

# **DOOM ON THE HILL**

Maxwell Grant

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# DOOM ON THE HILL

Maxwell Grant

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## CHAPTER I. THE SHORT ROAD

"FIGURING on reaching New York tonight?"

The filling-station attendant asked the question as he was replacing the cap on the gasoline tank of a trim coupe. The owner of the car, standing with a five-dollar bill in his hand, gave a nod as his response.

"Past eight o'clock now," remarked the gas man, hanging the hose on the standard. "You'll be lucky if you pull in by three in the morning."

"My calculation was two thirty," responded the motorist, as he followed the attendant into the service station. "Twenty miles more along the superhighway; then turn right along the Interstate Trail. Traffic is fairly heavy; but the roads are dry. I can make good time."

"That's the way most of 'em go through," observed the attendant, as he pounded the keys on the cash register.

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"In fact, that's the way I usually advise 'em to go. But I can give you a tip that'll cut off twenty miles."

"Bad roads?"

"Not when they're dry. That's why I'm giving you the tip. There hasn't been a drop of rain in this county during the past three weeks. You take this route I'm showing you and I guarantee you won't have to drop under fifty anywhere along the line."

The attendant unfolded a road map on the desk. He spread it flat and used a pencil to mark the location of this filling station upon the superhighway. The map showed the broad road running in a red line that crossed the Interstate Trail.

With his pencil, the attendant pointed out a diagonal road that was indicated by two thin lines. It formed a connecting link, cutting across from one main road to the other. The motorist nodded as he saw the obvious saving in distance.

"One and two-tenths miles," informed the attendant. "That's all you'll have to go before you strike the short cut. It's a dirt road; but solid as rock. You won't even kick up dust along it. A great bet, when it's dry."

Running his pencil along the short road, the attendant marked an X. The motorist leaned forward with interest. His face showed in the light above the table. A keen-eyed, clean-cut fellow in his early thirties, this chap displayed vigor and self-confidence. The attendant happened to glance up from the map. He grinned.

"I was going to tell you that this is a lonely sort of road," he stated. "But I don't think that would worry a fellow like you. All I'm warning you against is this spot I've put the X on. A grade crossing and a mighty mean one. You can spot it though, if you're looking for it. The road twists and runs along with the track; then cuts over it and twists on the other side."

"I'll be on the lookout," said the motorist, quietly. "What railroad line is it?"

"The Union Valley."

"Many trains at night?"

"Yeah. A freight along about nine; a local comes the other way right after that. The Union Limited blows through along about midnight; then comes the Dairy Express, into New York. More freights after that."

"Nine o'clock," mused the motorist, as he picked up the map and received his change. "I ought to hit that crossing ahead of the freight train."

"Yeah. But keep your eyes open, bud. That clodhopper comes through in a hurry."

THE motorist returned to his coupe. Half a minute later, his car rolled away from the filling station. Two minutes after that, the coupe slowed its pace while the driver, checking by his speedometer, began to watch for the short cut that the map had shown.

Spying the turn-off, the motorist swung away from the superhighway. The coupe rolled smoothly along a solid, well-packed road. The speedometer arrow moved up to the fifty-mile-an-hour mark.

As his car purred rhythmically forward, the driver focused his gaze straight into the glaring path of the headlight. Though his eyes were on the road, his thoughts were far away. He had remembered the

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filling—station man's admonition regarding the grade crossing; he would watch for the danger point automatically when he arrived at the twist in the road. For the present, he had time to devote to speculation.

New York before morning. That was an important goal. For this young man who was speeding eastward was engaged in a service which could not be put aside. His name was Harry Vincent. He was a secret agent of a mysterious being known as The Shadow.

To the world at large, The Shadow was a mysterious master who battled crime. A dweller in darkness, a supersleuth who could follow unknown trails, The Shadow was a fighter who had shattered hordes of crookdom. Public and police believed that The Shadow's headquarters lay in New York; but it was also rumored that his hand reached everywhere that the menace of crime might bring it.

To Harry Vincent, The Shadow was a patient but exacting chief. The Shadow had saved Harry from death on more than one occasion. He had provided his trusted agent with funds and comfortable surroundings; in return, he had demanded prompt and thorough obedience to orders.

There were times when The Shadow's ceaseless battles became the work of a lone hand. During these periods, Harry Vincent was free to journey. Though he welcomed these occasions, Harry never felt regret when he returned to New York. The service of The Shadow offered thrills and adventure which intrigued him.

Messages from The Shadow came from various sources. Harry was a member of a small but highly-trained group of workers. Like the others, he did not know the identity of The Shadow. Ten days ago, the quiet voice of an agent named Burbank had informed Harry that he could leave New York. This message had come over the telephone.

Harry had gone home to Michigan. Yesterday morning, he had received a telegram from an investment broker named Rutledge Mann. That message had referred to securities; to Harry it had meant that he must be back in New York within forty-eight hours. Harry had set out promptly from the little town of Colon.

New York! New adventure! Harry's mind was considering past episodes when his eyes saw a sharp turn to the right. This was the danger spot. Harry slackened speed and guided his car around the bend. As the road turned crazily upward to the left, he shoved the car into second and approached the grade crossing.

All clear. The coupe jounced across the tracks; then down the other side. A sharp turn to the right; then a curve to the left. Harry stepped on the accelerator as he approached a grade ahead. This was hilly country.

Easy curves required careful driving, but did not greatly hamper speed. The contour of the road became intriguing to Harry as soon as he had passed the railway crossing. The thick darkness outside the path of the headlights seemed as heavy as a shroud of solid blackness.

Each curve betokened adventure. At one turn, a dirt road cut in from the right. At another, the whiteness of an abandoned quarry loomed ghostlike on the left. As the road twisted lazily along the side of a sloping, half-wooded hill, Harry began to wonder what the next straight stretch might bring.

PERHAPS it was Harry's intensity of thought; possibly his instinct for adventure was at work. Whichever the case, the driver of the coupe was keyed to alertness as the road made another veer. The glare of the headlights revealed a clump of bushes; as the lights swerved, Harry caught a fleeting impression of something dark, huddled at the side of the road.

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Though his car was clearing the spot in question, Harry followed a sudden impulse. He jammed the brakes. They acted evenly. Without a skid, the powerful coupe came to a smooth stop in the center of the road, almost alongside the spot where the object lay.

Pulling a flashlight from the pocket in the door, Harry stepped from his car. He left the lights on and the motor running. He did not think that he would require more than a minute to satisfy his curiosity. But when Harry Vincent set foot upon the packed dirt of the road, he was scheduling himself for a long stay in this vicinity.

An exclamation of alarm came from Harry's lips as his flashlight picked out the huddled object in the road. There, Harry saw the folds of a heavy, dark overcoat. Rumpled crazily, the garment bulged high; as Harry approached, he saw two shoes projecting from one side of the coat.

All was silent here in the night. After a moment's pause, Harry Vincent stooped. He hesitated, almost sensing that eyes were watching him from somewhere. Then, shaking off the nervous impression, Harry clutched the overcoat and swept it free from the form beneath. Steadily, stolidly, Harry stared.

Lying in full view, huddled with face upward, was the body of a man. Rigidly turned toward Harry, with eyes bulging in unseeing stare, was the ashen countenance of an elderly man. Gray hair, rumpled above the thin, dried countenance, was proof that the man's age was past sixty.

But this was not all that startled Harry Vincent. The man's silence, his position – these were but preliminary proofs of foul play. The flashlight showed other evidence of more horrifying nature.

Coat and vest were open as testimony of a bitter struggle. A white shirt showed clearly in the light. The center of that shirt was crimson; it bore the singing marks of flame around a spot that indicated the victim's heart.

This elderly man had been attacked in the darkness. His struggles against a fiendish foe had been to no avail. However well he might have protected himself, the victim had succumbed to his enemy's last resort.

The man in the road had been shot through the heart. His killer had flung the overcoat upon his form and had taken flight from the scene of crime. Harry Vincent, speeding through the night, had stopped to uncover the body of a murdered man!

## CHAPTER II. THE LONE HOUSE

HARRY VINCENT was grim when he returned to his coupe. He had taken a short road to save time. He realized now that it would be impossible for him to reach New York before dawn. As an agent of The Shadow, Harry had been trained to the important duty of following any trail of crime that his path might cross.

The first step was to report this murder. Miles between two traveled highways, Harry was in a spot that seemed desolate. Yet his keenness told him that a town could not be far away. The proof of this conjecture lay in the railroad crossing that he had passed less than two miles back.

There must be towns along the line of the Union Valley and Harry was sure that he could find one without taking to the ties. He recalled a road that had cut in from the right. As he remembered it, that dirt highway had followed the direction of the railroad. Acting upon this recollection, Harry swung the coupe about.

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He found his road after a mile of driving. It proved to be rough and stony. Moreover, as Harry slackened his speed to twenty miles an hour, he noted that this road was swinging along the base of the hillside. It was evidently an old lower road that had been superseded by the one along the slope.

One mile back along the upper road; one curving mile along the lower. Harry realized that a person cutting across fields and through wooded patches could reduce the trip to half a mile. This was when he began to wonder if he had followed the best course. As the question perplexed him, he saw a house ahead.

It was a good-sized building, on the side of the road toward the hill. Harry surmised that its owner must be a man of means. Lights glimmered dully from windows on the first floor and the second. Another lighted window on the third story looked like an indication of servants in the place.

Harry found a driveway and entered. He swung his car up to the front door. He alighted and found a bell with his flashlight. It was an old-fashioned device, with a knob projecting from the center of the door. When Harry twisted the knob, the clangor of the bell was followed by echoes that seemed to come from the recesses of the building.

Harry waited half a minute. Then he rang again. Just as he was about to ring the bell for the third time, he caught the sound of footsteps from the stairs. A heavy, middle-aged woman appeared in the dim hall. She was attired in an old dressing gown, which she held bundled with one hand. Harry saw her by peering through tiny panes of glass beside the door; when the woman arrived, she stared back just as Harry stepped away from the window.

A LIGHT flashed on from a little projecting roof above Harry's head. Harry stepped into view as the woman again peered from the window. Seeing his friendly face, the woman unbolted the door and opened it.

"You want to see Mr. Breck, yah?" the woman questioned.

"Yes," responded Harry. "I should like to see him at once."

"I think he is gone out," informed the woman, making ready to close the door.

"Wait a moment." Harry stopped the closing door. "I have come here to report a – an accident."

"You mean someone hurt?"

"Yes. Up on the road along the hill. It is important that I bring aid. Do you have a telephone here?"

"Yah."

The woman stepped aside to let Harry enter. Half friendly, half suspicious, she conducted the young man through a well-furnished hall into a living room. This was a comfortable apartment, well-stocked with books. The woman pointed to the telephone, which rested on a wallbox equipped with a bell handle.

Harry lifted the receiver and whirled the handle. He was forced to repeat the operation before he received a response in the voice of a lazy rural operator.

"I am speaking from the home of Mr. Breck," stated Harry. "I want to talk to the police – or the authorities – at once. It is important."

"I'll ring the sheriff for you," came the operator's reply.

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Harry edged a glance toward the heavy woman. She was standing in the center of the room, listening intently to all he said. He wondered what her reaction would be when she learned that a murder, not an accident, was the subject upon which he had called the sheriff.

A gruff voice sounded its "hello" across the wire. Harry inquired if he were speaking to the sheriff. He received an affirmative response. Harry announced that he was speaking from the home of Mr. Breck; then he plunged into his statement.

"My name is Vincent," explained Harry. "Driving through to New York along the road on the hill. Found a body in the road! Looks like a murder, sheriff."

"What's that? Murder?" The questions were sharp ones. "You're at Breck's you say? Wait for me. I'll be there with my men."

"Very well, sir." Harry eyed the woman as he spoke. "I shall be ready to lead you to the place."

"Hold on," came the sheriff's voice. "Do you have a description of the man?"

"I can give it to you when you reach here."

"I want it now."

"All right." Harry felt annoyed by the sheriff's gruff-voiced delay. "The man was about sixty years of age. Medium height, wiry build. He had gray hair and a thin sort of face, while his eyes – I saw them bulging – were gray and –"

Harry had forgotten the woman standing in the room. As he reached the final point of his telephoned description, a shrill cry came from her lips. Looking up, Harry saw her clutch her hands to her heart and waver toward the floor.

"Trouble here, sheriff!" blurted Harry, into the mouthpiece. "Hurry out!"

HE flung the receiver on the hook and leaped to aid the woman before she slumped. At the same instant, another figure came dashing in from the door of the room. As Harry caught the woman, he found himself facing a long-faced, solemn fellow who bore the look of a servant. Together, they aided the woman to a couch, where she sank against the cushions and began to moan.

"Who are you, sir?" demanded the long-faced man. "What is the trouble? What has happened?"

"Didn't you hear me talking to the sheriff?" questioned Harry.

"Yes, sir." The servant hesitated. "I mean no, sir. I saw you from the door, but I couldn't catch your words."

"Murder," said Harry, tersely. "On the hill road. The woman was listening to my description of the victim. It must have overcome her."

"I understand, sir," said the servant, with a nod. "I am Craven, Mr. Grantham Breck's butler. Johanna" – he indicated the woman on the couch – "has these fainting spells quite often. I shall summon Adele, the cook."

Craven hurried from the room. Harry heard his footsteps pounding up the stairs. The man bellowed from above; there was an answer. Soon, a tall, stoop-shouldered woman appeared. Like Johanna, Adele was

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wearing a dressing gown. Evidently all the servants except Craven had retired for the night.

Johanna had been moaning at intervals while Harry watched her; but her condition had given Harry no cause for alarm. It was only when Harry turned toward the couch that the moans became most noticeable. Harry could not restrain the impression that Johanna was faking.

Adele, the cook, was both apprehensive and talkative. She worried for a bit; then as she placed a pillow under Johanna's head, she spoke in words that were half to Johanna, half to Harry.

"Poor soul!" exclaimed Adele. "She has been working too hard. Yes, sir, she has. Any one that visits this house can tell you the same, sir. There should be a dozen servants to keep the place tidied up as Mr. Breck wants it.

"There, there, Johanna. Rest a bit. I'll fetch you a drink of water. Yes, sir, it's a housekeeper that Johanna is; and a housekeeper should be giving orders – not always doing all the housework herself.

"It's been a wonder to me that something like this hasn't happened long ago. But you haven't had time, have you, Johanna, to be ill like this? No, sir – she's always on the go, working all hours of the day. Wait here, sir, while I fetch the water."

Johanna had closed her eyes and was lying silent. Harry's gaze narrowed as the young man turned toward the doorway. Craven had not returned. That was the first point that made him ponder. Another important factor was Adele's statement that Johanna had been working steadily. It belied Craven's claim that the housekeeper had been subject to frequent fainting spells.

HARRY was about to go and look for the butler when Adele returned. She was carrying a bottle of ammonia and a glass of water. She thrust the latter into Harry's hands, while she uncorked the ammonia and held it under Johanna's nose. The effect was electric. The housekeeper gasped and sat up, thrusting the bottle away from her.

Adele pushed the bottle into Harry's hands and grabbed the glass. She made Johanna drink the water; then stood back and smiled as the housekeeper rubbed her head and blinked. Adele seemed pleased at the effectiveness of her emergency methods. To Harry, however, the housekeeper's quick recovery was reason for new suspicion.

A few minutes passed while the cook made Johanna more comfortable on the couch. Harry began to edge for the door, hoping to gain some sign of Craven. Then came the sudden clang of the big bell.

"Craven will answer it, sir," announced Adele. "Stay right here, sir."

Again the clang. Still no sign of Craven. Harry turned to the cook.

"How far is it from town?" he questioned.

"To Chanburg, sir?" asked Adele. "Less than two miles, sir, by the short road that comes in below the house \_"

"Then that's the sheriff," broke in Harry, as the clang came with violence. "I'll answer the door myself, since Craven is not about."

With that statement, The Shadow's agent hurried out into the hallway. Grim as he hastened to admit the sheriff, Harry Vincent was forming a quick theory based upon Johanna's fainting spell and Craven's absence.

Harry Vincent was convinced that the dead man on the hill could be none other than Grantham Breck, the absent master of this house!

### CHAPTER III. NEW MYSTERY

WHEN Harry Vincent opened the front door of the house, an angry-faced man stalked in and glowered at The Shadow's agent. The newcomer was a husky fellow. His old, unpressed suit added to his rough appearance, while the badge that glimmered from his vest was token of his identity.

"I'm Sheriff Forey," the big man announced. "Tim Forey from down in Chanburg. Are you the fellow that called me over the telephone?"

"Yes," responded Harry.

"What did you say your name was?" questioned the sheriff. "Vincent?"

"Yes. Harry Vincent."

Three grim-faced men had followed Forey into the hall. They were wearing deputy badges. Their gaze was challenging on account of their chief's anger.

"What did you cut off the call for?" demanded Forey. "What happened here?"

"The housekeeper fainted," explained Harry, indicating the room where Johanna was still resting on the couch. "I had to catch her before she fell to the floor."

"I see. Well, it broke up that description you were giving me. Where's Mr. Breck?"

"The housekeeper said that he was out. She let me use the phone to call you."

"All right. But say" – the sheriff's eyes were suspicious – "for a fellow that was in all the hurry you were, it seems funny you left me standing outside this door. Why didn't you answer my first ring?"

"The butler was around," responded Harry, calmly. "I expected him to answer. I was in the living room. I came to the door when the butler failed to show up."

"All right." Again, the sheriff was abrupt. "Suppose we run up to the road and find that body."

"I was about to suggest it," put in Harry, quietly. "Otherwise you may be getting more calls from tourists who come through."

"On that road?" demanded the sheriff as he motioned Harry through the door. "Not a chance. Say, fellow, you're probably the first one who came through there this week. This your car here?"

Harry acknowledged ownership of the coupe. The sheriff ordered his men into the touring car which they had come in. He entered the coupe with Harry. Forey spoke as Harry started the car out into the road.

"Thought you said you were going into New York," remarked the sheriff.

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"I was," replied Harry, as he picked a course to avoid the bumps.

"You've got a New York license," said Forey. "I thought maybe you might have been coming from the city."

"I left there ten days ago," explained Harry. "I drove out to Michigan to see the folks. I was on the trip back."

"What part of Michigan?"

"St. Joe's County."

"How'd you happen to take this road?"

HARRY explained the episode at the filling station. He pulled the map from the pocket of the door, with the statement that the service-station man had marked the railroad crossing. For the first time the sheriff appeared amiable.

"Wondered why you came through this way," remarked Forey. "Most people duck the short cut. I figured somebody round here must have told you about it."

They had reached the hill road; the touring car close behind. Harry swung the coupe to the right. The sheriff put another question:

"How far from here to where the body is?"

"A bit over eight-tenths of a mile," replied Harry. "We'll be there when the trip-dial shows" – he leaned forward – "when it shows ninety-six and five tenths."

"That's funny," growled Forey.

"What is?" queried Harry.

"That you knew how far it was from here to the place you found the body. What's the idea? Why'd you begin clocking from this junction point?"

There was renewed suspicion in the sheriff's tone. While Tim Forey waited for a reply, Harry chuckled. This seemed to anger Forey.

"Well?" he growled. "Give me your answer. Why did you start clocking when you passed the lower road?"

"I didn't," laughed Harry.

"Then how do you know the distance?" queried Forey.

"After I found the body," explained Harry, "I remembered seeing a road that I had passed. So I turned the car around, noted the registration on the speedometer, and set out. I wanted to be sure of the distance to the body, so I clocked it coming back."

Forey emitted a gruff "huh." Harry smiled. He felt that his explanation had settled the sheriff. He could see that Forey was hard-boiled only on the surface. There should be no trouble from now on. Harry began to slow the car.

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"Tenth of a mile more," remarked Forey, as Harry glanced toward the speedometer.

"Yes," said Harry, "but I want you to see what I saw. Just as I finished this turn in the road, the lights glared toward the bushes on the right. That's when I glimpsed the body."

Harry had slackened to ten miles an hour. Forey was staring with him into the headlight glow. Bushes alone greeted their vision.

"I must have swung wide before," decided Harry. "I was traveling pretty fast. Funny, though, we didn't see –"

"Five tenths," put in Forey.

Harry braked the car. He knew that he had reached the spot. He clambered from the driver's seat and swung around the back of the coupe, glimmering his flashlight. Forey met him there; the deputies piled out of the touring car and flickered their own torches.

"Right over in here," declared Harry, sweeping the beam of his light.

"Yeah?" questioned the sheriff. "I don't see a body lying round."

"It was here –"

Harry paused. A deputy had gone back to the touring car. There was a click as the man turned on the searchlight that was mounted by the hood. A brilliant glare swept the side of the road for a space of a hundred yards.

Bewildered, Harry Vincent turned to face Sheriff Tim Forey, who was staring at him steadily. For the first time tonight, The Shadow's agent became confused.

"I was sure," stammered Harry, "sure that this was the spot. Positive, sheriff – yes – just as – just as certain as we're standing here right now. Yet – yet –"

"The body isn't here," put in Forey. "Which means that you've dragged us out here on a hoax."

"No!" protested Harry. "Why should I be such a fool as to do that? I tell you, sheriff, the body was here! Within ten feet of where I'm standing now! There's only one answer sheriff."

"Yeah? Let's hear it."

Harry saw that the man was unconvinced. Promptly, The Shadow's agent resolved upon a bold stroke that he knew would bring Forey a jolt.

"One answer, sheriff," Harry repeated, in steady tones. "Someone has removed the body of Grantham Breck!"

## CHAPTER IV. THE SHADOW LEARNS

"GRANTHAM BRECK!"

Sheriff Forey's square jaw dropped as the official repeated the name that Harry Vincent had uttered. Until that moment, Forey had regarded Harry as the possible perpetrator of a hoax. Forey had begun to doubt the story of an unidentified body in the road. But this mention of the name of Grantham Breck produced sharp

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suspicion in the sheriff's mind.

"Grantham Breck," declared Harry, with a sober nod. "Yes, sheriff, I believe that he was the dead man."

"So you knew Breck, eh?" challenged Forey. "Then you had a reason to be coming through here. I thought so. Say, fellow, what's your game? Come clean."

"I have no game," returned Harry. "I merely want to convince you that I actually found a body at this spot where we are now standing. I want you to know that I have been keenly alert from the moment that I made my discovery until –"

"You knew Breck –"

"I did not know him."

"Then how are you sure that he was the dead man?"

"Let me repeat my description of the body," responded Harry. "The one that I was giving over the phone, but which you received only imperfectly. A man sixty years old, or thereabouts. Of medium height, wiry in build. Gray hair above a thin, peaked face, with eyes that were gray –"

As at the house, an interruption came at this point. Tim Forey uttered a sharp exclamation as he wheeled to the deputies. The men were nodding. They recognized the description. Forey turned back to stare steadily at Harry Vincent.

