the path of gleaming electric lanterns carried by the riflemen who were up from the creek.

There was no mistaking Jorridon's intention to kill. His wounded arm did its best to aim. His face was venomous as he swung about in the light. Rifles crackled spontaneously. Jorridon jolted in air; came down face-first upon the turf. Three bullets had spelled the murderer's finish.

THOUGH amazed by the sudden arrival of so many reserves, Cardona and Marquette were prompt to join the riflemen. They saw a grim-faced man with a sheriff's badge. When he learned who Cardona and Marquette were, he nodded.

"I'm Sheriff Clayborne," he explained. "Over from Yarmouth. Brought along a posse of twenty men. Had a call from a fellow named Vincent. He said I'd find Nick Shoyden and Kip Farrick in the old Hawkins mansion, if I came there soon after nine.

"They weren't there; but there was signs that they had been. Vincent said something about you fellows being over here, looking in on some crooked work done by Rex Jorridon. So we were on our way across when the shooting began.

Again, The Shadow had scored in his moves against men of crime. He had expected to drive back Nick's crew, by starting a surprise fire. He had arranged for the sheriff to be on hand and round up the fleeing crooks. Changing plans, he had counted on the posse to cross the creek and arrive when it did.

Before the sheriff could speak further, his head tilted as though he had heard some unexplainable sound. His hand came up for silence.

Others heard the token that had reached his ears. It came from the path to the glen, a weird, chilling laugh that was ghostlike beneath the starlight.

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The sound faded an eerie, trailing tone that signified departure. Its last echoes answered, responding with their note of triumph. Two listeners Marquette and Cardona recognized that strange symbol of victory; for they had heard it before.

It was the triumph laugh of The Shadow.

Hardly would The Shadow get back to his sanctum in the heart of New York before the call would come for his services in the nation's capital. To Washington, The Shadow would go to lend as Lamont Cranston his aid in uncovering a "Washington Crime" as full of international intrigue as is the Washington Monument high!

Foreign embassies and even the War Department would become involved before The Shadow disclosed the international mastermind behind the "Washington Crime!"

THE END