"Sounds like Breck," asserted the sheriff. "But you're supposed to be a stranger hereabouts. How'd you know who he was?"

"I didn't, at the time I found the body." Harry spoke calmly; for this was the opening he wanted. "But when I called from the house, the woman Johanna cried out while I was giving the description. Then the butler dashed into the room. I am sure that he overheard my description, although he pretended that he had not. Then I became positive that the woman was trying to cover up the excitement that she had displayed.

"I was thinking matters over before you arrived, sheriff. It's only a half mile or so, cross lots, between here and the house. Johanna had told me that Mr. Breck was out. It gave me a hunch that there might be some connection between his absence and the murder on this road. That woman acted scared, sheriff."

"I get you now," growled Tim Forey, standing solemn in the glare of the searchlight. "Any fellow as keen as you ought to know what he's talking about. Take a look around, boys," – this was to the deputies – "and see what you can find. Maybe somebody lugged that body into the bushes."

The deputies began their search. There was no dust on the side of the road – nothing that could have left a trace of the missing body. Nor did the deputies discover any dead form in the bushes. Two of them shifted to the hill side of the road and scrambled about on the slope.

"You're not driving into New York tonight," the sheriff informed Harry. "I'm keeping you here as a material witness. What's more, I want to know something about your business. If you've got any credentials on you, I'd like to see them."

Harry opened the back of the coupe. He produced a briefcase; from it, he removed papers. These were proof that he was a real estate salesman, connected with a budding building development on Long Island. The

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sheriff, nodding in convinced fashion, came across letters from Rutledge Mann. He also found the telegram that Harry had received in Michigan.

"Mann takes care of my investments," explained Harry. "He is a prominent broker in New York. Moreover, he is connected with the real estate development on Long Island. I would like to telegraph him at his home, telling him that I am detained here."

The blare of a distant locomotive whistle came as the sheriff nodded. It was the nine o'clock freight, running late. The engineer was blowing for the road crossing.

"What is more," added Harry, "Mann can send you further proof of my identity. Of course, these letters of credit" – Harry was producing a wallet from his pocket – "can establish me for the present. If you need further information –"

"This is enough," interrupted the sheriff. "I guess you're all right, Vincent. But you'd better shoot that wire right away. Too bad I've got to keep you here, if you were supposed to be in New York tomorrow morning."

"Oh, Mann will understand," stated Harry.

The deputies were coming back to the road. They shook their heads as they faced the sheriff. Forey nudged his thumb toward the lower side of the road.

"Two of you fellows cut through to Breck's place," ordered the sheriff. "One of you drive the touring car around. Get the servants together and chin a bit with them. But don't ask them any questions until I show up with Vincent. We're going over to the depot in his car. Sending a wire."

HARRY and Forey entered the coupe. Harry swung the car about at the sheriff's order. They rolled back to the old road, then headed for the house, with the touring car following. When they reached the gloomy building, Forey ordered Harry to keep on. They came to the town road, one hundred yards past the house. Here Harry was ordered to turn right; a straight stretch followed; then Forey ordered another right turn on a road that cut over toward the railway.

"The station is about a mile from town," explained Forey. "Midway between town and that grade crossing you came over. These roads curve around worse than snakes."

The blare of a locomotive whistle; the sound of a slackening rattle – these were evident as Harry took a bend. The sheriff grunted.

"Inbound local," was his comment. "Just past the grade crossing. We'll get there with it."

The prediction was correct. A final twist in the road brought the coupe up to a little railroad station. Simultaneously, a two-car train coasted out from among the trees. Harry saw rails glimmer in the glare of the locomotive's headlight. He heard the ringing of the bell.

"Sit tight," growled Forey, as Harry drew up near the station. "There's people getting on and off. There's Zach Hoyler, the station agent, out on the platform. We'll wait until he goes back in."

A few automobiles were waiting by the station. Passengers from the local entered them. The locomotive bell began in response to the conductor's pull of the bell cord. Harry saw the station agent, a tall, stoop-shouldered fellow in shirt sleeves, as he sauntered back into the little depot. The parked cars rolled away.

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"Come on," ordered the sheriff.

WHEN Harry and Forey entered the station, they found the agent behind the ticket window. Dull eyes peered toward the visitors; then a pleasant grin appeared upon the agent's face as the man recognized the sheriff.

"Hello, Tim," greeted Hoyler.

"Hello, Zach," returned Forey. "Meet Mr. Vincent. Friend of mine from New York."

A quizzical look appeared upon Hoyler's tired face as the fellow shook hands with the sheriff's companion. Harry classified the agent as a typical key-pounder who served as telegraph operator as well as station master. Hoyler showed signs of long resignation.

"Vincent is sending a telegram," remarked Forey. "Give him a blank, Zach."

The agent complied. Harry looked at Forey and raised his eyebrows. The sheriff nodded and spoke in response to the quiet question.

"Say what you want," he ordered. "But keep it kind of quiet. Say, Zach" – he turned to the station agent – "who went out on that local just now?"

"Only Pete Lovel and Bill Crowder," replied the station agent. "Going down to Laporte for the evening. Came over in Scully's old cab."

"When are they coming back?"

"On the Union Limited. Heard them tell Scully to meet it."

"Anybody else around here?"

"Couple of the town boys. Jeff Wheaton and a pal of his. Walked in about half past seven and bummed around. They picked up a ride, I reckon, in one of those cars that was going back to town."

"Humph." The sheriff looked around to make sure that no one had entered; then he turned to the agent again. "Listen, Zach, I don't want anything said about my being over here. There's been a little trouble and I want it kept quiet."

"Sure thing, Tim. What's up?"

"Vincent here found a fellow lying on the hill road. Thought the man was dead and so he called me up from Breck's place. When we went back to the road, the man had gone."

"Wasn't dead after all?"

"No. But I didn't like the looks of it, so Vincent is going to stay over at Breck's until tomorrow. We're going to look around some in the daytime."

"Got old Breck kind of worried, eh?"

"Not him." Forey laughed. "He don't give a whoop. But I'm thinking about Ezekiel Twinton, up on the hill. He puts up a yap all the time. Scary fellow – always thinks there's prowlers on his place. So this time I'm

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going to tell him I've been on the job. How about that telegram, Vincent? Got it ready?"

Harry nodded and passed the yellow sheet to the sheriff. Forey smiled approvingly as he read the message to Rutledge Mann.

"Detained in Chanburg," said the sheriff, reading aloud. "Send full credentials care of Grantham Breck. Wire regarding securities."

The sheriff thrust the telegram through the window. He grunted a good-bye to the agent; then paused to add final words of admonition.

"Nobody knows I was here," reminded Forey. "Nobody knows that wire went out. Got the idea, Zach?"

"Count on me, Tim," responded the agent, as he placed the telegram on the table beside the telegraph key.

Harry followed Forey from the station. As they circled the little building, Harry was on the point of pausing. He was gripped momentarily by the same impression that he had gained on the hill road. He felt that eyes were watching him from somewhere outside the station. He was sure that a slight crunching sound had given him the idea.

Though the impression faded, Harry still felt uneasy as he entered the coupe. Nevertheless, he said nothing to Tim Forey. Harry felt that he had gained the sheriff's confidence. He believed that it would be unwise to suggest anything that might make Forey return to his original doubts of Harry's capability as a witness.

YET Harry Vincent might well have told Tim Forey of his impressions by the station. A quick investigation with flashlights would have proven that someone was near by. Two minutes after the coupe had rolled from the station, footsteps crunched upon the gravel of the driveway. A stocky, muffled figure appeared upon the lighted platform and moved stealthily toward the door. A gray-gloved hand turned the knob. A blunt, heavy-lipped countenance showed in the light of the waiting room as the intruder entered and moved softly toward the ticket window.

Zach Hoyler heard a footstep. He looked up quickly from his table and came promptly to his feet. Then he recognized the hard countenance that showed through the grille. His alarm changed to wearied annoyance.

"You again, eh?" he questioned. "Say, Nubin, if all the dicks on this line were like you, the agents would go goofy. I thought you went out of here on the afternoon express."

"I did," responded the hard-faced man with a grin. "But I came in on Number 42, ten minutes ago."

"Yeah? I didn't see you get off."

"Nobody sees Perry Nubin when he don't want to be seen. I dropped off on the other side of the train."

"Kelly didn't say anything about you being with him."

"That dumb conductor? He didn't know I was riding Number 42. I travel incognito, Hoyler."

"Maybe you do," snorted the agent. "And maybe you only rode the afternoon express down to the B and R crossing. Maybe you disguised yourself as a track-walker and hit it back along the ties."

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"Or maybe I came in on the freight, eh? Well – I didn't do either. I rode in on Number 42, like I just told you. Say, Hoyler – what was the sheriff doing here?"

"Saying hello."

"Yeah? And the bird with him. The guy that sent the telegram?"

"Snooping through windows, eh?" grunted Hoyler. "No wonder you got bounced off the payroll of the B and R. They hire real dicks, not snoopers."

"Answer my question," growled Nubin. "The guy sent a telegram. Pass it over. I want to read it."

Hoyler hesitated; then grinned. He picked up Harry's message and passed it through the window. Nubin read it with furrowed brow; then he glared at the agent.

"That ain't the whole story," remarked the railroad detective. "What's it all about? What did the sheriff say to you?"

"He told me to keep my mouth shut," retorted Hoyler. "That's what I'm going to do."

"Not with me," assured Nubin, savagely. "I want the low-down. See? If I don't get it, I'll bust in there and do some key-pounding on my own account. Report to the divisional chief, asking him to relieve you."

"All right," responded Hoyler, wearily. "I guess a smart mug like you could have me fired. I'll tell you all I know; but remember, the sheriff wants it kept mum. It's got nothing to do with this line, anyway."

"Spill it."

"I DON'T know much," admitted Hoyler. "This fellow Vincent came across a guy lying on the hill road. He reported it to Tim Forey. I suppose he made the call from old Breck's house."

"The lawyer who lives at the bottom of the hill? The bird that used to practice in New York?"

"Yeah. Well, anyway, Vincent must have thought the guy on the road was dead. But when he and Tim Forey went back there, they couldn't find him. So Tim is keeping Vincent at Breck's over night."

"Is Breck worried?"

"Tim Forey says no. But he said Ezekiel Twinton, the old land-owner on the hill, might raise a squawk if he heard about the case. That's why Vincent is staying here over night."

"What else did the sheriff say?"

"Nothing. Except to ask who'd been around here when the local came in. I told him. Only townfolk. If I'd known you came in on Number 42, I might have given you honorable mention."

"Lay off that!" exclaimed Nubin, angrily. "Look here, Hoyler. No matter who tells you to keep mum, you talk to me. See? But when I come around you say nothing. Get that?"

"Sure. But quit sneaking in on me. I'll go goofy if you keep it up."

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"Goofy? You mean maybe you'll stow a bottle in that table drawer."

Zach Hoyler set his pale lips as he stared through the window. He seemed to resent the detective's insinuation. Nubin smiled in sneering fashion. Hoyler snapped a retort.

"Just because the last two fellows hit the booze here is no reason to suspect me," declared the agent. "I haven't touched a drop since I came on the trick three months ago. I figured you for a small-timer, Nubin, when I heard you had come down from the B and R to the Union Valley. But I didn't think you were cheesy enough to spend your time trying to pin something on a little fellow like me."

"That's just one of my jobs," growled the detective. "Well, don't worry. Just keep sober, that's all. Think I'll move down to the crossing. Pick up the Dairy Express when she stops there.

"I might be back, though" – the dick paused warningly – "because the time a fellow would look for his bottle would be during the next few hours. It's a long wait here, Hoyler, until those two trains come through around midnight."

The agent smiled as indication of his sobriety. Perry Nubin passed the telegram back through the window. He stalked toward the door; then paused.

"I'm forgetting about the sheriff," he remarked. "Anything that happens off the right of way don't interest me. So long, Hoyler."

When the detective had gone, Zach Hoyler took Harry Vincent's telegram and clicked it over the wire. That job finished, the agent walked out on the platform and strolled about the station, swinging a lantern. This was an inspection duty that he performed at intervals between trains. He saw no sign of Perry Nubin during his tour.

THE telegram went through promptly. Less than an hour after the station agent had dispatched it, the wire was reaching its final destination in New York. White hands were beneath bluish lamplight in the corner of a dark-enshrouded room – The Shadow's sanctum.

A light glimmered as a tiny spot upon the wall. The hands reached for earphones. A sinister whisper sounded in the gloom. A quiet voice came over the wire:

"Burbank speaking."

"Report."

"Report from Mann. Wire from Vincent –"

The Shadow listened while Burbank repeated the message. The earphones clattered back to the wall. A hand wrote a note in ink of vivid blue, inserted the paper in an envelope and used another pen to address the letter to Rutledge Mann, Badger Building, New York.

The bluish light clicked out. A sinister, shuddering laugh rose to a crescendo, then shivered into ghoulish echoes. When those creepy reverberations ended, silence lay within the blackened sanctum.

The Shadow had learned the import of Harry Vincent's relayed message. The significance lay in the expression "send full credentials." That one word, "full," denoted both mystery and tragedy. Unsolved crime had been reported to The Shadow by his agent.

The Shadow had departed from his sanctum. Though it was nearing midnight, the master was responding promptly to the lure of mystery. Before dawn hovered above the little town of Chanburg, The Shadow, creature of darkness, would be there.

## CHAPTER V. THE SHADOW ARRIVES

MIDNIGHT. Sheriff Tim Forey and Harry Vincent were seated in Grantham Breck's living room. The deputies were strolling about the house, keeping a watchful eye upon the kitchen, where the three servants formed a silent group.

"All right," growled Forey. "Bring them in, Hank."

One of the deputies responded. A few minutes later, Johanna, Adele and Craven filed into the living room. They stood like prisoners before the bar. Johanna was pale; Adele looked scared; only Craven appeared normal, but his face was morose.

"I want to talk to you folks," growled Forey as he paced back and forth before the group. "I haven't said anything yet, because I've been waiting for your master to show up. It's midnight. He's not back. So I'm sure something is wrong."

Stopping, the sheriff stared at Johanna. The pale housekeeper placed her hands to her heart. Forey laughed gruffly.

"No use of faking again," he declared. "You're well enough to talk."

"I did not feel good," protested Johanna. "I tell you true, Mr. Forey. I was very sick. I was –"

"You passed out for a start," broke in Forey. "After that you faked it. Talk straight, Johanna. What was it that frightened you? Something that Mr. Vincent said over the telephone?"

"That was right, Mr. Forey," admitted Johanna. "It was all very bad when I heard him say that someone had been murdered."

"Wait a minute. Vincent was watching you when he first spoke. That wasn't when you began to faint. It was when he described the body that he had found."

Johanna began to tremble. Staring steadily, Forey growled another question:

"Did you think from what he said that the dead man might have been Grantham Breck?"

Johanna nodded, weakly.

"You were right, Vincent," declared the sheriff, turning to The Shadow's agent. "Now, Johanna" – again Forey gazed at the housekeeper – "do you know where Mr. Breck went tonight?"

"No, sir." The woman's voice rang true. "But he goes out more than once at night. I have seen him. Yah!"

"You mean more than once tonight? Or other nights?"

"Other nights."

## DOOM ON THE HILL

"By the front door or the back?"

"By the little side door, Mr. Forey."

"The side door? Where is it located?"

"At the foot of a little stairway, sir," put in Craven. "Mr. Breck reached it from the landing by his little study on the second floor."

"A secret entrance, eh?" quizzed Forey.

"Not exactly, sir," explained Craven. "But it is a very convenient mode of entry. One that would not be easily noted."

"Take a look up there, Hank," ordered the sheriff. "Since you've started to talk, Craven, maybe you can tell us more. Did you hear Vincent's description over the telephone?"

CRAVEN hesitated. He glanced at Johanna and saw that the housekeeper had weakened. Craven nodded solemnly; then spoke in a sincere tone.

"I'm sorry, sir," he explained. "When I came in here, I saw a stranger at the telephone. I heard him give a description that answered to Mr. Breck. Then Johanna fainted. I said nothing, sir, for I feared that the master would be annoyed when he returned."

"But you knew Breck was dead."

"How so, sir?"

"By what Vincent said."

"I was not sure, sir."

Hank had returned. He informed Forey that he had been in the study. He gave a description of the room and the stairway to the side door.

"Desk – tables – books on shelves along the wall," stated the deputy. "Everything in order. Looked in the closet. Nobody there. The side door was locked, Tim."

"Bolted?"

"No. Just locked."

"All right. I'll go up there later. We've got your story, Johanna. You're all right, Adele. But I want to talk to you some more, Craven. Where did you go after you left Mr. Vincent here?"

"To call Adele, sir," replied the butler.

"I know that," growled Forey. "I mean after that. Why weren't you here to answer the door bell when I arrived?"

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"I went to the master's study, sir," replied Craven. "I was alarmed by what I had heard. Not finding Mr. Breck, I tapped at the door of his bedroom. There was no response. And then –"

"Yes?"

"I believe that harm must have befallen Mr. Breck. I thought of the side door. I had been in my quarters on the third floor all evening; I had not heard the master go out. But I went down to the side door."

"Was it locked?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then what did you do?"

"I opened the side door, sir –"

"The locked door?"

"I have a duplicate key, sir." Craven produced the object and handed it to Forey. "I began to look about, off beyond the house."

"You mean you went up to the hill road," challenged Forey.

"No, sir!" exclaimed Craven. "Indeed not! I feared that Mr. Breck might have been injured; that he might be coming in toward the house. I was looking about when your car arrived, sir."

"Humph," grunted the sheriff. "Was he here when you got back, Hank?"

"Came down the stairs about ten minutes after we got in," declared the deputy.

"I had returned to my quarters, sir," said Craven, to Forey.

"All right," decided the sheriff. "We've established this much. Grantham Breck was accustomed to go in and out of that side door. He could have headed up to the hill. It looks like he was the man Vincent found murdered. Anything else, you two?"

Craven and Johanna shook their heads. It was Adele who burst forth suddenly with an unexpected statement.

"I'LL tell you something!" asserted the cook, with a defiant glance at the other servants. "There was people who came here to see the master. Maybe the same person always; maybe different ones. They came in by that side door."

"How do you know this?" questioned Forey.

"My room was on that side of the house, sir," explained Adele. "I was hearing them – on different nights – and I wondered who they might be. I spoke to Mr. Breck, so I did."

"And what did he say?"

"He was for saying it was my imagination. 'Adele,' says he, 'you'll be telling me next that there is a banshee round this place.' So after that, he gave me a room at the front of the house."

## DOOM ON THE HILL

"How long ago did this happen?"

"'Twas a few weeks past," recalled the cook. "So hearing no more prowlers, I kept to my own business."

"How do you think these visitors came in? Did they have keys of their own?"

"I think not, sir. I'm believing that Mr. Breck was expecting them. He could have gone down that stairway, sir, to let them come into the house."

Sheriff Forey resumed his pacing. When he stopped, he faced both Craven and Johanna. The servants eyed him stolidly. Forey smiled sourly.

"What's your answer?" he demanded. "You've heard Adele's statement. What about these visitors?"

"There may have been such persons, sir," admitted Craven. "My room is also at the front of the house. I heard no one enter at night."

"But you knew that Mr. Breck went out?"

"Yes, sir. Recently he developed that habit."

"Where's your room, Johanna?"

"It was in the front, sir," explained the housekeeper, "until Mr. Breck said to me that I should take the room from Adele. There was nothing to make me know why we should change."

"Did you hear prowlers after you moved to Adele's room?"

"There was nothing that I heard from my room. Perhaps it is that I sleep very good when I have gone to bed."

"All right," declared the sheriff. "That's all. You can go to your rooms, the three of you. Prepare two rooms on the second floor. Some of us will stay here tonight."

WHEN the servants had filed out, Forey beckoned to Harry. The sheriff led the way upstairs; they found Breck's study. The tidiness of the room was a tribute to Johanna's housekeeping. Then Forey located the stairway; he and Harry descended. Forey unlocked the side door and motioned Harry out into the darkness.

"You've clicked with me, Vincent," assured the sheriff, in a low tone. "I believe the man you found was dead. I'm also sure that it was Grantham Breck. He was an odd sort, Breck. Crafty, like most lawyers."

"What could he have been doing up by the hill road?" questioned Harry.

"He might have been going up to see Ezekiel Twinton," replied the sheriff, "but I doubt it. They weren't such good friends. Breck wanted to buy Twinton's property – some of it at least – and there was no sale. Both were sort of sore; but there was no real enmity between them."

"Then Breck would not have been visiting Twinton."

"That's just it. I've got another theory, though. Sometimes an old duck like Breck gets childish. He probably knew that Twinton was scared. Maybe he went up there occasionally to worry Twinton."

## DOOM ON THE HILL

"I see. So Twinton would be scared to remain on the hill?"

"That's my idea. Twinton reported prowlers to me not long ago. I'm not going to bother him tonight, although I'll take a trip in that direction."

"Perhaps Twinton –"

"Ran into Breck?" put in Forey, as Harry paused. "On the road you mean? I don't think so. It's too far below Twinton's property. However, I'll remember that, Vincent. There's a lot to be cleared up. I wish we had found that body."

"You're to stay here, Vincent" – Forey's tone became even more cautious as the sheriff paced out upon the sun-scorched lawn – "because we may find that body and when we do, we'll need your testimony. You'll have a room on the second floor. So will Hank. One of the other deputies will keep watch on the ground floor."

"Meanwhile, we'll think of Craven. He had time to beat us getting up to the hill road; he also had plenty of time to get back down here. It's a tangle, Vincent. We'll talk it over again after a night's sleep. Say – it's a dark night, all right."

As the sheriff paused, Harry thought he caught a rustle of dried grass near the house. He listened intently; but heard no repetition of the sound. Harry followed the sheriff in through the side door. Forey locked the barrier.

A few minutes later, the crouched figure of a man rose dimly from beside the house. The listener had heard all that passed between Tim Forey and Harry Vincent. Straightening, he hurried toward the front road. From there, he took a short cut over toward the station.

When the prowler neared the railroad, he sneaked toward the platform. His stocky form showed in the light. The man who had been by Breck's house was the railroad detective, Perry Nubin. The dick glanced in through a window of the station. He saw Zach Hoyler at the telegraph key. Shuffling away, Nubin walked along the tracks; then, after a pause, he again cut back across fields toward the old house.

The outbound Union Limited had gone through while Tim Forey and Harry Vincent had been waiting to quiz the servants. The inbound Dairy Express was due shortly. Hoyler had to be on duty when the Limited stopped; also when the fast milk train arrived. That would end his trick for the night.

THE Dairy Express was whistling for the grade crossing when Perry Nubin again neared the Breck house. Seated in an upstairs room, Harry Vincent was writing a report by the mild glare of a table lamp. The Shadow's agent heard the distant whistle; he also caught the clang of the bell as the train rolled into the station. Then, amid a lull, Harry was sure that he heard footsteps creaking somewhere in the house. They seemed to be descending stairs.

Hastily folding his half-written report, Harry sprang to the hall. There he found the deputy who had been stationed in an upstairs room – the fellow whom the sheriff had called Hank. On the stairway from the third floor to the second was Craven. The butler stared at the two men.

"Pardon, sir," he said to Harry. "I fancied that I heard the sound of a closing door. I thought that it might be the side exit to the house."

"Go back to bed," ordered Hank. "You got us hopping out here thinking you were some prowler."

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Craven turned and went upstairs. Harry and Hank returned to their rooms. But Harry was thoughtful as he heard the distant clang of the Dairy Express, followed by the chugging of the train from the station. He wondered if Craven had actually heard someone outside the house; or if the butler's statement had been a pretence to cover his own actions.

Harry stared from his window. He saw no one. But he was seen. A chunky man, crouching off by a side fence watched until Harry had gone from the window. Then the fellow cut off toward the hill. It was Detective Perry Nubin. The railroad dick was taking a long route toward the railway. If he left the vicinity tonight, it would be by a freight. The Dairy Express had already pulled away.

Harry finished his report, a matter of several pages, with blue-inked diagrams. He sealed the papers in an envelope and left it on the table. He went to bed; but he did not extinguish the little light. Harry had a reason for letting that glow remain.

THREE hours later, a faint thrum sounded above the town of Chanburg. Then came silence as an autogiro, its motor shut, moved slowly downward toward an open space that lay in the midst of woods. The giro settled like a hovering bird. A soft laugh whispered as a shrouded figure stepped from the strange ship.

Not long afterward, keen eyes were peering from darkness toward the gloomy house of Grantham Breck. Dull lights showed from the living room windows; a deputy was on duty there. The only other window that revealed a glow was that of Harry Vincent's room.

A squidgy sound came from the side of the house. Blackness seemed to project itself inward through Harry's opened window. Solid darkness materialized itself into the weird shape of a fantastic being. A tall, sinister figure garbed in flowing cloak of black, his features obscured by the turned-down brim of a slouch hat. Such was The Shadow.

Harry Vincent was asleep. Gloved hands picked up the envelope from the table. Fingers produced the report. Keen, burning eyes read the full account of Harry's adventures, including the final incident of Craven on the stairs.

Writing faded after The Shadow had read it. Such was the way with messages transmitted in the special ink. The lines of the diagram vanished after The Shadow had finished with it. The papers which The Shadow placed beneath his cloak were blank.

Every detail was implanted in the mind of the master sleuth. Silently, The Shadow crossed the room and glided out into the hall. Moving through darkness, he reached Grantham Breck's study. A tiny flashlight glimmered as The Shadow made a brief inspection, to assure himself that no secret hiding places were located here.

After the light went out, a swishing sound came from the side stairway. The Shadow reached the side door; the light shone on the keyhole. A probing instrument of steel opened the lock. The Shadow moved out into darkness and used his special key to lock the door behind him.

From then on, The Shadow's course was untraceable, save for the glare of his flashlight when it reappeared at the very spot on the hill road where Harry Vincent had spied the body. There, The Shadow moved in mysterious fashion. His tiny light showed broken twigs on bushes; it revealed a tiny fragment of gray cloth hooked by a bramble.

The Shadow moved up the hill side of the road. His light, directed on the ground, enabled his keen eyes to spy slight flutterings of parched grass. Moving here and there, The Shadow traced evidence of various paths

– footprints that even an expert sleuth would have ignored.

Though these traces were insufficient to serve as identifications; though they formed hopeless, intermittent paths, The Shadow, none the less, seemed satisfied. As token came the whispered mockery of his uncanny laugh – a sound that resembled an echo from his sanctum in Manhattan.

When the first tinge of grayish dawn trickled from a clouded horizon it revealed a fleeting outline of the black-cloaked figure on the hillside. Then The Shadow merged with the darkness of a wooded patch. The early morning breeze caught the sinister throbs of a modulated laugh and carried its whispered echoes.

That was the final token of The Shadow's presence. His first brief investigation finished, the master had departed. Night was The Shadow's habitat. Others could act by day; Harry Vincent could report their doings. When shrouding darkness fell once more, The Shadow, invisible, would resume his task.

### CHAPTER VI. NEW PERSONS ENTER

LATE the next afternoon, Harry Vincent's coupe pulled up at an old house on the hill. Harry had followed the road at Sheriff Forey's guidance. The approach to the house had required a considerable detour. This house was the home of Ezekiel Twinton. After Harry and Forey alighted, the sheriff rang the bell.

An old, quavering servant answered the door. He ushered the visitors into a small parlor. A few minutes later, a dry-faced, crabby man entered. Harry placed his age as between fifty and sixty. This man was Ezekiel Twinton. He nodded to Forey; gave a curt greeting when introduced to Harry; then sat down.

"I suppose you know what's up, Mr. Twinton," opened Forey. "We've been searching all over the hillside for the body of a murdered man."

"I saw the searching parties," crackled Twinton, "but I did not learn their purpose. I sent Dunmore out to inquire, but the poor fellow is nearly stone deaf. He came back with a very imperfect idea of what was going on."

"You've still got the chink servant, haven't you?" inquired Forey.

"Yes," replied Twinton. "Lang Sook, my Chinese cook. But he is as hopeless as Dunmore. Lank Sook cannot understand English; Dunmore cannot hear."

"He answered the door quick enough," observed Forey.

"He does that," remarked Twinton, with a nod. "He seems somehow to detect the vibration of the door bell. But you can shout in his ear without him hearing you. However, the house is well guarded. I have hounds and Great Danes chained about the place after dark. They are sufficient to frighten dangerous intruders. I shall be watchful from now on, since you have found a dead man near here. Where was the body?"

"In the road on the side hill."

"Off my property. Well, that is a good point. Nevertheless, Forey, I have told you that prowlers have been about. Perhaps this man was one of them."

"I don't think so?"

"Why not?"

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"Because we have an idea who the dead man was. Mr. Vincent discovered the body; it was gone when I came to the place. But we feel pretty sure of the fellow's identity."

"Someone from the town?"

"A bit closer. Grantham Breck."

Ezekiel Twinton stared in horror. His lips opened; then formed a gasp. This revelation seemed to strike him with pangs of terror. Forey proceeded.

"I was busy most of the day," explained the sheriff. "I couldn't get up here as soon as I had hoped. I had an idea that perhaps Breck had come up here to see you."

"No." Ezekiel Twinton was emphatic in his reply. "Breck and I have not visited each other since I flatly refused to sell any of my property to him."

"He wanted to buy the house, didn't he?"

"Not exactly. He said that he would be willing to purchase the entire estate. But he chiefly wanted the portion that was once the old Pastely farm. Come. I shall show you. My! This is terrible news, Forey."

TWINTON led the way through the kitchen. Standing on a broad porch, he pointed along the brow of the hill. A few battered fence posts marked what had once been a dividing line. Just beyond was a low, flat building built of stone. It was scarcely more than five feet high.

"The old spring house," declared Twinton. "It was abandoned after the farm buildings burned. That was before I bought any of this property. After I took over this house, five years ago, I bought the old farm also."

"When did Grantham Breck offer to buy it?"

"He made his final offer about a month ago. He insisted that he must have a house on the hill. I told him I wanted no neighbors within view. I added that he could buy houses on other hills hereabouts; that he would be a fool to build a new one. Somehow he seemed set upon rebuilding on the site of the old Pastely farmhouse."

"That's about a hundred yards past the fence line, isn't it?"

"Less than that. Fifty yards, I should say. I filled in the old cellar so no one would fall in it. I left the spring house closed. But tell me more concerning Grantham Breck" – Twinton paused quizzically – "and how he happened to be wandering along the hill road."

"Breck seems to have been going out at nights," declared Forey. "The servants were sort of mysterious about it until we pinned them down. They finally admitted that Breck used a little side door that led to his study."

"I know the door," observed Twinton, nodding. "Breck showed it to me. I used to visit him occasionally before we came to loggerheads about the property sale."

"What is more," stated Forey, "we learned that people have come in and out that door within the past month."

"Secret visitors?" inquired Twinton.

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"Yes," responded Forey. "We are anxious to know who they might be."

"I might name one for you," stated Twinton, in a casual tone.

"Who?" demanded Forey, quickly.

"Young Elbert Breck," replied Twinton.

Dusk was nearing and it was gloomy under the projecting roof of the porch. Yet Harry Vincent could distinctly see the expression that flickered over the face of Sheriff Tim Forey. Ezekiel Twinton was watching it, too. The owner of the hill house smiled sarcastically as he made his next statement.

"Young Breck does not know that he had been seen hereabouts," remarked Twinton. "I chanced to see him over in Laporte, about a month ago. He was registered at a hotel, under the name of Elwood Turner."

"How did you learn that?" demanded Forey.

"I inquired at the hotel," replied Twinton. "I knew the clerk well. I told him to keep check on his falsely registered guest. I was in Laporte yesterday afternoon, Forey. Elbert Breck was still staying there."

"Elbert Breck," mused the sheriff. "Grantham's only son. In wrong with the old man. He deserved to be, too. Squandered money, got himself in trouble. I thought maybe the kid had landed in jail by this time."

"He was not quite that bad, Forey," put in Twinton, with a charitable chuckle. "Perhaps he was here to regain his father's confidence. As I said before, he visited his father secretly. Late one afternoon I was driving by Breck's house. I saw young Elbert entering that side door."

"Humph," grunted Sheriff Forey. "Thanks for this information, Twinton. Well, if you notice any prowlers around, give me a prompt call. Come on, Vincent. We'll walk around to the front."

Harry was staring across the lawn as he heard the sheriff speak. Over beyond the fence, close by the darkening side of the spring house, he had fancied that he had seen the outline of a moving shape. The impression faded as Harry gazed. As he walked along with Tim Forey, The Shadow's agent smiled.

Only one person – to Harry's knowledge – could have approached so close to Twinton's house while daylight still persisted. That being was The Shadow. Harry already knew that his mysterious chief was in the vicinity. The absence of the report was proof of that. But now the agent knew that The Shadow was already deep in his investigation about the scene of crime.

HARRY and Forey drove along the roundabout way to the Breck house. Gloaming had set in; yet the twilight still gave Harry the complete view of the Breck estate that he had gained during the morning. Off to one side of the house was an old barn; Forey's searchers had searched it today. Farther away was a stone smoke-house; a square, windowless building with a tiny chimney in the top. Its steel door was fastened with a massive padlock. The searchers had therefore ignored it.

As they pulled up in front of the house, one of the deputies appeared. He beckoned hastily. Forey clambered from the coupe and approached on the run. The deputy put a quick question.

"Say, Tim," he said to the sheriff. "Take a guess – who do you think blew in while you were up at Twinton's?"

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"Save the riddles for the next barn dance," growled Forey. "I'll answer this one just the same. Elbert Breck."

"Say-y" – the deputy paused with mouth agape. "How'd you figure –"

"Just forget it," snapped Forey. "Where's young Breck?"

"In the living room."

Forey beckoned to Harry. Together, they entered the house. Floor lamps were lighted in the living room; stretched in an easy chair was a young man, smoking a cigarette. He sprang to his feet as the newcomers entered. Harry Vincent stopped short. He saw a distinct facial resemblance between this arrival and the dead man whom he had discovered on the hill road.

"Hello, sheriff," greeted Elbert Breck, in a troubled tone. "Is this true – what I read – about my father –"

"What you read?" inquired Forey.

"Yes," replied Elbert, shifting his gaze. "In the New York newspaper. I was in New York this morning. Reading a newspaper. It said a search was being made for the body of Grantham Breck."

"Got the newspaper with you?"

"I – I guess I left it on the train. I was so worried, I came here right away. Is – is this the chap who saw the body up on the hill road?"

"Yes." Forey introduced Harry. "Vincent here thinks it must have been your father; but the body was gone when I came to investigate."

"I'm sure that the body was that of Grantham Breck," said Harry, solemnly. "I can see the resemblance between the dead man and his son."

Elbert Breck succumbed. Dropping in his chair, he buried his face in his hands. His shoulders shook from the effect of convulsive sobs. Harry and Forey stood by while the young man managed to overpower his emotions. Elbert Breck stared upward. His countenance was haggard.

"We – we didn't get along, father and I," gulped Elbert. "But when I first – when I first learned of his reported death, it – well, it broke me up. I'm his only heir – but that doesn't mean anything. He was my dad. I – well, I was to blame for our misunderstandings. This – this has changed me, sheriff. I mean it. I mean it."

There was something pathetic in Elbert's speech. It won Harry Vincent's sympathy. Even gruff Tim Forey softened sufficiently to clap his hand on the young man's shoulder.

"We're investigating, kid," said the sheriff. "We'll get to the bottom of this. You stay right here. It's your father's house – yours now – and leave the rest to me."

"All right, sheriff."

"I've got Vincent staying here. If it wasn't for him, we wouldn't have learned anything. I want him to stay on –"

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"As long as he wants." Elbert arose and gripped Harry's hand. There was a surprising firmness in his grasp. "You're my friend already, Vincent. You're white – that's all."

The effort seemed to overcome Elbert Breck. Subsiding, the young man dropped back into his chair. He rested his head on one hand and stared toward the floor. His face was melancholy.

"I'm going down town," remarked Sheriff Forey. "Come along, Vincent, while I scare up those deputies. I'm taking them with me – rather, I'm going with them in their car."

They left Elbert Breck.

THE moment they were outside the front door, Forey gripped Harry's arm. The sheriff spoke in a low, tense tone.

"Elbert is lying," he informed. "His story doesn't click. No mention of his father's death could possibly have reached the New York newspapers this morning. Elbert wasn't in New York. Ezekiel Twinton was right. Elbert was staying over in Laporte."

"How did he hear the story there?" inquired Harry, in a whisper.

"On account of the searching party," stated Forey. "I told them who they were looking for. You know how news leaks out. Wait a minute, though. I'm telling you how Elbert could have learned of his father's death – one way that he could have learned. There's another way."

"You mean –"

"That Elbert might have known it last night. Learned it here – not in Laporte. Listen, Vincent, I'm suspecting nobody; yet everybody. I've even had you on the list."

"I thought so," chuckled Harry.

"But you're off it now," assured Forey. "What's more, I'm going to prove it to you. I'm leaving you here alone. I want you to make friends with Elbert Breck."

"I think I can do that," declared Harry.

"I know you can," stated Forey, emphatically. "This much is certain. Elbert is trying to get a line on what's happening, or he wouldn't have shown up so promptly. If I stay here; if I leave deputies, he'll know that I'm suspicious."

"You might explain that you were watching Craven."

"That would only be a halfway measure. It's a sure bet that Elbert will stick around so long as he thinks he's clear. That's why I'm going to depend on you for a while. Are you game?"

"I am."

Harry received the sheriff's bonecracking hand clasp. Turning on his heel, Forey called to the deputy. The two entered a touring car and started back to town. Harry Vincent stood pondering.

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STRANGE events had crossed his path. Out of a clear sky, Harry had discovered death and mystery. The result: he was playing two parts, both leading to the same goal. He had become the secret agent of the law as well as the secret agent of The Shadow.

The Shadow! As Harry stood in the gathering darkness, he wondered what The Shadow's next step might be toward the solution of the strange problem that involved the murder of Grantham Breck and the disappearance of the dead man's body. While Harry pondered, the answer came. With an uncanny closeness that made Harry quiver, a whispered voice spoke a single word from the darkness close beside him.

"Report!"

The Shadow! The master of darkness had come here from Twinton's! He wanted to know what his agent had learned. Steadily, in a low monotone, Harry recited the conversation that had passed at Twinton's. He followed with an account of the interview between Elbert Breck and Sheriff Tim Forey.

All the while, Harry stared straight ahead. He did not see The Shadow; he did not see his chief; but he felt a distinct impression of The Shadow's veiled, yet dynamic presence. In conclusion, Harry began to recite his own speech here with Forey, here outside the house. It was then that a hissed interruption sounded.

"Report received."

Almost immediately afterward, Harry sensed that he stood alone. He realized that The Shadow had listened in on his talk with Forey; that The Shadow had required only the missing details. Harry knew that The Shadow had departed. This meant that his chief wanted him to carry on until he received new instructions.

Turning, Harry Vincent went back into the house. He was ready to play the game; to be friendly with Elbert Breck, yet to keep close watch upon the young man's actions. He knew that Sheriff Forey had reached a standstill; yet he was confident that new developments would come. The Shadow was at work.

Off beyond the dimly lighted house, a strange, shrouded figure was gliding through the gathering darkness. Harry Vincent had divined correctly. The Shadow had bided his time throughout the day; now, with darkness his habitation, the master of the night was ready to resume.

A whispered laugh stirred up vague echoes. That throbbing mirth was foreboding. Before this night was ended, The Shadow would produce evidence that others had failed to gain.

## CHAPTER VII. THE SHADOW AT WORK

ONE hour after The Shadow had received Harry Vincent's verbal report, an autogiro came settling upon the lighted landing field at Laporte. The pilot alighted and strolled over to a place where cabs awaited passengers from planes. He entered one of these vehicles and ordered the driver to take him to the Laporte Hotel.

The rural taximan was garrulous. He began chatting with his passenger as he headed for the town. The arrival from the autogiro listened quietly to the driver's gab.

"Seen that windmill of yours this mornin', boss," informed the taximan. "Say – them giros sure can drop down quiet, can't they? Seen it again when you went up this afternoon. Say – you ought to use that ship to fly over Chanburg. I hear there was doin's round that town.

"Lookin' for a body over there, I hear. Finished up about three o'clock in the afternoon, I reckon. But they was talkin' here at the air field about sendin' a couple of planes over that way tomorrow. Guess they figure

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people could see things from above that they couldn't see on the ground."

The chugging sedan that passed for a taxi had reached the main street of Laporte. The town was a thriving one; its chief thoroughfare was well illuminated. Laporte boasted three hotels; the driver pulled up at the best, the Hotel Laporte.

When the pilot of the autogiro entered the lobby of the hotel, his features were plainly revealed for the first time. His face was firm and impassive, almost masklike. It gave no clue to his exact age. Brilliant eyes shone from either side of a hawklike nose.

Tall and sweeping of stride, the hawkish arrival entered an elevator and rode up to the fifth floor. There he entered a room which he had engaged that morning, under the name of Lamont Cranston. As soon as the door had closed behind him, Lamont Cranston assumed the role of The Shadow.

Though he had left his black garments stowed safely in the autogiro, The Shadow still possessed his gift of merging with the dark. He moved silently through the room. His whispering lips formed a soft laugh. A light clicked above a table in the corner. Its shade sent the rays downward; only white hands appeared beneath the glow.

THIS morning, The Shadow had brought his giro from the clearing. Late in the afternoon, he had taken off from the Laporte flying field, to travel high above the countryside which the sheriff's men had searched. He had dropped into the clearing, paid his visit to Twinton's and Breck's. Then he had returned to Laporte.

The Shadow had accomplished the very thing that the taximan had said might be done tomorrow. He had viewed the terrain about Chanburg from the air. Brief though his inspection had been, the mysterious investigator had gained the results he wanted.

The hands unfolded a sheet of paper. It was a topographical survey map of the district about Chanburg. This government chart was excellent in detail. It showed houses, clumps of trees, contours and heights of hills. Then came a sheet of thin cardboard. It already bore a penciled enlargement of the topographical survey map. The Shadow's hand began to supply additional markings that did not appear upon the printed chart.

A blue dot marked the spot where Harry Vincent had found the body in the road. The Shadow produced a drawing compass; he thrust the point into the blue dot and used the penciled end to trace a circle one mile in radius. This accomplished, he concentrated on the area within the circle.

It was possible to trace The Shadow's thoughts from the motion of his right hand. Not only did that hand make light markings on the chart; it also put down time notations on the margin, to indicate the exact space of minutes that had passed between Harry Vincent's discovery of the body and the arrival of the sheriff. The time period was less than half an hour.

The corpse had been removed during that interval. Where had the body been taken? That was the problem which The Shadow sought to answer. His first act was to run the pencil along the roads.

The Shadow was considering the theory that the body might have been carried away by automobile. That possibility could not be totally rejected. Yet it was unlikely. Had the murderer had a car available, he would probably have stowed the corpse therein immediately after the murder.

The pencil moved over to the railroad. This time, The Shadow's hand indicated complete rejection. The body could not have been taken away by train, because of two reasons. First: the necessity of loading it aboard at the station; second, the schedule of the trains themselves. It was a long trek from the road to the station. The

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freight had gone through shortly after the discovery of the body. The local – the Limited – even the Dairy Express; none of these would have been suitable. Living men could have boarded them; but a corpse could not have been carried along.

The Shadow knew that the murderer could have kept the corpse by the tracks until the arrival of an early morning freight; but that would have meant a dangerous risk. No – The Shadow's hand as it roved within the circle indicated the belief that the body was still somewhere in that area.

Pausing by the blue dot, The Shadow touched thin lines that he had made. These were the traces that he had discovered one night ago. To an ordinary student of crime, they might have signified the presence of one prowling enemy. To The Shadow, they meant more. Several persons had been near the scene of crime. While one, probably the leader, had slain the victim, the lines in the dried grass indicated that the killer had aids close at hand.

Harry Vincent's arrival must have occurred shortly after the murder. The killer and his pals had taken to the cover of the bushes. The broken twigs; the bit of gray cloth on a bramble – these were indications of the lurkers. Probably the murderer had believed that Harry would pass by. When Harry had discovered the body, the killer had waited.

Harry's departure had been fortunate. Had he waited too long, The Shadow's agent might have become a second victim. But after Harry left, the lurking killer decided on prompt action. Aided by his pals, he had one logical thought; to stow the body in some place where it would lie unfound; then to make a get-away.

THOUGH the killer might still be near Chanburg, it was plain that his aids had gone. The search by the sheriff's men had revealed no suspicious strangers. The Shadow's pencil followed the course of the railroad track. Ruffians – the kind that a killer had at his heels – could well have hopped the Dairy Express, somewhere along the line.

What of the body? The Shadow's hand kept hovering above the circle. It touched one tiny black square that was just within the circle. That square was located near the railroad, between the station and the grade crossing.

The hand moved upward. It stopped upon another black square close by the indicated home of Ezekiel Twinton. That was within the limits of the circle. The hand rested there a few moments; then made another move.

This time it touched a black square near the home of Grantham Breck. The Shadow's whisper formed a sinister laugh. He had found a logical answer to his problem. Of three places, he was eliminating two.

If the railroad had been the means of departure for the pals of the killer, they would not have left the body near the tracks. A trip up toward Ezekiel Twinton's had its drawbacks. First: the lugging of the body uphill. Second: a march away from the railroad. Third: the necessity of crossing the hill road on the return journey, unless the men made a long, roundabout detour over Twinton's hill. This, according to the topographical map, would have meant the crossing of marsh land and intervening creeks.

Toward Breck's. A downhill trip. Then a cut over to the railroad. There was only one objection. Harry Vincent had stopped at Breck's and had brought the sheriff there. But that was pure chance. The killer had probably thought that the motorist would keep straight into the town of Chanburg.

A faint, almost inaudible buzz sounded from beside the table. The Shadow's hands moved into darkness. They opened a square suitcase. Fingers turned a knob. The Shadow whispered. A response came through

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earphones that he was placing on his head.

"Burbank speaking."

"Report."

A voice clicked through the shortwave set. The Shadow ended the conversation with short, cryptic words. Earphones went back into the suitcase. A soft laugh sounded in the hotel room.

Word from New York. Work there on the morrow. A new battle with unfinished crime. The Shadow must leave this vicinity for the time. That fact was not alarming. For The Shadow, though he was convinced that a dangerous master of evil lurked near Chanburg, was also sure that the hand of crime lay in temporary abeyance.

The Shadow was positive that the enemy relied upon a crew of workers who had departed. The killer would lay back now that his mob was gone. Should crime require a repetition, the evil chief would again summon his cohorts.

Such was the basis of The Shadow's deductions. Yet the master sleuth had not yet placed his finger upon the arch criminal, nor had he divined the motive for murder. The Shadow scented hidden purposes. He knew that he must force them to the light.

So far, Sheriff Tim Forey, Craven the butler, Ezekiel Twinton and young Elbert Breck had bobbed up like puppets before The Shadow's view. The Shadow suspected that these were not all concerned in the complications that mysterious murder had produced. He still had time for further investigation; he intended to use it before his forced departure for New York.

More important than living men was a dead one. That, at least, was the case for the present. To fight criminals, The Shadow chose to bring them into action. Before he left for Manhattan, The Shadow intended to perform one definite task: namely, to locate the corpse that Forey and his men had failed to find after prolonged search. A whispered laugh, timed to the extinguishing of the light, was proof that The Shadow knew he could gain the result that he desired.

LATER that evening, Lamont Cranston checked out of the Laporte Hotel. He took a cab to the airport. His luggage was loaded aboard the autogiro. He took off – presumably for New York – and the wind-milled ship climbed skyward.

Dull starlight gave some visibility of the ground below. The Shadow's ship moved high above the town of Chanburg. The motor stilled; the giro descended like a silent monster from the heavens. It came to rest in the clearing which The Shadow had first chosen for a landing place.

A phantom form reappeared upon the hill near the house of Ezekiel Twinton. The building was dark when The Shadow encircled it. Faithful watch dogs, sleeping by their kennels, were undisturbed by the gliding figure that passed with less sound than the rippling breeze.

The Shadow reached the little spring house. Its closed door was sheathed with iron. Rusted nails, showing beneath the glimmer of the tiny flashlight, were proof that this place had not been entered. The Shadow moved away.

Later, his form appeared in the vicinity of the railroad. The Shadow reached the spot that had shown as a tiny square on his map. Passing through a thicket of furzelike bushes, he came to an abandoned shack. A simple

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clamp held the door shut; The Shadow opened it and entered.

Empty bottles, a few old newspapers – these were the objects that the little flashlight revealed upon the wooden floor. Small, dirty–encrusted windows were tightly closed. The Shadow moved out into darkness. He reached the railroad tracks. Here he paused.

Someone was puffing up the side of the embankment. Silent, The Shadow could trace the motion of a form that took to the ties, heading in the direction of the railroad station. The man's pace was hasty. His stocky form was barely visible. The Shadow took up the trail.

The sound of a train approaching from far in the opposite direction spurred the prowler to more rapid stride. Close to the station, the man cut over behind a trio of side–tracked freight cars. He clambered in through one of the opened doors and waited. The Shadow merged with the darkened side of the car.

The roar of a train; a clanging bell. The Union Limited came blazing down the rails to halt at the little station. Its headlights, however, did not reveal either the prowler or The Shadow. Both were out of range. The Limited chugged away.

It was then that the chunky prowler dropped from an open door on the side of the car toward the station. The Shadow circled the end of the freight car and remained unseen. Zach Hoyler was on the lighted platform, preparing to push a baggage truck back to the station.

The squatty prowler paused; then clambered over the rails. He reached the platform just as Hoyler was unlocking the outside door of the baggage room. The Shadow, too, had moved forward. He had gained the shelter of a bush not a dozen feet from the baggage–room door.

The Shadow saw Zach Hoyler turn in momentary alarm at the sound of thudding footsteps. Then he observed the relieved grin that appeared upon the agent's face. Zach had recognized the squatty, muffled prowler as the man stepped into the light.

The Shadow, too, saw the visage of the stranger; but his keen eyes viewed that square, pudgy–lipped countenance for the first time. The man whom The Shadow had followed was Perry Nubin, the railroad detective.

## CHAPTER VIII. CORPUS DELICTI

"HELLO, bloodhound," greeted Hoyler, from the baggage–room door. "When did you drop in?"

"Just now," responded Nubin, gruffly. "Climbed off the Union Limited."

"Riding in style, eh?" laughed the station agent. "I suppose you pulled the trick stuff again. Nobody knew you were aboard."

"Right," responded Nubin. "If any mug can prove I was on that train, I'll hand him a ten spot."

There was a touch of irony in this statement; one that The Shadow appreciated even though Zach Hoyler did not. The Shadow had learned the reason for Nubin's hasty progress along the track. He knew that the detective had been prowling the fields near the Breck house. He also understood that Nubin wanted to create the definite impression that he had just arrived in the vicinity of Chanburg.

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"What's the idea this trip?" questioned Hoyler, while he lugged boxes into the baggage room. "Going to pull a search for that missing body?"

"Let the hicks look for it," growled Nubin. "Just the same, that's why I'm here. Making a routine check-up, that's all. Guess you can tell me all I need to know."

"That's a real satisfaction," stated Hoyler, grinning as he locked the door of the baggage room. "Any time anybody can tell you anything, it's an event to remember."

"Lay off the sarcasm. This is railroad business. I want to know about that search this afternoon."

"Better talk to the sheriff. I've been anchored here ever since early in the afternoon."

"I'm not worrying about the sheriff. I'm interested in railroad property. Did those yahoos come messing around the right of way?"

"I don't think so." Hoyler shook his head. "Some of them walked in along the tracks, but they looked like they were quitting the search."

"What did they have to say?"

"Nothing that concerned the railroad. But they had a good idea whose body they were looking for."

"Whose?"

"Grantham Breck's."

PERRY NUBIN cocked his head a trifle as he heard the station agent's statement. His face, however, betrayed no surprise. The Shadow could study the detective's heavy visage plainly from the bush.

"I thought the body was unidentified," declared the railroad dick.

"So did I," responded the station agent. "But the sheriff let the word slip out. Old Breck hasn't been seen since last night. The body answered his description. So they're looking for him."

"Humph," grunted Nubin. "Well, that don't mean anything to me. I just wanted to know if there was any chance of the sheriff starting an argument with the Union Valley."

"How could that come about?"

"Well" – the dick was speculative – "he might have figured that some hoboes had dropped off a freight and caused the trouble. That would make him figure that they went out of town the way they came."

"Have you seen any bums along the line?" asked the agent.

"No," replied Nubin, "but that's why I'm asking you. I can't watch this whole division all the time."

"I haven't seen any bums," declared Hoyler, "but that doesn't mean there's none around. They wouldn't walk into the station to buy a ticket or check their baggage. That's a cinch."

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"Wise-cracking again, eh?" Nubin snorted the question. "Say, Hoyler, I know the ways of hoboes better than you do. I know they'd duck off through the woods when they came near a station. Of course you wouldn't see any of them around.

"But those yap deputies might. Or they might figure there'd been some bums around. If they did, you'd be the first fellow they'd talk to. That's why I'm asking what you heard."

"No mention of any hoboes," stated Hoyler, emphatically. "If there had been, you would have been here on an earlier train than the Limited."

"How come?"

"Because I would have tapped the information through. I'm working for the Union Valley, too. I would have wired the word to the chief. He would have sent you down here on his own hook."

"You've got more brains than I thought, Hoyler. Well, I guess there wasn't any use in my coming here after all. I'll go out on the Dairy Express. But don't say anything about it to the train crew."

"Some more smart stuff, Nubin? Say – you're the wisest dick that ever worked on this road. Where are you going to hop on?"

"Same place as usual, I guess. B and R crossing. I'll get aboard when the train comes through. So keep your mouth shut."

"All right, Nubin. But you'd better start hoofing it if you expect to be there in time."

With this admonition, Zach Hoyler went back into the station. Perry Nubin strolled about until he heard the clicking of the telegraph key. Then he sidled off into the darkness of the tracks. The Shadow watched until the green glow of a signal light showed a momentary glimpse of the chunky form. Then The Shadow followed.

The railroad dick was walking back in the direction of the shack. But he did not go that far. Instead, he scraped down the embankment and headed across fields. His course led toward the Breck mansion. It was slow and cautious; Nubin seemed to be in no hurry. In fact, the whistle and clatter of the Dairy Express was already audible when the dick reached his destination.

This was the third spot that The Shadow had intended to visit. The presence of Perry Nubin had caused a change in his plans. By the darkened side of the house, The Shadow waited. At intervals, he could hear Nubin's cautious prowling. Only the keen ears of The Shadow could have detected the sound, for Nubin was well away from the house.

HOURS passed. The clear starlight presaged an early dawn. Yet Perry Nubin kept up his vigil. He chose new spots more distant from the house; yet all the while he watched. During this period, The Shadow waited, unseen. Though time was shortening, he could afford to lose it. His business here was too important to neglect; and it had to wait until the railroad dick departed.

At last there were no more signs of Nubin. The Shadow sensed that the detective had left. Moving silently from the cover of the house, The Shadow glided to the rear and approached the square outline of the closed smoke house. This was the third tiny block that had appeared upon his map.

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The glimmer of the little flashlight shone upon the massive padlock that guarded the smoke-house door. No search had been made in this building, because the lock itself gave evidence that the building had not been entered. The Shadow had learned this fact from Harry Vincent. But The Shadow's opinion concerning the locked door was different from the one that had entered the mind of Sheriff Tim Forey.

Indeed, the whispered laugh that sounded in the darkness was evidence of definite knowledge. The Shadow knew that the sheriff had overlooked a simple possibility; yet one on which new facts of crime were hinged. The Shadow had left details in the hands of the law. The law, represented by Forey, had failed in its quest.

A blackened pick of steel probed the padlock. After a short while, a click sounded. The lock snapped open. The Shadow removed it; softly, he opened the door of the smoke house, entered, and closed the door behind him.

MANY minutes passed before The Shadow's figure reappeared. A black-gloved hand snapped the padlock back in place. The Shadow moved toward the house. His flashlight glimmered along the ground. A whisper sounded as The Shadow found an object that would suit his next purpose. It was a small hand-sledge that lay with other rusted tools on the little back porch by the kitchen.

Dawn would soon be due. The last period of darkness was suited to The Shadow's next purpose. Without using his flashlight, The Shadow returned to the smoke house. There, he relinquished his usual mode of silence. The Shadow had brought the sledge with him. Swinging it through the darkness, he pounded fiercely upon the steel door, aiming haphazard for the big padlock.

Crash! As The Shadow's strokes continued, lights began to blaze in the Breck house. Windows came open. Excited shouts sounded from within. With two final strokes, The Shadow used precision in the darkness. These blows sufficed to completely shatter the padlock.

Hurling the sledge to the ground, The Shadow swung off past the smoke house, heading for the rear fence. But as he rounded the final corner, a stocky figure came hurtling upon him from the darkness. The Shadow swirled just as heavy, hamlike hands caught him by the throat.

Wrestling free, The Shadow grappled with a powerful foe who emitted incoherent roars. Doors were clattering from the house. Men's voices shouted as flashlights began to blaze. The Shadow's enemy gave a hoarse shout. It was triumphant, for the black-cloaked form was slumping downward.

"I got him! I got —"

The man's cry ended as The Shadow's back shot upward like a spring. Clawing nothingness, the fellow went hurtling head foremost over The Shadow's shoulders. He thudded heavily upon the dried ground and rolled along the tufted grass. Swiftly, The Shadow swept away into the darkness. His figure merged with the blackness beyond the fence.

HARRY VINCENT was the first to spy the form of The Shadow's overpowered adversary. Harry's flashlight showed the fellow lying face downward. Elbert Breck arrived; then Craven. While the servant held the light, Harry gripped the prone man's shoulders. The fellow mumbled; he came to a sitting posture. Harry saw the dull face of a yokel. Craven uttered an exclamation.

"It's Hiram!" declared the servant.

"Who is Hiram?" questioned Harry.

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"The lad who works about the place," explained Craven. "He always gets here just about dawn, sir. A dullard, but faithful and as powerful as a bull. I am amazed, sir, that he was so promptly whipped in the struggle."

Slight streaks of dawn were appearing as Craven spoke. Harry Vincent recalled that he had reported no mention of Hiram to The Shadow. Harry realized who the yokel's adversary had been. Then Harry's thoughts turned to the present. Hiram, propped against the back corner of the smoke house, was beginning to talk.

"I heard him," asserted the rustic. "Bang – bang – that's the way he was goin' – right at the smoke–house door. I knowed he'd come this way. I can rassle, I can. So I grabbed him, by heck."

"Are you hurt, Hiram?" inquired Craven.

"Nah," responded the hired man. "Might have been, though, if I'd bumped a rock. Say – I wisht I knowed the rassling holt that feller used. Picked me up like this" – Hiram swooped his arms upward – "and heaved me, he did. Then he run away."

"Which direction?" inquired Elbert Breck.

"How'd I know?" retorted Hiram. "I was layin' kinda foolish like, with all the wind knocked out of me."

Elbert stared off toward the fence. Though the sky was lightening, the ground was still hopelessly dark. Pursuit was impossible; Harry Vincent promptly killed all thoughts of it.

"I heard the hammering on the smoke–house door," declared Harry. "Hiram says someone was trying to get in there. I thought I heard the lock smash. Suppose we look and see what happened."

"We should aid Hiram first, sir," put in Craven. "Perhaps we should help him to the house."

"A good idea," chimed Elbert. "Come on, Vincent, give me a lift with him."

"I can walk," protested Hiram, as Harry and Elbert aided him to his feet. "Leave me use my own legs."

"Take it easy," ordered Elbert.

"That's right, Hiram," added Craven, who was leading the way with the light. "Do as young Mr. Breck orders. He is the master here at present."

Hiram showed no ill effects from his struggle. By the time they reached the living room and propped him on the couch, his face was wearing a sour look.

"I want to go back to the smoke house," he complained. "I tell you, the feller was trying to get in there. Leave me go –"

A motor came to a stop out front. Then a clang of the door bell. Craven looked worried; then went to answer the call. Sheriff Tim Forey stamped into the living room.

"That cook of yours called me on the phone," stated Forey. "Where is she? What's up?"

"Here I am, sheriff." Adele appeared in dressing gown from the stairway. "There was a terrible noise out back. Someone smashing at the smoke–house door. The men rushed out; I called you on the telephone –"

"What happened out there?" quizzed Forey.

"Hiram encountered someone," replied Harry. "He thinks the person was trying to break into the smoke house."

"Let's get out there!" barked Forey. "Come along. All of you!"

THE outline of the smoke house was plain when they arrived outside. The sheriff was the first to near the door. He tripped over the hand-sledge and picked it up. He noted big dents in the steel door; then observed the shattered lock.

"The fellow smashed things right," growled Forey. "But he didn't get in. Leastwise I don't think so. The hasp is still on the staple. Looks like he was mighty anxious to get in, the way he hammered at the door. I wonder what his idea was."

Prying the hasp free, the sheriff drew back the steel door. The interior of the smoke house was totally black. Forey stepped over the threshold and turned on his flashlight while the others peered in through the door.

A sharp word came from the sheriff's lips; Craven uttered a startled cry; while Elbert Breck delivered a choking gasp. The flashlight had illuminated the entire floor. Its rays were revealing a huddled object in the center of the smoke house.

Face upward was the body that Harry Vincent had discovered in the road. The Shadow's agent recognized the thin countenance with its gray hair. This was the corpse for which the sheriff's posse had been searching. It remained only for Forey, himself, to give the statement of identity.

"Grantham Breck," declared the sheriff, solemnly. "You gave us the right start, Vincent. This is the dead man you saw in the road."

Elbert Breck was slumping by the door. Craven, his face ashen in the dawn, was quavering as he sought to aid his new master. This time it was Hiram who came to aid. He caught Elbert by one arm; Harry Vincent took the other.

Elbert was choking with convulsive sobs. Craven was shaking as he faltered ahead to open the back door of the house. They reached the living room; there Elbert slumped upon the couch, while Craven stood beside him.

Harry Vincent went out again, to report to Sheriff Forey at the smoke house. He was thinking of what Forey had said; that he – Harry – had been right about the body. But Harry Vincent also knew that he was right about something else. The proof was coming in the form of a distant sound off by the hill. It was the thrumming motor of The Shadow's autogiro.

Harry knew the truth. That fading sound marked The Shadow's departure. But before he left, rising into the haze of dawn, The Shadow had performed his task. He had located the hiding place where the body of Grantham Breck was lying. He had deliberately paved the way to the discovery of the missing victim.

## CHAPTER IX. THE SHADOW'S RETURN

FIVE days had passed since the finding of the body in the smoke house. During that period, Harry had kept in communication with The Shadow. He had done this by letter and by occasional telegrams to Rutledge Mann. Through wires that referred to securities and real estate had enabled Harry to relay coded points of

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information to The Shadow.

The county coroner had classed Grantham Breck's death as murder. Tim Forey had insisted that Harry Vincent remain in Chanburg. Harry had made no objection. Hence he was still a guest of Elbert Breck.

Moreover, Harry was still holding the sheriff's confidence. Forey and deputies appeared occasionally at the house; but Harry was the secret watcher delegated to keep tabs on any doings there. This duty was becoming troublesome.

On two nights, Harry had heard Elbert Breck creep downstairs from his room. He had heard the young man go out of the house. He had timed the intervals of Elbert's absence. On both occasions, the heir had been gone for more than one hour.

Craven, too. The butler was crafty as well as taciturn. Only once had Harry noted action on his part; that was when he had heard Craven coming up the stairs. Though he had no proof that the servant had gone out doors, Harry suspected that such had been the case.

Harry had not reported these occurrences to Tim Forey; but he had sent word of them to The Shadow. One point upon which Harry was convinced: there was no collusion between young Breck and the butler. During the day; at dinner – in fact, whenever occasion offered the opportunity – Harry had looked for signs of some secret conference between them. He had observed none.

On this particular evening Harry was seated in the living room with Elbert Breck. Off and on, Elbert had shown signs of talkativeness; but he had always swung into a nervous silence. Harry had made no effort to lead him on, and this policy was bringing results. Of a sudden, Elbert began to speak.

"Father's death has troubled me terribly," began the lawyer's son. "Something must be done about it, Harry. New clues must be uncovered. I can stand this delay no longer."

"We are liable to hear from Forey tonight," remarked Harry. "After the bullet was extracted from the body, he sent it to New York. Experts are examining it."

"Do you really think they can learn anything?" questioned Elbert. "From the bullet I mean? Could the killer's gun be identified?"

"Positively," declared Harry. "Of course, they will have to find the gun. The bullet, however, may tell them the make of the weapon. That will be one clue."

"But I have no faith in Forey," blurted Elbert. "He passed up the most obvious place to search for father's body."

"The smoke house? Yes, we realized after the body was found that the search should have begun there. But I must confess it never occurred to me that the body would be hidden there."

"I must admit that I was confused also. But Forey should have thought of it in the beginning. Father naturally had the key to that padlock. The murderer would have found it with his other keys. That was why he unlocked the smoke house, put the body inside and closed the padlock afterward. Forey suddenly realized that after the body was found. Funny nobody thought of it before."

Harry Vincent smiled. He knew someone who had deducted the murderer's simple action. The Shadow. He had picked the smoke house as the place to find the body.

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HARRY realized that the art of deduction included many points that seemed absurdly simple once results had been produced. He also knew that not one of all Forey's searchers – nor even Harry himself – had struck upon the logical idea which The Shadow had gained.

"Do you know," continued Elbert, "if the keys had still been on my father's body, I think Forey would have continued to be puzzled. But he was so worried about the side door of this house that the first thing he looked for was the key–ring."

"I know," laughed Harry. "He shouted out that the keys were missing. Not in any pocket. Then all of a sudden he said: 'Say – that's how the murderer fooled us. Took the keys and unlocked the door of the smoke house.' Then he kicked himself for not thinking of it before."

"Why do you think Forey put new locks on all the doors of this house?" questioned Elbert, suddenly. "Do you think he figured the murderer would be coming back?"

"Perhaps," answered Harry. "He has your father's keys, you know."

"Then there's that prowler," mused Elbert. "The fellow who smashed the padlock on the smoke–house door. He couldn't have been the murderer. He would have unlocked the padlock – unless he had lost the keys or thrown them away."

Again, Harry smiled. He knew well why the padlock had been broken. More than that, he was sure that The Shadow had first managed to open the lock and make sure that the body was within the smoke house.

"Harry," said Elbert, in a confiding tone, "there's something I want to tell you. I – I believe that Forey suspects me of complicity in my father's death.

"How so?" queried Harry, in feigned surprise.

"Because father and I were at odds," responded Elbert. "What is more, I want to tell you something – something that is not to be passed along to Sheriff Forey –"

"I understand. You can talk, Elbert."

"I – I was not in New York when I heard the rumor of my father's death. I was in Laporte. I – I had seen my father only a week before. Here, in this house. I came through that side door. He – my father – admitted me."

Elbert gazed toward Harry as he spoke. The heir's gaze was half shrewd, half nervous. Harry's response was a quizzical look; but there was nothing suspicious in the manner of The Shadow's agent.

"I needed money," explained Elbert. "To pay off debts. I promised my father that I would behave if he gave me one more chance."

"What was his reply?"

"He – he turned me down at first. Then he gave me hope. He said that he might help me in a few weeks. I had a little money, so I stayed in Laporte."

"Why didn't you tell this to Forey?"

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"I was afraid he wouldn't believe me," declared Elbert. "He might have decided that father promised me nothing. Forey, like everybody else around here, has a very poor notion regarding my integrity. But you – well, you have been a friend, Harry. Tell me – do you think I should make this statement to Forey?"

"Perhaps," replied Harry, adopting a neutral attitude.

"I may do so later," decided Elbert. "But for the present, I want you to say nothing –"

The young man broke off as Craven appeared from the stairway. The servant entered the living room and looked about in a critical manner. He seemed to think that the place was untidy, for he grumbled a bit to himself. He went back to the hall and began to shout for Johanna.

ELBERT had become a clam. Something in his manner indicated that he thought he had talked too much. Harry also had the suspicion that Elbert had been pumping him. Did the heir suspect that Forey knew he had been in Laporte? Perhaps; that certainly would account for Elbert's confiding statements. He might well have been trying to make Harry betray what Forey had learned from Ezekiel Twinton.

Johanna arrived in the living room. She began to rearrange books upon a table. Then came the clang of the door bell. Craven answered it. Tim Forey strode in, followed by a stout man whom Harry had met two days ago: Norman Trobers, the county prosecutor.

Beckoning to Craven, the sheriff made the servant stand near where Harry Vincent and Elbert Breck were seated. Assuming an important pose, Forey made a statement:

"The bullet is back from New York. Here it is" – he produced the metal slug – "with photographs. This is going to help us a lot, Elbert."

"Good," declared young Breck.

"That'll please you, too," resumed the sheriff. "Eh, Craven?"

"Certainly, sir," replied the servant. "I hope that the fiend who slew the master will be captured."

"Well," remarked Forey, pacing back and forth, "we've learned this much. The killer used an odd sort of a gun. Not many like it in this country – leastwise not hereabouts. Did any of you" – he spoke impersonally, but looked from Elbert to Craven, ignoring Harry – "ever hear of a Luger pistol?"

"No, sir," replied Craven. "What was the name again?"

"A Luger."

"Never, sir."

"How about you, Elbert?"

"Certainly I've heard of Lugers," declared Elbert. He was a bit pale. "I've seen them. German guns. I – I – well, I'm a bit surprised to learn that a Luger –"

As Elbert paused, there came an unexpected interruption. Johanna had heard the conversation. Elbert's last mention of the name "Luger" brought her suddenly into the conference.

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"Ach! Das Luger!" exclaimed the housekeeper. "Yah. I have remember. You want you should see it?"

"A Luger pistol?" queried Forey.

"Yah," repeated the housekeeper. "Mr. Breck he one time say: 'Johanna. This have come from the old country. Luger.' Come with me. I show you where it is put. I have forgotten until this time right now."

As Johanna walked from the room, Forey beckoned the others to follow. The housekeeper lead the way upstairs. She took the side passage and entered Grantham Breck's study. She went to the end of a bookcase; there, the housekeeper removed a handful of books and pressed against the back. Something clicked; a little compartment opened.

Springing forward, Forey pushed Johanna to one side. Thrusting his hand in the aperture, the sheriff brought out an automatic pistol. Harry Vincent recognized at once that the gun was a Luger. All were tense while Forey made his examination. The sheriff was solemn as he turned to face the group.

"The caliber of this Luger," declared Forey, "is different from that of an American gun. What is more, it is the caliber of the pistol which discharged the bullet through the heart of Grantham Breck.

"One shot has been fired from this pistol. I don't need an expert to tell me the answer. Grantham Breck was killed by a shot that was fired from his own gun. What is more: the murderer came here and replaced the pistol afterward!"

Gasps of amazement. Harry Vincent was bewildered. He saw an astonished look upon Craven's face. He observed Elbert Breck blink as he stared at the sheriff.

A short quiz followed. Elbert and Craven disclaimed all knowledge of the gun's existence. Johanna was above suspicion, for she had revealed the hiding place. The woman said that she had seen Grantham Breck put the pistol in the special compartment of the bookcase. That was all.

BEFORE Sheriff Tim Forey left the Breck house, he summoned two deputies to come there. He had reason to keep them at the place since it was established that the murderer had been a visitor there. After the deputies arrived, Harry Vincent remarked that he would have to send a telegram to New York. The sheriff told him to drive over to the station in his coupe; that he would go also.

On the way, Forey talked a bit. The finding of the gun puzzled him. Yet it did not shake his confidence in Harry. Forey stated that he wanted Harry to be as observant as before. Their conversation ended when they reached the railroad station.

Harry sent a telegram to Rutledge Mann. The station agent went back to his table. The two men left. It was between train time; the platform was deserted; but again, Harry had a feeling of uneasiness. The reason became apparent after the coupe had departed. It was then that Perry Nubin shuffled into view.

The railroad dick entered the station. Zach Hoyler looked up from his key. Nubin nodded. He waved for Hoyler to keep on. The detective listened to the ticks.

"I got it," declared Nubin, when Hoyler had finished sending the telegrams. "'New developments prevent present departure. Send full details regarding my securities.' Was that all of it, Hoyler?"

The agent nodded.

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"Sent by this guy Vincent," observed Nubin. "Same address as the last one, wasn't it?"

"Rutledge Mann, New York City," declared Hoyler.

"What were the new developments?" quizzed Nubin.

"I don't know," snapped Hoyler, angrily. "Say – you must think Tim Forey swore me in as a deputy."

"Keep your shirt on, Hoyler. I've got a right to know what the sheriff said to you."

"He didn't say anything. This fellow Vincent gave me the telegram. That's all. Say – you're a dick. You've got some authority, even though it isn't as much as you put on. Why don't you go down and see Forey?"

"Maybe I will. Not tonight, though. I'm walking the tracks tonight."

"Been demoted?"

"Say – you're wise, aren't you? Listen, Hoyler. If you want to keep this job of yours, you'd better show less lip. I could ease you out of it."

"Yeah. Maybe. I guess you could by planting a bottle of hooch in this table drawer. I wouldn't put it past you, either. But you won't catch me off duty long enough to pull a stunt like that."

With this bitter assertion, Zach Hoyler arose and went through the inside door into the baggage room. Perry Nubin stood by the ticket window, an angry snarl on his lips. Then, with clenched fists, the dick turned and strode from the station.

As he had told Hoyler, the detective started off along the tracks. He headed in the direction of the grade crossing. But he did not go far along the right of way. Skidding down the embankment, he cut across fields toward the house now owned by Elbert Breck.

A FEW hours later, an autogiro dropped from the sky and landed in the clearing on the hill. The figure that emerged from the ship was as vague as a living specter. Silently it moved through the woods; then traveled toward the house below the hill.

A light was burning in a window. It indicated Harry Vincent's room. The figure of The Shadow appeared, looming inward from the window. Gloved fingers opened an envelope. Burning eyes perused a coded report that turned blank.

The Shadow departed, His vague form circled the silent house. Tonight, however, The Shadow detected no sounds or tokens of a prowler. Perry Nubin had left a short while before The Shadow's return.

## CHAPTER X. THE SHADOW LISTENS

SHERIFF TIM FOREY was seated in his office. This room was located on the first floor of a little building just off the main street of Chanburg. It had once housed a shoe shop. Battered doors, ramshackle windows vied with the furnishings. For Tim Forey's chairs and desk looked like relics of the early nineties.

It was evening – two nights after the discovery of the Luger pistol in Grantham Breck's study. The death gun was at present lying upon Forey's desk. The sheriff was discussing it with the prosecutor.

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"I'm keeping the pistol here," declared Forey. "Wired New York yesterday. An expert's coming up here. Thought that would save time, Mr. Trobers."

"A good idea," decided the prosecutor.

"Do you know" – Forey arose and walked over by the half-opened window – "this case is getting mighty tough. It's beat everything that's hit this locality."

"How about the Dobbin gang?"

"That bunch of bank robbers, seven years ago? That was tough all right, but it was different. That was a man hunt. We shot down the whole outfit."

"And they dropped a few of the local boys, too."

"Yes. That was bad. But there was no mystery about it. Those birds were fugitives from justice. Hiding out hereabouts. Supposed to have a load of swag with them. But that was the bunk."

"Are you sure?"

"Mighty sure. There was a bunch of them came in on the Union Valley. Some of them dropped off here. Dobbin was with that part of the gang. The rest kept on – never heard of again – and it's likely they had the swag."

"I see."

"We learned Dobbin's crowd was about. We fought it out with them. Up on the hill, over by the railroad. I shot down Dobbin myself. Say" – Forey chuckled – "it's lucky that Ezekiel Twinton wasn't living up on the hill at the time. He'd have gone goofy."

"I suppose so," nodded the prosecutor. "The Dobbin gang set fire to the old Pastely farmhouse, didn't they?"

"Yeah. It was empty at the time and they made a stand there until we drove them out. But it's funny, Mr. Trobers, you mentioning that fight with the bank robbers and my remembering that they had come in on the Union Valley."

"How so?"

"There was a fellow in here this morning. A railroad detective. His name was Perry Nubin. Told me that if I thought any marauders were about, to be sure and let him know. Said he'd cleaned all the bums off this division of the Union Valley."

"What did you reply?"

"That we were looking for one smart guy – not a gang. I showed him the Luger pistol. He said it was a right good idea to have the expert come up from New York."

"Anything else?"

"No. Nubin said he was going over to another division; that's why he dropped in. Said he wanted to be sure everything was right; that he wouldn't be back here for a week or more. But he looked to me like he was all

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talk; and I found out later that I was right. I asked Zach Hoyler about him."

"You mean the station agent?"

"Yeah. He lives here in town. I met him when he was going on duty; I wanted to make sure that this fellow Nubin really worked for the Union Valley. Zach told me Nubin is trying to make a big hit with the company. He was dropped by the B and R; that was a come-down, so he's trying to impress his new boss with his efficiency."

"The mentality of a railroad detective," remarked the prosecutor, "is sometimes confined to devising new ways of pitching riders from freight trains."

"You said it, prosecutor," chuckled Forey. "Those legal terminals you use are pips."

The prosecutor smiled as he arose from his chair. Tim Forey pulled down the window and started to close the catch. It was broken, so he shrugged his shoulders. He dropped the Luger in a desk drawer and pushed the drawer shut.

"I'm watching things out at Breck's," he remarked. "Got a good reason to have deputies there now. If young Elbert tries anything sneaky, they'll nab him. I'm having them watch Craven, too."

"This man Vincent?"

"He's all right. Maybe the others are, too. I'm keeping an eye on the outside – that is, for suspects. If Ezekiel Twinton would only get over his jimjams, I'd feel better."

"What's his trouble?"

"Thinks there's prowlers as usual. Only they never get near the house, so he says. I think the guy's cuckoo. I'd be, if I lived in a place with only a deaf servant and a chink cook who can't talk English."

SHERIFF and prosecutor had shifted to the door. Forey turned out the light. They departed; there was a click of the sheriff's key that denoted the locking of the door. Then silence. After that, the unlocked window moved upward.

A swish sounded in the sheriff's office. A tiny light glimmered on the desk. A gloved hand opened the drawer and removed the Luger. The Shadow studied the weapon.

The master of darkness had listened in on the sheriff's conversation. He was here to examine the death gun. His left hand arranged the flashlight on the desk; his right glove slid clear of his hand. Producing a sheet of paper, The Shadow began to make notations in bluish ink.

Written thoughts that faded as the ink dried. The Shadow was considering the history of this weapon. His ideas would have amazed Tim Forey. The sheriff, balked by circumstances, had made no deductions whatever.

In Grantham Breck's possession.

This was the first statement that faded. The Shadow knew that the old lawyer, prowling up the hill side, would have gone armed. He had taken the Luger with him for protection.

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Struggle. Murder.

These two words told what had happened. Grantham Breck had encountered an enemy who had overpowered him. In the fight, the antagonist had gained the Luger pistol. He had slain the lawyer with the weapon.

Keys. Body. Replacement.

The first word told of the murderer's finding. The second, his immediate plan of putting Grantham Breck's body in the smoke house. The third referred to the gun. A soft laugh came from The Shadow's lips.

Replacement later.

The Shadow was recalling Harry Vincent's report. On the night of the murder, Harry had heard footsteps in Breck's house. He had encountered only Craven, who had told Harry and the deputy that he, too, had heard footsteps. That, logically, was the time when the gun had been put back in Grantham Breck's study.

Knowledge. Time interval.

The Shadow was comparing two points. First, that someone must have known the location of the smoke house; second that someone also knew where the Luger belonged. Had there been no time interval between the bestowal of the body and the replacement of the gun, it would have meant that one person knew both facts.

But the time interval made it possible for two persons to have figured. First: the murderer, who like anyone who had seen Breck's grounds – would have known about the locked smoke house. Second: a crafty schemer, who knew Breck's house from the inside.

Whether one or two were involved, the man upon whom The Shadow must concentrate was the schemer who had replaced the gun. Yet The Shadow was missing no point. Roughly, he specified the time interval:

Smoke house before nine.

Replacement after midnight.

A soft, whispered laugh as the written thoughts vanished. The Shadow resumed his deductions with a new phrase:

Contact with Breck.

This referred to the chief criminal concerned. The Shadow was considering the matter of the pistol. Whoever had replaced it had most certainly visited Grantham Breck by that side door. The two must have been good friends. Otherwise, the lawyer would not have shown the visitor the hiding place where he kept the Luger. Johanna had been the only other person to see the pistol. Old Breck had shown it to her by coincidence.

The Luger.

Words and the pistol were both before The Shadow's burning gaze. Again the soft laugh whispered. There must be some definite reason why Grantham Breck had brought the weapon from its hiding place to let his secret visitor examine it. The Shadow had the answer.

Crime. Complicity.

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Crime had been brewing. Grantham Breck and his visitor had been hatching misdeeds between them. Figuring ways and means, the old lawyer had produced the Luger pistol. It had been an inspiration. Then murder had intervened. The Shadow had the reason for it:

Double cross.

GRANTHAM BRECK had not played fair. It was plain that he had been working with some man of crime. The lawyer should have stayed indoors. The period of the visit had been followed by Grantham Breck's new habit of sneaking out at nights.

Why should the lawyer have jeopardized his position by becoming a prowler? He had been visited by a crook. This man had minions. The answer was obvious. During a lull that had followed the visits, the old lawyer had started out on his own. The crook was watching. He had brought in thugs to aid him. Grantham Breck had been intercepted on his way up the hill. He had received the crook's answer to a double-crosser: death.

The goal.

Swag. The Shadow knew that answer. Tim Forey's chance remarks had been illuminating. Some crook knew that the wealth of the Dobbin gang was buried hereabouts. It must be on the hill, in the property that Ezekiel Twinton had purchased.

Hence Grantham Breck's offer to buy that land. A New York lawyer who had dealt with crooks, Grantham Breck had been approached by some member of the evil fraternity. Had he bought the property, the hidden spoils could have been easily regained. Failing in that, Grantham Breck had advised the crook to bring in a crew – or perhaps the crook himself had suggested that plan.

Again the laugh. The Shadow was linking all this with the Luger pistol. He could see Grantham Breck as an advisor, as canny in plans of crime as he had been when facing juries. One more written thought concluded The Shadow's chain. His hand wrote two words:

The move.

The crook had brought in his crew. That meant that the time to move had been approaching. But instead of going after the swag, Grantham Breck had been slain. Perhaps the mob had been brought early, on the lawyer's account. If so, it was proof that Grantham Breck knew too much.

The move would be coming soon. The murder of the old lawyer had delayed it. The discovery of the Luger pistol might well mean another short delay. But the move would come; and it would be ordered by the master crook, the only one who must surely have remained on the ground.

The Shadow would wait. No need to strike until the move was made. But meanwhile, he would piece more facts. His silent investigations would continue.

The little light went out. The Luger was shifted back into the drawer. A swish; the drawer closed. Half a minute later, the window was silently lowered.

The Shadow had listened. He had made his deductions. Forgetting nothing in the past or present, the unseen investigator blended with the night.

## CHAPTER XI. PATHS TO THE HILL

IT was after midnight. The Union Limited had gone through. Zach Hoyler's duty was nearly ended. After the arrival and departure of the Dairy Express, his day's work would be over. The station agent was coming from his little ticket office when the door of the waiting room opened. In stepped Perry Nubin.

Hoyler was surprised to see the railroad dick. Nubin grinned as the station agent stared at him. He seemed to pick the question that was in Hoyler's mind.

"Wondering how I came in tonight, eh?" asked Nubin. "I guess old Number Three pounded through here pretty fast, didn't she?"

Hoyler nodded. Number Three was the Union Limited. The train had been running late; Hoyler had received a wire stating that it would not stop at Chanburg unless passengers were waiting. Hoyler had wired back that none were at the station.

"Well," chuckled Nubin, "I was aboard. Thought I wasn't going to get off, but she slowed up near the grade crossing and I dropped clear. Hoofed it back here along the tracks."

Hoyler nodded. He doubted the detective's explanation. There was no reason why the Limited should have slowed when it neared the spot where the hill road crossed the tracks. Nevertheless, Hoyler deemed it unwise to express doubts of Nubin's truthfulness. He made a tactful remark.

"I knew you were around town this morning," said the agent, "but I didn't expect you back. Went out this afternoon, didn't you?"

"Sure," replied the detective. "But I thought I'd better make a quick trip in and out tonight. Just to make sure things were right."

"There's nothing wrong so far as I know."

"Well, you don't always know everything," growled Nubin. "But I'll take your word for it. Say – I saw that rube sheriff this morning."

"So he told me."

"He did? When?"

"When I was coming on duty."

"What did he want?"

"Just wanted to be sure you were a railroad dick" – Hoyler paused to grin – "so I told him you were. Gave you a good boost, Nubin. Said you'd once worked for the B and R, but changed to the Union Valley. Told him you were on the ladder – but I didn't say whether you were going up or down."

"More wise-cracks, eh? Well, if that yap with the tin star asks you anything more, tell him I came in on the Limited tonight and went out on the milk."

"You're taking Sixty-two?" questioned Hoyler, referring to the Dairy Express.

## DOOM ON THE HILL

"Yeah," replied Nubin, "and if you keep an eye out, I'll show you how neat I can get aboard. Stick here on the platform when Sixty-two pulls out."

One of the waiting-room windows was open. Peering eyes were looking in from the blackness. Keen ears were listening. The Shadow had chosen this post; yet neither Hoyler nor Nubin was aware of the fact. Agent and detective were making for the platform; already, the whistle of the Dairy Express was blaring for the crossing of the hill road.

"Going back to a milk route, eh?" laughed Hoyler, as Nubin started to cut across the tracks. "Well, riding Sixty-two is better than driving a horse and wagon."

Nubin made no response to this jest. He disappeared beyond a freight car on the siding. Hoyler turned to watch the approaching glare of the Dairy Express as the train came grinding down the rails.

THE train was a heavy one. The wheels of the big Mogul spun when the locomotive started forward after the brief stop. Zach Hoyler remained on the platform, watching the long line of black milk cars move slowly by. As the rear of the train was nearing, a figure sprang outward from between two cars. Perry Nubin waved a good-bye to the station agent.

Hoyler watched the train curve around the nearby bend, its speed still low. He walked back into the station, to close up for the night. He did not see two events which took place outside.

The first concerned Perry Nubin. It was something that Hoyler could not possibly have observed, because of the intervening bend. Three hundred yards up the track, the railroad dick dropped from his perch and landed sprawling beside the right of way. He crouched there until the train had passed; then lingered, planning to return toward the station after the agent had gone.

The second occurrence was one that Hoyler might have witnessed had he been outside the station. From the darkness beside the waiting-room window, a spectral figure moved across the platform. For a few brief moments, lights showed the vague outline of The Shadow. Then the phantom shape merged with the darkness. The Shadow had headed along the tracks in the direction from which the Dairy Express had come.

Shortly afterward, the station was blotted out by darkness. Zach Hoyler had started for town in his old roadster. No one was near the station. Perry Nubin had approached; then made a short cut over toward the road. The Shadow was far along the track.

Later, a light glimmered in the old shack halfway to the grade crossing. The Shadow had entered the little building. His keen eyes were studying odd scraps of newspaper and empty bottles. Some of these objects had been moved. Someone had visited the shack.

A soft laugh crept from The Shadow's lips. The little light went out. The Shadow moved away from the shack. His course led him back to the station. Finding that all was silent there, The Shadow began a stealthy course in the direction of the Breck house.

THIS investigation had required more than a half hour. Hence The Shadow had not reached the vicinity of the Breck house when a certain event took place within that building. The happening there concerned Harry Vincent.

Sheriff Tim Forey had placed two deputies on duty. One was asleep in the living room; the other in a bedroom on the second floor. Harry Vincent, however, was awake. As he sat by the little table, The Shadow's agent fancied that he heard creeping sounds from the hall.

## DOOM ON THE HILL

Craven? Harry recalled that the servant had spent a long time in the kitchen earlier in the evening. About midnight, the man had gone upstairs. Harry stole softly to the hall and listened. He heard nothing more.

Harry tiptoed to the door of Elbert Breck's room. He tried the knob. The door was locked. Harry could see Elbert's window from his own, so he went back and peered out from his window. He made a prompt discovery. Hanging from Elbert's window was a ropelike object formed of trunk straps buckled together.

Elbert had made a secret exit from the house. How long ago, Harry did not know. He recalled that Elbert had gone to his room at eleven o'clock. It was nearly one o'clock now. Hastily, Harry added lines to his report. He folded all the sheets and placed them in an envelope. Stealthily he left his room and found the back stairs to the kitchen.

There was no lock on the door that led to the back porch. The barrier was fitted with two bolts; both of these had been drawn. This meant that Craven, like Elbert Breck, could also be roaming at large. Yet if both were out, they must be acting independently; otherwise they would have chosen the same means of exit. This bore out Harry's positive belief that Elbert and Craven had no common plan between them.

Harry went outside and closed the door behind him. Staring across the fields, he was sure that he saw a figure prowling toward the hill. The starlight gave only a momentary glimpse. This was the direction in which Harry was sure Elbert or Craven would have gone. The Shadow's agent headed toward the hill.

SEVERAL minutes later, The Shadow arrived beside the house. His keen eyes spied the string of straps hanging from Elbert Breck's window. Swiftly, The Shadow used this contrivance to reach the second floor. He entered Elbert Breck's room and found it empty.

The key was on the inside of the door. The Shadow unlocked the barrier, made his gliding way to Harry's room and read his agent's report. He returned, locked Elbert's door from the inside and made a prompt exit by the window. Swiftly, The Shadow headed toward the hill.

Up ahead, Harry Vincent had passed the road where he had found the body of Grantham Breck. Creeping along the slope beyond, Harry held his breath and listened. He was sure that he heard soft sounds from the night. He knew that one man was up ahead. But he also felt sure that there was another lurking over to the right; that a third was moving in from the left.

Harry kept straight ahead, gripping the revolver that was in his pocket. He felt confident that The Shadow would soon be here; but much depended upon how soon the mysterious master visited Breck's to gain Harry's report.

Of one thing, Harry was certain as he neared the brow of the slope and saw the dim outline of Ezekiel Twinton's house. Paths were converging on the hill. Cross-purposes were at work. Danger – perhaps death – lay close at hand.

## CHAPTER XII. DEATH ON THE HILL

ALL became tense as Harry Vincent crouched close by the fence line that had once marked the boundary of Ezekiel Twinton's property. Listening, Harry felt sure that stealthy men were on the move. Harry sensed that something was due to happen. It came.

A mastiff growled. One of Twinton's dogs had scented a prowler. Then came another growl; a hound yapped. The deep-throated, warning bark of the first mastiff broke from the darkness. A lull followed.

## DOOM ON THE HILL

Someone had approached too close to the house. The intruder had shifted away; still, the dogs were growling. Harry was positive that Ezekiel Twinton must have been awakened by the noise. One minute passed; then a bright light flashed from beneath the roof of the back porch. Ezekiel Twinton stepped into view.

The light was powerful. Harry could make out Twinton's attire. The hilltop dweller was clad in slippers, trousers and shirt. Peering from his porch, he looked for prowlers within the range of light that formed a forty-foot circle. He stepped down to the ground.

Harry, himself, could see a figure that had stopped on the very fringe of the light. This man was close to the ground. Had Twinton spied the man also? Or had he observed some other lurker in the gloom? Harry drew his revolver, not knowing what might happen.

Ezekiel Twinton was coming forward, his glinting gun half raised. Suddenly, he made a swift leap directly toward the figure that Harry had observed. The huddled man came to his feet and sprang into the darkness. Twinton pounced upon him. They grappled; then the prowler went sprawling just beyond the edge of the light.

Twinton was quick as a cat. He seemed intent upon capturing his prey. He bounded forward, instead of using his revolver. He, too, was leaping into darkness. Then came the sudden finish, just as Twinton grappled with his hidden foe.

A vivid flash accompanied the burst of a gun. The shot came from the spot where the men were struggling. Harry heard a hoarse cry; then a groan. With an instinctive shout, The Shadow's agent sprang forward, raising his revolver.

Harry did not use his flashlight, for he did not want to betray his exact position. Hence his action produced immediate effect. Footsteps rustled in the grass. As Harry paused, he heard panting. Men were scurrying off through the darkness. This was Harry's cue.

The Shadow's agent clicked his flashlight and sent its beam traveling in a wide sweep. For the fraction of a second, the glare revealed one speeding form; then another. But when Harry tried to focus the light on either spot, he found that he was too late. Though he had caught a flash of two prowlers, Harry knew that there were three at least. Still approaching the scene of the conflict, he moved the light more slowly. He discovered no one.

A groan from the ground ahead. Convinced that no sniper could be close enough to pick him with a pot shot, Harry advanced to the spot where he had heard the sound. He turned his light upon a huddled figure. He recognized the face of Ezekiel Twinton.

THE house owner was the person who had received the shot. Twinton's staring eyes were glassy. Harry knew that the man was dying. He spoke to Twinton. Lips moved in response; but they uttered no sound. With a gasp, Twinton rolled upon his face.

Blood stained the shirt as Harry now saw it. Twinton had been shot in the back. His revolver was lying on the ground beside him. Again, Harry swept his light about, hoping that he might spot the killer. He discovered no one.

Commotion from the porch. Quickly extinguishing his light, Harry gazed in that direction. Two men had arrived there: Dunmore, the old deaf servant, was standing with Lang Sook, the cook. The Chinaman was babbling a lingo that Dunmore could not have understood even if he had heard it.

## DOOM ON THE HILL

Barks and growls had arisen from about the house. The dogs were excited. Yet Harry, crouched in the darkness beside Ezekiel Twinton's body, was waiting. He had no purpose other than his indignation at this deal of death. He wanted to get the murderer. Neither Dunmore nor Lang Sook had nerve enough to venture forth. The pair went back into the house.

Still Harry lingered. Then came a hiss. Startled, Harry listened. Then he heard the whisper of The Shadow. The silent master had arrived too late to witness crime. He wanted the facts that Harry could give him.

"Report."

In a low, tense voice, Harry told all he knew. He sensed that his information was vague. Moreover, nearly ten minutes had elapsed since the tragedy. The Shadow, however, made no comment while Harry spoke. The single word that he uttered at the end of Harry's story was a command:

"Return."

Harry nodded. Pocketing his revolver, he arose and went away through the darkness. He had begun to realize his own folly. He belonged in the house at the bottom of the hill; yet he had lingered here by the dead body of a man whom he could not aid.

The Shadow's tiny flashlight glimmered after Harry had departed. Keen eyes studied the position of Ezekiel Twinton's form. The Shadow observed the flattened grass. His light showed the area of the brief struggle. It moved further along; then it suddenly went out.

Dunmore and Lang Sook had reappeared upon the porch. The old servant was carrying a lighted kerosene lamp. The Chinaman had armed himself with a large carving knife. Together, they stepped to the ground and advanced with caution. The Shadow moved off into the darkness. He waited and watched.

A gasp came from Dunmore's lips when the servant discovered the body of Ezekiel Twinton. Lang Sook babbled incoherently in Chinese. Dunmore raised the lantern to form a larger circle of light. He did not see the lurking figure of The Shadow.

The servant signed to the cook. Lang Sook seemed to understand. Extinguishing the lantern, Dunmore laid it on the ground. He and the Chinaman lifted Twinton's body and carried the inert form into the house. After the door had closed, The Shadow's light again flickered here and there. At last it went out altogether. A soft laugh – solemn and mirthless – undulated through the darkness. The Shadow departed.

HARRY VINCENT had lost no time in heading back for the house below the hill. He realized that others could have reached this goal far ahead of him. When he arrived, Harry tried the back door. It opened. Softly, The Shadow's agent entered and stole up to his room. His first action was to attire himself in pajamas. Then he sat in a chair and listened. Ten minutes passed.

Harry heard a sound in the hall. Then came the gruff challenge of a deputy. Feigning sleepiness, Harry opened the door of his room and stepped into view. He discovered the deputy speaking to Craven. The servant was half dressed.

"Where've you been?" quizzed the deputy.

"Down in the kitchen, sir," responded Craven. "I fancied that I heard a sound down there. I went to investigate."

## DOOM ON THE HILL

"Everything all right?"

"Yes, sir – that is, all right now, sir" – Craven hesitated – "the back door was unbolted. But I believe that was a mere oversight, sir."

"Didn't you bolt it tonight?"

"No, sir. I thought that you would do so. Mr. Forey said that you were in charge here, sir."

"Is the door bolted now?"

"Yes, sir. I bolted it."

"All right, get to bed."

The deputy nodded to Harry and strolled back into his room. Harry returned to his own quarters. Scarcely had he closed the door before he heard a scraping sound outside the window. Looking out, he saw Elbert Breck coming up the chain of straps. The young man gained the window and drew the improvised rope up after him.

Harry pondered as he inscribed a brief report. He knew that Elbert had been out; he was sure that Craven had also left the house. He pictured the two men upon the hill, both fleeing after Harry's shout.

But why had they not arrived back before him? With fifteen minutes' start, both had shown up fifteen minutes after Harry's arrival. Why the half hour interval? All the way down the hill, Harry had worried for fear that Craven had arrived ahead to bolt the door. Now he was sure he knew the reason why the barrier had still been opened.

All this would be new mystery for The Shadow. Harry completed his report and went to bed. He was asleep when soft squidges sounded from outside his window. The figure of The Shadow appeared. Keen eyes read Harry's coded report. The Shadow departed.

LATER, the phantom figure was lurking by the railroad tracks, near the abandoned shack. Listening, The Shadow heard footsteps upon the ties. He knew the identity of the man who walked by. It was Perry Nubin, the railroad detective.

The dick turned from the tracks and used a flashlight to find his way to the little shack. The light glimmered for a short while. The Shadow could see its glow through the grimy windows. Then the light blinked out. Perry Nubin had also been at large. He had chosen these quarters for the night.

The Shadow moved into darkness. His form became apparent later on, when it glided from the dark street beside the sheriff's office and passed beneath the glow of a light on the main street. A fleeting patch of darkness that moved along the ground – the shadow of The Shadow – that was all.

The final token of The Shadow's presence occurred in the little clearing where the autogiro was stationed. There, far from habitations, The Shadow indulged in a burst of mockery that came in bitter, sinister tones.

The sound died. Echoes lisped their answer. All was silent. The Shadow had been too late to intercept murder on the hill. But he had gained facts that might lead to its solution. There was an omen in The Shadow's laugh.

The murder of Ezekiel Twinton had been unanticipated. A curious crosscurrent of events had caused it. The death of the man on the hill was due to produce new situations. The Shadow knew that it would be the

forerunner to the crime that he had prepared to meet.

### CHAPTER XIII. THE SECOND BULLET

THE next afternoon found Sheriff Tim Forey in his office. Two men were with him, One was Norman Trobers, the county prosecutor. The other was Harry Vincent. Tim Forey was discussing murder on the hill.

"Two fools!" exclaimed the sheriff. "Dunmore and that Chink cook. They had no telephone; so they kept watch over that body until morning. Then they got word in to me – hours after Ezekiel Twinton was murdered."

"No evidence, then?" inquired Trobers.

"No," growled Forey. "That dry ground left no footprints. I figure Ezekiel Twinton put up a fight; then he was shot dead. The same as with Grantham Breck. Only Twinton was shot in the back.

"I've got the bullet" – Forey produced a slug from the desk drawer – "and I won't have to send it into New York. The expert is due here this afternoon. Maybe he can tell something about it."

Forey dropped the bullet back in the drawer. It clanked alongside the Luger. The sheriff rested back in his chair and spoke again.

"I brought Vincent in here on a pretext," he explained to the prosecutor. "Since he found Grantham Breck's body, it was natural that he should see Ezekiel Twinton's corpse also. But the real reason I brought him in for was to talk about this butler, Craven. One of the deputies reported that the fellow was moving around last night."

"Inside the house or outside?" quizzed Trobers.

"Inside, the deputy says," replied Forey. "But he could have gone out as well. He might have been coming back when the deputy spotted him. Listen, Vincent, did you see or hear Craven go out of the house last night?"

"No," responded Harry. "I heard the deputy challenge him in the hall. Craven gave his explanation about the back door being unbolted."

"What about Elbert Breck?" questioned Trobers. "Do you think he could have sneaked out the back way, Vincent?"

"No," replied Harry. "As a matter of fact, Elbert locked himself in his room for the night."

The explanation sufficed. Harry said nothing more. He knew that he must preserve silence that he might aid The Shadow. Accusations of either Craven or Elbert would bring a definite quiz. Harry knew that he might be forced to declare his own actions of last night. That would end his usefulness by making him a possible suspect in the murder of Ezekiel Twinton.

"Here's the way I figure it," asserted Forey, in abrupt fashion. "Old Grantham Breck was a cagy sort. He had something up his sleeve. There was something fishy about him wanting to buy some of Twinton's property. Well, Grantham Breck got bumped off, and somebody had a reason for doing it.

## DOOM ON THE HILL

"Like as not the actual murderer cleared out. But somebody stuck around. Whoever did was prowling like Grantham Breck had done. This fellow ran into Twinton and killed him last night. Now who was the fellow?"

"Somebody who knew something about Grantham Breck's affairs," decided Trobers.

"You've hit it, prosecutor," agreed Forey. "Well, there's Craven. He was pretty faithful to old Grantham Breck. He knows the lawyer was acting funny. Maybe that's all that Craven knows. But maybe he knows more.

"Then there's young Elbert Breck. He was hanging out over in Laporte. Using an alias. He may have been snooping into his father's affairs; on the contrary, he may have been trying to get back in the old man's good graces. He's a puzzle, too, Elbert is.

"But that's not all. Maybe there was somebody on the outside. Somebody who had no business hereabouts. Some fellow who was in cahoots with Grantham Breck. That bird – if there is such a one – is still about. I'm looking for him; but I've got no clue to him."

"The new bullet," suggested Trobers.

"Yeah," remarked Forey. "The other led us to the Luger pistol but that only mixed things up worse. Say – I wish that expert would show up."

FOREY arose and began to pace the room. As if in answer to his impatience, there was a knock at the door. Forey opened it to admit a quiet-faced, middle-aged man who was carrying a heavy suitcase.

"Mr. Hubert?" questioned Forey. "In from New York?"

The arrival nodded. Forey introduced himself and shook hands. He followed by introducing the expert to the prosecutor and Harry Vincent.

"Before I have you examine the Luger gun," declared Forey, "I've got another slug I want you to look at. There was a second murder here last night. Fellow named Ezekiel Twinton was killed up by his house on the hill.

"You have extracted the bullet from his body?"

"Here it is."

Forey produced the slug from the desk drawer. The expert opened his bag, brought out a powerful microscope and laid the bullet upon a little piece of cloth. Moving over by the window, he started a preliminary examination which ended promptly. He laid the microscope on the desk.

"You've made a mistake, sheriff," he announced, as he advanced with the bullet resting on the cloth.

"How come?" demanded Forey.

"I understood," declared Hubert, "that the Luger pistol was in your possession."

"That's right."

"Then you have given me the wrong bullet. This is the one that you sent to New York for examination."

## DOOM ON THE HILL

"Not at all." Forey laughed gruffly as he reached into the desk drawer. "Here's the slug that killed Grantham Breck. I kept it in this match box, so I'd know where it was."

"Perhaps you made a slip," put in the prosecutor. "Maybe you have given Mr. Hubert the wrong bullet."

"No, no," protested Forey. "This is the slug that came from old Breck's body –"

"Let me see it," suggested Hubert.

Forey handed over the bullet. The expert placed it beside the one that he already held. His forehead showed a wrinkled frown. He picked up the microscope. His examination was brief. He turned to the sheriff.

"You were right, Sheriff," he declared. "This bullet from the match box is the one that I examined previously. But that is not all. This second bullet –"

He paused and stared into the opened drawer of the desk. He saw the Luger pistol and directed an inquiring stare toward Forey.

"Is that the pistol?" inquired Hubert.

"Sure," responded Forey. "One shot fired. I've kept it right here ever since we found it."

"I must examine it –"

"Wait a minute! How about that bullet that killed Twinton?"

"This second bullet," declared the expert, in a serious tone, "is the reason why I must examine the pistol itself. If it is the weapon that fired the first bullet –"

"What then?"

"It will be the pistol that discharged the second bullet also. These bullets" – Hubert was holding his hand flat and moving it up and down – "are not only of the same Luger caliber. They are identical in markings. Each was discharged from a Luger. Each came from the same Luger."

SHERIFF FOREY gaped. The expert was nodding solemnly. With a gruff ejaculation, Forey reached in the desk drawer and pulled out the pistol that he had found in Grantham Breck's study. He opened the weapon. He did not need the expert to certify what he saw.

"By George!" exclaimed Forey. "Someone has got at this gun. There's a second cartridge missing! You are right, Mr. Hubert! Prosecutor" – Forey shook his head – "we're up against a mighty clever murderer. He used this gun to kill Twinton like he did old Breck!"

The prosecutor was on his feet. He pointed to the window at the side of the office. He stepped over and juggled the broken catch. Tim Forey emitted a growl.

"That's it," he decided. "Say – have I been dumb. That killer was looking for trouble last night. But he didn't want us to get wise to him. He knew the Luger has us puzzled. So he sneaked in here and armed himself with it."

## DOOM ON THE HILL

"That side street is black as pitch at night. Anybody could sneak into town without being seen. After he took the gun and killed Twinton, the guy came back. Left the Luger here just to make a sap of me – to have us doing some more blind guessing.

"It wouldn't take a smart gazebo to pull that stunt. But the clever part was the idea. We're as bad off as we were before. Humph. The guy did it neat. No traces here in the office. Well, prosecutor, you'll have to keep the evidence in your safe from now on."

"How soon could the man have gotten here after the murder?" inquired Trobers. "I presume that he would have returned promptly with the gun."

"Well," mused Forey, "by cutting across lots, he could have passed the Breck house inside of ten minutes. Fifteen more would have got him to the top of the hill, I reckon. He could have made as good time – maybe better – coming back."

"You don't think –"

"I'm thinking nothing, prosecutor. Not until Mr. Hubert has examined this Luger gun. But I guess it's a sure bet that this pistol fired those bullets."

Harry Vincent was pondering as he drove back along the devious road to Elbert Breck's home. He was considering the travel time, by foot, between Breck's and the sheriff's office. Ten minutes each way – twenty altogether. Harry began to see a possible reason for the late returns of Craven and Elbert Breck. But there his thoughts divided. He would prepare a report; the rest would remain with The Shadow.

Harry Vincent did not know that The Shadow, last night, had found evidence to prove that someone other than Elbert and Craven could have been up the hill and back into the town. The Shadow was watching events outside of Breck's house. To Harry belonged the task of checking those within.

The vital point of Harry's report would be the news that the second bullet was fired from the Luger pistol. That, to The Shadow, would mean more than even Harry Vincent supposed.

## CHAPTER XIV. WORD SPREADS

SHERIFF TIM FOREY was paradoxical in his methods. There were times when the big-fisted official remained closemouthed. On other occasions, he decided to talk. No one – not even Forey himself – could explain just which policy would develop.

Forey had tried to preserve secrecy about the death of Grantham Breck. Possibly his failure to track the murderer had made him decide to work differently in the case of Ezekiel Twinton. Whatever the reason, the result was that the story of the Luger pistol reached many ears by nightfall.

People discussed the matter in the town of Chanburg. They carried it with them to Laporte, and other neighboring places. Forey began to feel that he had chosen a good plan. Certain it was that someone had prowled into town last night. There was a chance that some native might bring in word of having seen the person who entered the sheriff's office.

But Chanburg was a nine o'clock town. Anything that happened after midnight would fail to raise the fast-sleeping burghers. In this section of the hinterland, nothing short of a fire whistle could have aroused the sleepers from their beds.

## DOOM ON THE HILL

There was one exception to the rule. Occasionally, people were about at eleven thirty on account of the arrival of the Union Limited. Enterprising folk sometimes came home on that train. There were others, traveling northward, who now and then went out on it.

Harry Vincent was scheduled to stay longer in Chanburg. This made it wise for him to send a routine telegram to Rutledge Mann. Harry happened to go over to the station just about the time the Union Limited was scheduled to arrive. The windows of the waiting room were open when Harry got there. The Shadow's agent heard voices. He found three passengers for the Union Limited talking outside the ticket window. The train was late.

Harry received a telegraph blank from Zach Hoyler. The agent went back to his table; Harry listened in while he was writing out the message to Mann. The men from town were discussing the developments of the day.

"SAY," said one, "it ain't no secret now why Tim Forey's been looking glum. That first murder had him buffaloed. That's hot, ain't it, him finding the gun up at Breck's?"

"Don't hold a candle to the second murder," grunted a second man. "Boy! I'll bet Forey went cuckoo when he found out the fellow had swiped that German gun and put it back again. Used it to kill Ezekiel Twinton, by heck!"

"Forey's worried," announced the third townsman. "Do you know what he's after? He's hoping that somebody might have seen that fellow coming in and out. That's what."

The other two men laughed. Then the first speaker adopted a serious tone.

"Listen, fellows," he said. "We're live wires, us three. So we can talk together; but don't let nobody in town know what I said. Chanburg's just about the deadest town on the map. I say that even though I do live there."

"Is it on the map?" jeered the second man.

"I reckon not," replied the first. "Say – if we had a nine o'clock curfew most of the folks would complain because it woke 'em up at night."

"You're right, brother."

"I know it. Well – here's what I'm driving at. That smart fellow who took that gun and put it back in Tim's office knew he was plenty safe. There's two places around here where nobody won't see you if you walk through after midnight."

"Chanburg's one. Is there another?"

"Sure. Over on Brown Hill. The old grave-yard."

The other townsmen laughed. Their conversation ended abruptly. The whistle of the Limited had sounded. Zach Hoyler was coming from his little office.

Harry Vincent lingered until after the train had left. He pushed the telegram through the ticket window, just as the station agent returned. Turning to go out, Harry ran into a stocky man who had just entered. He saw a square, challenging face. It was Harry Vincent's first meeting with Perry Nubin.

## DOOM ON THE HILL

The Shadow's agent left. Nubin strolled about. After he heard the coupe roll away, the dick peered through the ticket window. Hoyler had not yet picked up Harry's telegram. Nubin drew it from the window, read it and put it back. Hoyler came over to get it.

"WELL, gum-shoe," greeted the agent. "I suppose you were riding stylish again tonight."

"Yeah," responded the detective. "Say – I was down in Laporte today. What's this I hear about another murder? Did somebody plug a guy named Ezekiel Twinton?"

"Someone did. Too bad you weren't working in back of this window, Hawkshaw. You'd have heard all about it."

"How come?"

"Tim Forey let the details out. He had the pistol down in his office – the one that was used to murder old Breck – and somebody climbed in there. Used the same gun to bump off Twinton. Then put it back."

"Humph. Used the Luger again, eh?"

"So Tim admits."

"Got him puzzled?"

"Plenty. The expert is up from New York. Says the gun fired both bullets."

"Where's the pistol now?"

"Guess they've put it away in a safe."

"It won't do them much good," remarked Nubin. "It's tough to trace any killer through a foreign-made gun."

"Why should it be?" asked Hoyler.

"Well" – Nubin paused – "most guns have a history, leastwise the kind that murderers use. But if old Breck imported that rod direct from Germany – or got it from a smuggler – there wouldn't be much chance of learning anything. You say the expert's still around?"

"I didn't say so, but I expect he is. Maybe Tim figures there'll be some more shooting."

"So he's put the rod out of sight, eh? Well, that may bring in some American gats."

"Funny thing," suggested Hoyler, "about old Breck having that pistol in the first place. Tim thinks he was carrying it when he was killed. I wonder why he chose a German gun."

"Nutty, I guess," growled Nubin. "He's the kind of bird who would have wanted something different. Say" – the dick changed the subject – "what about this guy Vincent? Has he been sending these telegrams very often?"

"Pretty often. Guess he's got a job with that fellow Mann."

## DOOM ON THE HILL

"Must think he's a big shot, worrying so much about his investments. Say – that fellow Ezekiel Twinton lived up on the hill, didn't he?"

"Yes."

"Who lived with him?"

"Two servants. A deaf butler and a Chinese cook."

"What are they doing now?"

"Tim Forey moved them down into town, I understand. Leaving the old house empty. I guess he brought the dogs along, too."

"No deputies up there?"

"Why should there be? There's nothing in that house worth stealing. If there is, it would be easier to move it than to put men guarding a place where nobody's living."

"Guess you're right. Say, Hoyler, tap this through for me." Nubin reached for a telegraph blank. "Buddy of mine used to work on the B and R. Out of a job in New York; thought maybe I could place him on the Union Valley if he came up to see me."

"Anything like you?" questioned the agent, while Nubin was writing the telegram. "If he is, that wire don't go through from this station."

"There it is," retorted Nubin, shoving the telegram under the wicket. "Send it and keep the wise-cracks for the rubes down in Chanburg. I'm going out on Sixty-eight."

THE Dairy Express was on time. It came grinding into the station before Hoyler had a chance to send the telegram. Perry Nubin hopped on between milk cars. He waved to Hoyler as the train pulled out. Number Sixty-eight was lighter than usual. Hoyler watched the train gather speed as it reached the bend.

When the agent came back into the station, he entered the ticket office and picked up the two telegrams. There was a third one lying beneath the others; one that Hoyler had forgotten. It was a message that he had received over the telephone from the Breck house.

That wire had been phoned in shortly before Harry Vincent's arrival. It made Zach Hoyler ponder. The telegram was addressed to Powers Glidden, who was evidently a New York attorney. It stated that the sender wanted to retain him as advisory counsel.

Hoyler was wondering why Harry had not brought the telegram. He was also puzzled by the signature. It was simply one name: "Breck." Hoyler recalled the voice that had come over the wire; its tones had been those of Craven, the butler. The man had called the station on previous occasions.

It seemed logical that Elbert might have given Craven the message to send. Perhaps he had formulated the telegram after Harry Vincent had departed for the station. The single name "Breck" was also explainable; but Hoyler had pondered upon the fact that it could have applied to the dead father as well as to the living son.

Perry Nubin's telegram was to a man named Charles Bland. It was a suggestion that Bland should come to see the detective at Laporte. It was signed by Nubin's full name. Zach Hoyler stacked Harry Vincent's telegram

with the other two.

Blackness blotted out the lights from the platform as Hoyler began to send the telegrams. That blackness occupied a single window. The Shadow was close at hand. He had heard the conversation between the men from town. More than that, he had seen Perry Nubin listening in outside an opened window.

The detective had not come in on the Limited; but he had actually gone out on the milk train. The Shadow had watched the speed of the departing Dairy Express. He knew that Nubin could not have hopped off at the bend.

The Shadow was listening to the clicks of Zach Hoyler's key. The agent was finishing for the night. The Shadow listened to the ticks and read them plainly. He understood all the messages that were going over the wire. Three pauses marked short intervals between the telegrams that Zach Hoyler dispatched. His task completed, the agent left the little office, closed the windows, turned out the light and came through the door of the waiting room, locking it behind him.

Hoyler's roadster rumbled townward. The Shadow stood silent in the darkness. Then came the sound of his shuddering, whispered laugh. The Shadow had gained the key to coming crime. In one of the telegrams that Zach Hoyler had sent to New York, the master sleuth detected a summons that meant dangerous business. The move that The Shadow expected would soon be due.

LATER, The Shadow glided into the clearing by the autogiro. He opened a box in the cockpit of the ship. He lifted earphones and gained contact with Burbank. Then came the sinister tones of The Shadow's weird whisper.

Orders to Burbank. Speaking from darkness, The Shadow gave them. The Shadow knew the goal that men of crime were seeking. He knew that the move was coming; he knew the reason why. Over the short-wave radio, The Shadow was instructing Burbank how to aid him in his plans.

For The Shadow, keen in his study of two murders, had devised a clever scheme by which he could frustrate the evil band that would soon be moving toward its long-sought goal. Through bold success, The Shadow would seek to clear the underlings; then encounter their evil chief alone.

## CHAPTER XV. IN FROM NEW YORK

Two nights later. A heavy freight came plodding along the line of the Union Valley. Couplings clanked; big freight cars jolted as the engineer gave the brakes. The locomotive came to a stop nearly half a mile up the line. The caboose was by the station platform. The conductor of the freight waved to Zach Hoyler, who was standing outside the waiting room.

"Cutting off up ahead," informed the conductor. "Dropping a couple of empties and picking up that refrigerator box you got on the siding."

Zach Hoyler nodded. The refrigerator car had brought a consignment to Chanburg. The empty freight cars were to be loaded on the morrow with a large shipment from a cannery located near Chanburg. The baggage room already contained the first load of crates. They had been brought over early, by mistake.

Brakemen were hurrying along the tops. The train was cut about sixteen cars from the locomotive. The first step was to pull further ahead to the end of the long siding; then to back and pick up the empty refrigerator car. After that had been attached, the locomotive would again pull forward, back up and drop the pair of empties.

## DOOM ON THE HILL

A trainman was standing by the switch as the locomotive and the first sixteen cars went by. The pair of empties were among the lot. The short first section took the curve just beyond the switch; then came to a stop. The engineer was waiting for the swing of lanterns that would give him the signal to back. Members of the train crew were on the near side of the track – the inner portion of the curve.

While the first sixteen cars were at a standstill, doors opened on the far side of an empty car. Sweated figures dropped beside the track and scurried for the bushes on the upper embankment. They were crouched there when the locomotive reversed. They waited until the lumbering "hog" had chugged back on to the siding. Out of the headlight's glare, the waiting men scrambled back to the rails and jogged along the track.

None of the train crew saw them. Brakemen had moved back by the switch and beyond. Lost past the curve, the jogging crew heeded the gruff voice of their leader. A dozen men scrambled down from the right of way. They were heading for the little shack in the bushes.

The refrigerator car was attached; the empties were dropped. The whistle of the locomotive called in the flag man. The couplings jerked; the conductor waved from the caboose. Zach Hoyler responded and went back into the station before the rear lights of the train had disappeared around the bend. He heard the distant blare of the locomotive, whistling for the grade crossing.

A FEW passengers began to appear. They were coming to take the inbound local, which was soon due. The agent stamped some tickets and attended to other details. The local arrived. Several passengers alighted and took waiting automobiles back to town. Zach Hoyler settled down for his long wait until the Union Limited pulled in.

The door of the waiting room opened. Two men entered. One was Harry Vincent; the other, Elbert Breck. They approached the ticket window; it was Elbert who spoke first.

"Any telegram for me?" he questioned. "For Elbert Breck?"

"No," replied the agent. "I'd have phoned you if any had come in."

"Hardly," remarked Elbert. "Our phone went out of order a few hours ago. Send your telegram, Harry. I'll meet you outside."

Harry took a blank and wrote out another telegram to Rutledge Mann. This was still part of his policy. He had received a dummy wire from Mann this morning; a reply was in order. Harry gave the message to the station agent; then went outside to look for Elbert.

There was no one on the platform. Harry walked over to his coupe. Elbert was not in the car. Turning about, Harry chanced to see his companion appearing from the far end of the platform. Elbert arrived at the coupe.

"Just taking a little walk along the track," remarked the young man. "Didn't know you had come out."

When they reached the house, Harry and Elbert found Tim Forey there. The sheriff seemed glum. He talked a bit about the mysterious death of Ezekiel Twinton; he mentioned that the house on the hill had been closed.

These were facts which Harry and Elbert already knew. Craven happened in while Forey was talking; the servant moved about and finally went into the kitchen. After a while, Forey decided to leave.

"I've sent the deputies back to town," informed the sheriff. "Keep the place locked up in case there's any prowlers around. Guess you fellows can look out for yourselves."

## DOOM ON THE HILL

Forey shot a significant glance at Harry. The Shadow's agent understood. Baffled, Forey intended to allow full leeway here. The sheriff did not know that Elbert Breck had been abroad on the night of Ezekiel Twinton's murder.

Perhaps the sheriff still suspected Craven. If so, he was relying upon Harry and perhaps Elbert. Harry nodded in response to Forey's glance. He became thoughtful after the sheriff had left. Under ordinary circumstances, Harry might have condemned himself for misleading the sheriff into thinking that all was well within this house.

But Harry was an agent of The Shadow. He knew that his service to the hidden investigator would offset any neglect of duty to which Forey had assigned him. Not long after the sheriff's departure, Harry went upstairs and prepared a brief report for The Shadow.

Coming downstairs, Harry discovered that Elbert Breck was absent from the living room. Harry knew that Elbert had not gone up to his own room. Going out into the kitchen, Harry found the place empty. The back door was unbolted. Harry stepped out and looked about.

CRAVEN, too, was missing. Had they started out on separate ways? Not knowing how soon The Shadow might appear, Harry returned into the house and went up to add notations to his report. He estimated that either Elbert or Craven could have been gone for half an hour – Craven perhaps longer.

Footsteps, soft in the hall. Harry stepped from his room. It was Craven, coming down from the third floor. Ostensibly, the servant had been in his room all the while. Harry began to have doubts of his own suspicions.

"Have you seen Mr. Breck?" inquired Harry.

"No, sir," replied Craven. "I have been in my room ever since Mr. Forey left. I was just coming down to make sure all was locked."

"The back door is unbolted. Wait. I'll go down with you."

As they reached the kitchen, the back door opened and Elbert Breck stepped into view. The heir seemed taken aback for the moment; then he grinned weakly.

"Taking a little stroll," he said to Harry. "Just here about the place. Thought you had gone to bed, or I would have invited you along with me."

That ended the matter. Craven looked up. It was nearly eleven. Harry strolled in and turned on the radio while Elbert and Craven retired. A little while later, Harry went up and added a few notes to his report. He left the light on as a signal to The Shadow; then went to bed.

TEN minutes before the Union Limited was due, a silent figure glided through the darkness near the railroad station. The Shadow stopped, away from the lighted platform. There were no passengers tonight. Zach Hoyler was standing at the outer end of the platform, leaning against a lightly loaded baggage truck.

Evidently the Limited was due on scheduled time. Other work finished, the agent had wheeled out the truck and was whiling away the minutes that remained. At last came the sounds of the approaching Limited. The train pounded into the station. The baggage went aboard. Off came three trunks and a square box. The final object measured about two feet in each direction.

## DOOM ON THE HILL

The Limited pulled out. As Zach reached the door of the baggage room, a stocky figure stepped from the track. Perry Nubin growled a greeting. The agent smiled in wry fashion.

"Back again," was his remark. "Getting to be a habit. Well, sleuth, there's three trunks and a box that just came into town. Look them over. Maybe they've got fingerprints on them."

Nubin passed up the trunks; but he studied the box while Hoyler was unlocking the outer door of the baggage room. The detective said nothing; but a quizzical frown appeared upon his heavy forehead. The Shadow, watching from darkness, observed the expression. So did Zach Hoyler, as he turned from the baggage room.

"What's the matter?" queried the agent.

Nubin looked up suddenly.

"Nothing in particular," he said, gruffly. "But I just found something better than fingerprints. Look at the label on that box."

"Addressed to Grantham Breck!" exclaimed Hoyler, as he noted the name on the box. "Say – I wonder where that came from?"

"New York," returned Nubin.

"Sure," agreed Hoyler, "but I mean who sent it?"

Nubin shrugged his shoulders; then made a brief remark.

"The old man hasn't been dead long," stated the detective. "Maybe this is something he ordered before he was croaked. Say – that box is kind of heavy, ain't it?"

"Yes," admitted Hoyler, as he swung the box from the truck. "Mighty heavy, for its size."

"Must be loaded with lead. Here – I'll give you a hand with it."

"Don't worry. I'll roll it into the baggage room. Here goes."

"What are you going to do with the box?" questioned Nubin, as he followed to the door of the baggage room.

"Call Breck's house," responded Hoyler. "That's who it's addressed to. Breck."

"It's for Grantham Breck. He's dead."

"I'll notify his son."

"Tonight?"

"Can't. He was over here earlier in the evening. Happened to mention that his phone was out of order."

"Humph. I'd like to know what's inside that box."

"Do you want to crack it open?"

## DOOM ON THE HILL

Nubin hesitated at Hoyler's question. The detective was considering the consequences.

"Give the order," said Hoyler. "I'll pry the top loose. But remember – the responsibility is yours. It's kind of away from regulations; but you seem to make your own rules when you want to –"

"Leave it lay," interposed Nubin. "But it's not going over to Breck's in the morning. This box is addressed to Grantham Breck. You can't notify a dead man that a shipment is waiting for him."

"How about calling the sheriff?" questioned Hoyler. "Tim Forey has every right to open it. Maybe it might give some clue to why Grantham Breck was murdered."

"That's a good idea. Where is Forey tonight?"

"Somewhere downtown. Probably out at some fellow's house playing poker in the kitchen, with the window shades down. That's the way they do round this town. Got to keep in right with the goody–goodies, you know."

"Suppose we wait until you're off duty," decided Nubin. "I was going out on Sixty–eight; but I think I'll stay over. I'll run down with you and help look up the sheriff. Guess I could get a room in that house where you're living?"

"Sure. The place is as big as a barn and there's only about three people rooming in it. The old lady will be sore when we wake her up; but I guess she'll get over it."

Hoyler locked the door of the baggage room. He had other details before the Dairy Express came through. He mentioned that fact to Nubin. The detective nodded. After Hoyler went back into the station, Nubin strolled about; then suddenly cut across the tracks and prowled past the empty freight cars.

AS on a previous night, The Shadow caught sight of the detective's outline as Nubin headed up past the green signal. Tonight, however, The Shadow did not follow. He waited. At last the dick returned. He appeared at the end of the station platform, just as the whistle of the Dairy Express sounded at the grade crossing above the station.

The milk train arrived. Nubin joined Hoyler. The agent closed the station. The two men went away in Hoyler's car. It was then that The Shadow moved along the darkened platform. He reached the door of the waiting room; he picked the lock without the aid of his tiny light. Inside, The Shadow turned the lock as deftly as he had opened it. He continued into the office.

Here the light glimmered. It shone on the table, where Hoyler, in his hurry, had left odd articles scattered about; then it flashed toward the inside door to the baggage room. Suddenly the light went out, while The Shadow whispered a laugh that was inaudible outside this room.

He had heard sounds from outside. Quickly, The Shadow worked on the inside door of the baggage room. It opened; the lock was not formidable. The Shadow stepped into the windowless room and locked the door behind him. His light glimmered; he found a corner hiding place behind two trunks.

OUTSIDE, stealthy figures had approached the door of the waiting room. One man was working on the lock. He had a key which seemed to serve his purpose; for after a few attempts, it did the work as effectively as The Shadow's pick.

"Stay here, mugs," came a low growl. "Wait'll I go in and look over the lay."

"All right, Spike," came a response.

The man who had opened the door moved across the waiting room. He entered the ticket office. He flashed a light upon the table. Then, after a pause, he turned the glare along the wall, to the door of the baggage room. Producing a smaller-sized key, he worked on this lock. It yielded. The locks throughout this station were obsolete. It was seldom that anything of value was left here over night.

The flashlight gleamed a half minute longer in the ticket office. Then came "Spike's" growl, through the grilled window to the waiting room:

"Well, you mugs! I'm waiting. Move in here."

Followers obeyed. Half a dozen men followed Spike into the baggage room. Faces showed dimly above the light as Spike picked out the box addressed to Grantham Breck. It occupied the center of the floor.

"Lug it," growled the leader. "Out the way we came. Maybe this is what we're looking for."

"Heavy enough," remarked one of the gang.

"Yeah." Spike's tone was non-committal. "Well, we ain't opening it here. Hoist it along the track while I'm locking up."

Men moved out with the box. Spike followed. He locked the door behind him. Minutes passed. At last, The Shadow moved. His soft laugh echoed in eerie fashion as its tones crept through the windowless baggage room.

This time The Shadow used his little light as he unlocked the outer door. The flashlight went out; The Shadow stepped from the baggage room and locked the door behind him. Spike and his henchmen had disappeared; but The Shadow had no doubt concerning their destination. Shrouded in darkness, this being of the night took to the tracks and headed toward the shack that lay halfway to the grade crossing.

The Shadow had permitted the theft of the box addressed to Grantham Breck. Like those who had stolen the heavy article, he intended to view the contents when the box was opened.

## CHAPTER XVI. SPIKE MAKES PLANS

WHEN The Shadow had first viewed the shack near the railroad, it had been deserted. Later, The Shadow had observed Perry Nubin use the place for sleeping quarters. Tonight, when The Shadow arrived near the wooden building, he found it under guard.

Three men were stationed as pickets outside the shack. They had no lights; but they were covering the edges of the tiny clearing. Their circle of coverage was scarcely more than fifty feet in circumference.

There was a light inside the shack. Otherwise, all was darkness. This was to The Shadow's liking. Noiselessly, the master sleuth picked a space between two pickets. Not one of the three guards knew that he had entered the circle.

The Shadow avoided the grimy windows through which the light trickled. Had he stopped by one of them, his form would have blotted out the light from within the shack. Instead of a window, The Shadow chose a corner where a loose board had been knocked out. There was an opening a foot in width, two feet above the floor. Crouching close to the ground, The Shadow peered within.

## DOOM ON THE HILL

Mobsmen from Manhattan. The Shadow recognized their leader. Spike Balgo. The fellow was noted for his toughness. Spike, himself, was prying the top from the box that had come for Grantham Breck. Boards crackled as Spike manipulated a jimmy. The box came open.

Spike yanked away excelsior. Then came a triumphant growl. He reached into the box and produced a Luger pistol; then another. Out came more in quick succession. Spike opened small boxes, with drawerlike lids. He held up a cartridge, to display its shiny bullet.

"Say" – Spike's dark, thick-featured face came into the light – "the big boy guessed it right. Lugers. Brought in for us. This means we can do plenty. There's more rods than we need."

Mobsmen were shuffling about. They seemed puzzled by Spike's statement. The mobleader ordered them to stack the guns and ammunition in the corner. He tilted the big box on end. Grinning in the light of the kerosene lantern, he began to talk.

"Listen, mugs," announced Spike. "I said I'd give you the lay when we got out here. Some of you was with me before; but even they don't know what it's all about. I don't talk as a rule, see? But there's times when I tell things.

"We're after a load of real swag. The big boy – you don't need to know who he is just yet – knew it was stowed somewhere around here. He thought he'd play a good bet. He knew a foxy lawyer old Grantham Breck – who was living in the house down at the bottom of the hill.

"He spilled the news to Breck. Big swag – stuff taken in and hid by the Dobbin gang, some years ago. He and Breck figured between them where the stuff would be. But there was a guy living near it – a bimbo named Ezekiel Twinton."

Spike paused and looked about the group. The mobsters were intent. Most of them had heard of the Dobbin outfit. They saw a cut coming when the swag was gained.

"Breck plays fair at first. See?" Spike was resuming. "He works with the big boss. Tries to buy property from Twinton. Then he stalls. Tells the big boy to wait. The big shot wises that Breck's trying to pull a fast one. Get the swag for himself. That's when the big shot sends me the tip to be on the job."

"De night you croaked old Breck," put in a leering mobster. "Dat was when I was wid you, Spike –"

"Never mind who rubbed out old Breck," interrupted Spike. "He got his, the way the big shot wanted it. That's all you need to talk about, Dingbat."

"A slug from de guy's own rod," chimed in the leering mobster, heedless of Spike's admonition. "Say dat was smart –"

"Lay off!" barked Spike. "Dingbat" quieted. "I'm doing the talking. I'm coming to that part of it. Listen, mugs – I might as well tell all of you that I rubbed out old Breck. Took his gat and let him have it. Then I met the big shot and slipped him the hot rod."

SURPRISED looks from the mobsmen. Spike grinned. He pointed to the Luger pistols that had been unloaded from the stolen box.

"See them gats?" quizzed Spike. "That was the kind I grabbed from Breck. A Luger. Sample he got in from Germany and always carried with him."

## DOOM ON THE HILL

"Wot was de idea?" asked Dingbat.

"I'm getting to it," snarled Spike. "Keep your trap shut. I know what you mugs are wondering about. You want to know what the big shot did with that hot rod. Well, I'll tell you. He sneaked it back into the room where old Breck kept it. When they found the gat, it was sitting right where it belonged."

Chuckles from the gang indicated admiration of the big shot's cleverness. Spike waved for silence. He had not yet finished.

"The rube sheriff found the Luger," he explained. "Kept it in his office, down in the town. Well, the big shot was sitting pretty – so was I for that matter – because they didn't know what to do next. I'd scrambled, along with Dingbat and a couple of you fellows who were with me. The hick sheriff didn't have nothing he could pin on the big shot.

"Then the big shot wises that things still ain't so good. He don't like the looks of it up on the hill. I'm gone – he figures he'll have to make a trip up there himself. So he does. And before he goes, he slides into the sheriff's office and picks up old Breck's rod."

Spike paused to look from face to face. The mobsmen were tense. Their forte was gang war; craft and strategy were new to them. Admiration showed upon evil faces.

"Then the big shot" – Spike paused – "well, never mind mentioning him. I'll just tell you this. There was trouble up on the hill and the guy that lived there – Twinton – got his, like Breck. It was just one of them things that happened – that's all. But it didn't make no trouble for the big shot.

"Why? Because when they dug the slug out of Twinton, they found it came from that same Luger. Where was the hot rod? Back in the sheriff's office, where it belonged. Say – I'll bet that yap was ready to pinch himself, when he found he had the gun that dropped Twinton."

"Boy!" put in Dingbat. "Dat was de cat's. You're tellin' us somethin', Spike –"

"I'm telling you more," growled the gangleader. "The reason the big shot yanked that Luger pistol into these jobs was because old Breck had shown him the gun. The big shot knew where Breck kept it hid. When Breck was on the level, he gave the big shot a real idea.

"They was both figuring on some fireworks if they had to send us guys up on the hill while Twinton was still living there. Twinton wouldn't sell the property to Breck. That was the catch. See? Well, when Breck shows the Luger to the big shot, he says it would be a hot idea to bring in a load of them guns so we could carry them. Then if we had to do any bumping, the bullets wouldn't mean nothing.

"When Breck pulls the double-cross, the big shot twists the Luger stunt on him. That mixes things up. All the time, the big shot is thinking, though, that maybe Breck might have sent for them guns. Things were fixed so they'd come to him; the only trouble was maybe somebody might get a chance to look into the box first. That wouldn't make no trouble for the big shot; but it would queer things for us.

"Well, Twinton's dead. So the big shot sent for us. The house is closed; the job ought to be easy. Looked like the Lugers would be out of the picture; but just the same, the big shot had me posted to take a squint into that baggage room just in case something might have come in for old Grantham Breck. There was a chance that the box might be laying there and it was."

"Plenty of slugs for dem rods, too," put in Dingbat.

## DOOM ON THE HILL

"Yeah," agreed Spike. "So we're going to use them. Load them up and use them instead of our regular gats. We got to lay low tonight. Tomorrow night we go after the swag. There's no telling just who we're going to run into.

"If we rub out any wise birds, the sheriff's going to find Deutsch slugs in them. If he ever manages to figure out where the bullets came from, he'll be worse off than before. A bunch of rods shipped to Grantham Breck" – Spike chuckled – "say, that's going to be great."

MOBSTERS mumbled in agreement. Spike strolled over to the corner. He began to load a Luger while his crew gathered around to watch him handle the gun. Nods showed that the gorillas were familiarizing themselves with the German pistols.

"Take this rod," ordered Spike, handing the first Luger to Dingbat. "Toss out your old one. Come on – all of you – load up and get rid of your old gats. Some of them smoke-wagons you're lugging would show up worse than fingerprints. Say – the big shot is going to feel great when I tell him about this grab."

A gangster went to the door and called in the guards. They, too, were supplied with Lugers. The entire mob – more than a dozen men – was equipped with the new type of small-arms. An assortment of glimmering revolvers lay in a pile upon the floor. These were the guns that the gorillas had brought with them.

"No target practice," warned Spike. "Them Deutsch rods will do their stuff when you have to use them. Better than these hunks of old iron." He laughed as he indicated the discarded revolvers. "Pack up that junk, Dingbat. Put the old rods in one of them bags we brought with us. We'll take them along when we go up to the station."

"The station?"

"Sure. If it's clear there, we're going to stick this box back where it belongs."

"Empty?"

"No. We'll fill it with cans out of one of them crates in the baggage room. Bring the rest of the crate along with us. Say – if the yap sheriff gets a peek into this box before it's delivered, he's going to do some more head scratching."

"What about the old rods?"

"You and I are going further along, Dingbat. The mob can come back here. We'll head for the trestle a couple of miles down the line. Then we'll heave those old gats out into the creek. It's plenty deep, with lots of mud on the bottom. Nobody's going to dig them out of there."

Spike turned warningly to his crew. His eyes were glaring as he put a final warning.

"No holding out on any rods," he asserted. "The old ones, I mean. We ain't carrying anything that would go as evidence. Get me?"

The mobsters nodded. Assured that he had collected all the guns that might prove incriminating, Spike beckoned to Dingbat, who had finished loading the bag. The leering gorilla put a question just as the group prepared to move.

"Say," he asked. "What about the big shot? Ain't you goin' to slip him one of these new gats?"

## DOOM ON THE HILL

"The big shot's taking care of himself," returned Spike. "He ain't going up on the hill. We'll meet him later. What's more, he's not going to get himself in no trouble until we're with him.

"Maybe he'll stick here after we make our get-away. He's smart enough to stay on the ground if he wants to. Maybe he'll scam along with us. That's up to him. If he sticks, you mugs won't even know who he is. If he takes it on the lam, you'll find out who he is.

"The big shot's our ace in the hole. Get that? He's the cover-up man in this outfit. I know what he wants done; I got the final orders before we came here. He knows we're here. I've been moving around while you mugs were in this shack. Whether I've talked with the big shot or whether I'm going to talk with him – well, that's my business and his."

With this final statement, Spike Balgo motioned his crew along. Dingbat followed with the bag full of old revolvers. Other mobsters carried the empty box. Three members of the crew remained in charge of the shack.

AFTER the last of the departers had scrambled up the embankment, a huge blot detached itself from the side of the shack. An unseen form glided off into the darkness. It did not follow Spike Balgo and his mob; instead, the shrouded shape moved away from the railroad.

Several minutes later, a whispered laugh sounded near a clump of trees. That soft yet sinister sound marked the passage of The Shadow. Later, a blackened figure loomed through the window of Harry Vincent's room. A tiny light flickered. The Shadow was preparing a message for his agent.

The task was completed when The Shadow left an envelope upon the table near the window. The blackened form moved outward. The next token of The Shadow came from the clearing where the autogiro was located. The Shadow's voice sounded as a sinister whisper as the master of darkness formed radio contact with Burbank, in New York.

After this communication was ended, The Shadow laughed again. There was foreboding in that hollow tone that died amid the clearing. The mockery carried a note of coming triumph. The Shadow had anticipated events; he had also deducted past occurrences. Spike Balgo's conversation with his mob had merely proven the soundness of The Shadow's analysis of the past and the future.

Silence. The Shadow was resting for the morrow. When Spike Balgo and his crew fared forth to the hills, they would be scheduled to find a hidden foe of whose presence they had not dreamed. Men of evil were slated to meet The Shadow.

## CHAPTER XVII. MOVES BEGIN

NINE o'clock the next evening. The through freight had just pulled out, taking along the two cars loaded with canned goods. Another empty had been left; this car was far up the siding, toward the switch.

Passengers had not yet arrived for the evening local. One man was stamping back and forth through the waiting room. It was Perry Nubin, the railroad dick. He was impatient when he stopped beside the ticket window.

"Say" – Nubin growled as he addressed Zach Hoyler, who was at his table – "I want to ride out on that local."

"Nobody will stop you."

## DOOM ON THE HILL

"I know that. But I don't want to go before that fool sheriff gets here. He said he was coming to open that box that blew in for old Grantham Breck."

"Forey went out of town this morning," observed the agent. "Said he would come out here after he got back. There's nothing to worry about. The box is safe."

"It ought to be," agreed Nubin. "The only time you opened the door was when those shippers took the canned stuff out. We were both watching to see they left Breck's box alone."

"Well. Why beef about it then?"

"I told you why. I want to get back to Laporte. Maybe there's a message there for me –"

Nubin broke off as the door of the waiting room opened. In stamped Sheriff Tim Forey. The official nodded to the detective; then approached the ticket window.

"All right, Zach," he said to the agent, "let's see that box. We can go in through the inside door, can't we?"

The agent nodded. He picked up a cluster of keys. He went to the inner door of the baggage room. Forey and Nubin followed. The door unlocked, Hoyler turned on a light. Tim Forey studied the box which lay in the center of the floor. He read its label.

"To Grantham Breck all right," he declared. "Well, it's got to be delivered to his son. Have you called the house yet, Zach?"

"No," responded the station agent. "But there was a call here today. Phone's been fixed at Breck's."

"Who called?"

"Well, there were two calls, now that I come to think of it. One from young Elbert; then one from Craven."

"What did they want to know?"

"If anything had come in. I took it to mean telegrams. I didn't mention the box, because you hadn't seen it."

"Hm–m. I wonder why they both called?"

"I don't know."

"Which called first?" quizzed Nubin, suddenly.

"Young Breck," responded Hoyler.

"That settles it." The dick laughed. "He must have told the servant to call; the fellow probably was busy so young Breck made the call himself. Then the servant called later. But say, sheriff – what about this box? Are you going to open it?"

"Yes," responded Forey. "But I thought it might be best to run it over to Breck's first."

"That won't do."

## DOOM ON THE HILL

"Why not?"

"Well – when Hoyler here called you last night, you said you'd come up today and take a look in the box. Being as how it concerns the railroad, you agreed to let me see the shipment."

"You can go with me to Breck's."

"Then Hoyler won't see the shipment, He's the agent who received it. If I make a report, I ought to have his statement. What's more – I'm going out on the local. Won't have time to go over to Breck's. Train's pretty near due."

Taps from the agent's wicket proved Nubin's statement. Hoyler went out to see who was there. Staring from the baggage room, Forey saw a firm, impassive face beyond the ticket window. The sheriff was staring at The Shadow – guised as Lamont Cranston.

A QUIET voice asked for a ticket to Laporte; also for time tables of the Union Valley and the B and R. While Hoyler was busy, Foray acceded to Nubin's request. He picked up a small metal wedge and used a hammer to drive it under the top boards of the box. The container came open with surprising ease.

Foray saw the glint of metal. An exclamation of surprise came from his lips. He thrust his hand into the box and yanked out a tin can. It had no label. Liquid sounded within when the sheriff shook the metal cylinder.

"Canned goods!" exclaimed Nubin. "Say – that's a hot one. No wonder the box was heavy."

"No labels, though," growled Foray. "May be something phony about this."

Zach Hoyler had come back from the ticket office. The customer was still at the window, studying a time table. Like Hoyler, he could see the tin can that the sheriff was holding. He also heard Forey's remark.

"Tin cans?" put in Hoyler, as he approached. "That's a funny one, Tim. There were crates of canned goods here in the baggage room all night."

"Labeled?" asked the sheriff.

"Sure," replied the agent, scratching his head. "Over from the Newton Canneries. Had their usual labels on them."

"Humph." The sheriff paused. "Maybe some smart Aleck might have taken the labels off some of those cans. He could have put them in this box."

"I locked everything last night," remarked Hoyler. "Still, these doors aren't any too strong. I never leave anything valuable here at the station."

"It's just a coincidence," laughed Perry Nubin, eyeing the sheriff's frowning face. "Old Breck must have bought some canned goods cheap – right out of a factory. Through some official in the place. Maybe these were samples of some sort.

"On that account, they were shipped without their labels. Breck would have known what they were. Maybe it's a brand that hasn't been named yet. The point is, a lot of canned goods don't have anything to do with murder."

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Nubin seemed satisfied with his theory. Foray, after removing most of the cans and replacing them, began to nod his agreement. Zach Hoyler was on the point of making comment; he changed his mind when he saw that he would probably be over-ruled. He went back into the ticket office when Foray started to nail up the box.

Perry Nubin came from the baggage room. He strolled out through the station and reached the platform. The local was about due. The detective saw two more passengers in addition to the tall personage who had bought the ticket and obtained the time tables.

The local clanged into the station. Boarding the rear car, Nubin looked for the passengers. He saw two of them getting on the train. The tall stranger was not in view. Nubin supposed that he was the first aboard. As the local pulled out, the railroad dick waved to the sheriff and the station agent. They had come out of the waiting room. He saw them turn back in as the local neared the bend.

Despite the quickening speed of the local, the detective bounded across the platform and hung from the opposite steps. He swung clear, landed on the ground beside the tracks and went staggering forward until he sprawled on the embankment. Grinning, he arose and dusted his clothes. Cautiously, he crossed the tracks, threw a glance toward the station; then took to the lower side of the embankment.

PERRY NUBIN was positive that his deeds had not been witnessed. He did not know the tall stranger of the ticket room had failed to board the local. Shrouded in darkness, that personage was standing by the station. Staring keenly toward the bend, The Shadow glimpsed the vague figure of the railroad dick as Nubin scurried across the tracks.

TIM FOREY had come in a car driven by a deputy. He and Zach Hoyler took the box from the baggage room and loaded it aboard. The car started toward the road that led to Breck's. Zach Hoyler came back into the station. The Shadow moved off into the darkness.

His course was toward the clearing where he had parked the autogiro. From there, The Shadow intended to communicate with Burbank; then to move forth on a new and important mission. Darkness swallowed the swiftly-gliding figure.

AT the Breck house, Harry Vincent was seated in the living room. The Shadow's agent was oblivious to the music that came from the radio. He was pondering upon cryptic thoughts that had gripped him during the entire day.

The Shadow's message! It had been revealing in part; yet mysterious as well. It had given Harry inklings concerning the truth of crime. It had included instructions which Harry intended to carry out to the letter, yet which puzzled him to a considerable degree.

The door bell rang. Craven answered it. Sheriff Forey strode in; he nudged toward the door. Craven went out and reappeared helping the deputy lug in the square box. At Forey's order, Craven went upstairs and summoned Elbert Breck, who was in his room.

When the heir arrived, Forey indicated the box and mentioned that it had come for Grantham Breck. He ordered Elbert to open it. Craven produced a hatchet, Elbert set to work in nervous fashion. He acted as though this unexpected shipment worried him. Harry watched Craven as well as Elbert. The butler was solemn; standing as still as a stone statue.

"Canned goods!" exclaimed Elbert, when he had pried open the box. "They must have been shipped by some friend who did not know that my father had died!"

## DOOM ON THE HILL

"It might have been an order, sir," put in Craven. "Mr. Breck was in the habit of storing away food—stuffs."

"Did he ever get canned goods without labels?" quizzed Forey.

"I believe he did, sir," recalled Craven. "Small shipments, as I recall them. Most of the goods had labels, though. I cannot give positive information, however."

"Why not?"

"He always placed the canned goods in the custody of the cook. It was her province, sir."

"Where's the cook now?"

"Adele, sir? I believe she has retired. But she could tell you nothing, sir. It was the old cook – Martha – who worked here when those previous shipments came to Mr. Breck."

"I see." The sheriff appeared satisfied with the explanation. "Well – I'm going back to town. Come on, Hank."

Craven began to unpack the canned products and take them into the kitchen. Elbert Breck strolled into the living room with Harry Vincent. Lighting his pipe, the heir slouched into an easy chair. Like Harry, he listened to the radio while Craven finished unpacking the cans and went upstairs.

TEN thirty. A musical program ended. The radio was tuned in on Station WNX. The voice of an announcer came over the air. Steady in tone, it carried a slight emphasis on certain words.

"If you give 'any' tobacco this 'one' test," came the announcement, "you will learn that ripened 'leaves' alone can 'capture' the full tobacco flavor. Talk to an old smoker. Ask 'him' his opinion. 'Put' the test to 'him'. He will tell you that 'in' his experience, the best 'smoke' is the product of Lowden Brothers, the oldest tobacco 'house' in Virginia; the makers of Old Dominion Burley."

Elbert Breck was oblivious to the radio. But Harry Vincent, listening placidly, caught every word that had been emphasized. To him, the announcer's speech conveyed a hidden message, told by those stressed words:

"If anyone leaves, capture him. Put him in the smoke house."

Harry already knew that The Shadow had planned to move tonight. Harry's own part had been outlined; but this final order was needed. Harry knew that The Shadow must have communicated with Burbank; through some contacts, the master sleuth had arranged for that announcement to go over the air from WNX.

Harry had received orders of this type in the past. He knew that The Shadow must already be operating on his own; otherwise, he would have delivered this final message through Harry's window. Faring abroad, The Shadow was planning to frustrate the band of thugs headed by Spike Balgo.

To Harry Vincent, The Shadow had entrusted the duty of preventing a move from the Breck house. Harry was alert. Tonight, he was determined to give the aid upon which The Shadow relied.

## CHAPTER XVIII. FOES IN THE DARK

TEN minutes after the announcement from Station WNX, Elbert Breck went upstairs to bed. Craven had already retired; Harry Vincent was positive that the servant was on the third floor. Going to his own room,

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The Shadow's agent seated himself beside the little table.

Here, Harry began to write. He used an ordinary pen tonight – not the one that carried the disappearing ink. Carefully choosing his words, he phrased a brief account of certain things that he had noted during his stay at this house.

There were items that Harry omitted; there were others – a bit puzzling to him – that he included. Harry's report was partially his own and partially The Shadow's. In writing it, Harry utilized certain statements that were implanted in his mind. They were suggested phrases that had come in The Shadow's message.

His task completed, Harry folded the note and sealed it in the envelope. He wrote the name of Sheriff Tim Forey on the outside. This epistle was to be delivered to that official, by order of The Shadow. The delivery would follow after Harry had performed his first duty.

In a sense, Harry Vincent understood what was going on. He knew that trouble was brewing on the hill. The Shadow would take care of events up there. But behind the scheme lay a hidden hand. Someone – a big shot – was in back of the game.

Craven's actions – those of Elbert Breck – the presence of an unnamed prowler – all these belonged in Harry's report. Yet they did not give the final verdict. They did not tell who had slain Grantham Breck or who had killed Ezekiel Twinton. Yet Harry sensed that his report would have a value.

After events broke loose tonight, Tim Forey would have new information. Then Harry's statements would fit into place like the odd pieces of a jig-saw. Harry's thoughts began to center on this very house.

Two men: Elbert and Craven. They were not in collusion, yet both had acted oddly. Harry knew the reason for the double activity. One was probably suspicious of the other. This meant that if one went out, the other might follow.

The mysterious elimination of one would puzzle the other. Hence it was Harry's job – impartially – to put the first chap away where the second would not find him. This would mean quick work; Harry felt sure that he could perform it.

A new padlock had been placed upon the smoke house. Tim Forey had the key. That padlock, however, had been mysteriously removed; a similar one had been put in its place by The Shadow. Harry Vincent had the key to it – left with The Shadow's message. Later, it would be Harry's duty to explain that he himself had broken off the sheriff's lock and put on one of his own. The results of tonight's adventure would justify the deed.

ELEVEN o'clock. Harry Vincent was tense. He felt that trouble was centering about this house. Though action was due upon the hill, the movements hereabouts might have their effect. Harry felt that something was due to happen.

Listening, The Shadow's agent heard soft footsteps in the hall. He caught the creak as someone descended the back stairs. Gripping an automatic, Harry stole from his room. He reached the stairs and moved downward. He found the kitchen door in the dark; it was unbolted.

Moving out, Harry spied a dim figure going toward the smoke house. Evidently the person was getting clear of the grounds before taking his next direction, whatever it might be. Swiftly, Harry hastened forward. He was almost upon the lurking man before the fellow turned.

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Springing, Harry shot fingers for the enemy's throat. The man went sprawling on the ground. His head thudded against the dry, baked clay. Half groggy, the victim tried to voice a protest. Harry clapped hand to his mouth. The man gasped and subsided.

Harry produced a dark bandanna and used it as a gag. He had hit the man harder than he had expected. Bonds were unnecessary for the present. The smoke house was only a dozen yards away. Harry hoisted his prey and made for the door. He found the padlock dangling; the hasp was open for his convenience.

Inside the smoke house, Harry closed the door behind him. He chuckled softly. This had been a quick, efficient job. Letting his limp burden to the ground, Harry turned on a flashlight. He studied the pale face that came within the light. The man whom he had captured was Elbert Breck.

Leather thongs were hanging in readiness from a hook on the smokehouse beam. Harry used them to bind the young heir. Elbert opened his eyes and blinked when his captor had finished. He tried to snarl; he struggled with his bonds. All was to no avail.

Elbert was carrying a gun. Harry had felt it in his pocket. But The Shadow's agent had not removed the weapon. Instruction had been to tie and gag his prisoner in such fashion that the man could neither escape nor cry for help. Harry had done this.

Harry clicked off the flashlight. He stole from the smoke house and listened. He heard nothing. He unlocked the dangling padlock and fastened the hasp to the staple. When the padlock clicked shut, the job was done. Only The Shadow or Harry could open that door; they alone had the keys. Someone could break in – but that was unlikely. No one would suspect that the living son had been stowed in the cache that had once housed his dead father.

The next step was to communicate with The Shadow. The mode of contact depended upon the time element. There were different ways in which Harry could inform his chief of the capture; he had time to utilize the best. That meant a trip up to the road on the side of the hill – to the very spot where Harry had first discovered the body of Grantham Breck.

THERE had been no signs of Craven. It was possible that the butler had not heard Elbert and Harry leave. There was a chance that he had come out while Harry was still in the smoke house; if so, Craven was probably seeking Elbert's trail off away from the grounds.

Harry headed for the hill road. For a space, he felt free. Then he gained the suspicion that someone was on his trail.

Could it be Craven?

Harry recalled the stealth of the butler; but he was reassured when he gave thought to the fellow's physical inferiority. He was sure that Craven – should he enter the scene – would be easily overpowered. Elbert Breck had not proven at all formidable.

Harry had no fear of mobsters. If any of them used the road to reach the hill, The Shadow would be watching. Moreover, Harry did not expect any to be coming from this direction. He reached the bushes that fringed the road. He pushed through to the exact spot where Grantham Breck's body had lain.

There, Harry paused. After a short interval in which he felt security, The Shadow's agent used his flashlight. He picked up three small stones and set them in a cluster. He added a fourth stone – a larger one – to the group.

## DOOM ON THE HILL

This meant that he had captured Elbert Breck; two large stones would have indicated Craven. Three would have been the sign had Harry encountered someone other than a man from the house. His message posted, Harry extinguished the flashlight and moved back along the road to choose a new opening between the bushes.

Someone stirred close by. Harry drew his automatic. The sound came from the lower side of the road. Instinctively, Harry edged toward the embankment. He clambered upward, in order to gain an advantage in case he were forced to an encounter.

More sounds. Harry tried to locate them. He paused, ten yards above the road. Dried grass rustled close at hand. Deliberately, Harry moved in that direction. Then came a figure, springing from the dark. Harry shot forward to meet the attack.

HE expected Craven. Instead, he locked with a fighter of more potency. A stocky, stalwart foe was his antagonist. Gripped by a strangle-hold, Harry swung his arm in desperation. A hand caught his wrist. Harry's automatic dropped from his hand. Then he and his enemy sprawled upon the ground. Together, they rolled toward the embankment. Headlong, they shot down to the road; all the while, the pressure on Harry's throat increased.

A jolt. Harry lay motionless. The other man arose and frisked The Shadow's agent. Finding no weapons, he grabbed Harry beneath the arms and brought the young man to his feet. Groggily, Harry staggered in the other's grasp.

The unknown assailant piloted Harry along the road; then cut through to a field. They covered some distance in this fashion; then Harry, recuperating, realized his predicament. Swinging, he shot his hands forth for a new grapple. The answer was a fist straight to his jaw. Harry collapsed.

The victor chuckled. Then, with a remarkable display of strength, he hoisted Harry over his shoulder and struggled forward with his burden. At times, he stopped and let Harry fall roughly on the ground; these intervals of rest completed, he again hoisted his prisoner and continued his progress.

The course led to the railroad, a hundred yards above the station. Here the assailant waited, letting Harry lie slumped across the rails. Then, after a brief glance toward the lighted platform of the station, he hoisted his burden and staggered forward toward his goal.

This was the empty freight car on the siding. The victor shoved Harry through an opened door, on the far side of the track. The nearer door was closed; after clambering into the car, the man closed the further door also. He turned the glimmer of a flashlight upon Harry's face. Once more, he chuckled.

Something white projected from the side pocket of Harry's coat. The man drew out the envelope addressed to Sheriff Tim Forey. He opened it, unfolded the paper and began to read by the glow of his flashlight. Muttering sound came from the man's lips.

Mumbling after he had finished reading, the fellow extinguished the flashlight. Groping in the corner of the car, he produced a small oil lantern. He lighted the wick and hung the lantern on a nail that projected from the wall of the car.

The lamplight revealed Harry Vincent lying senseless on the floor. It also revealed the visage of the man who had brought The Shadow's agent here. It showed a grim smile upon the thick lips of a hard-faced countenance.

The stocky fighter who had ended Harry Vincent's prowl; the antagonist who held the young man prisoner was Perry Nubin, the hard-boiled railroad detective. It was he who had also learned the import of the undelivered note to Sheriff Tim Forey.

### CHAPTER XIX. FOES IN THE LIGHT

SOME minutes after Perry Nubin had dragged Harry Vincent from the road on the hillside, a tiny glimmer of light blinked upon the deserted highway. This was close to the spot where Harry had left the tell-tale markers. Probing the darkness, the intermittent glimmer picked out the posted stones.

A whispered laugh. The Shadow had learned of his agent's doings. Elbert Breck was a prisoner, stowed in the smoke house. That much had been accomplished. The light went out. The Shadow moved along the road.

Not far beyond the spot where The Shadow had stopped, lay evidence of the encounter on the upper embankment. Those traces of conflict could not have escaped The Shadow had he approached the place. There, the shrouded investigator might have divined that his agent had been captured. But The Shadow did not advance that far. Something occurred to stay his progress.

Footsteps were clicking upon the hard dirt of the road. They were coming from the direction of the grade crossing. The Shadow knew their meaning. They marked the approach of part of Spike Balgo's crew.

Stealthily, The Shadow drew away. Moving down the road, he merged with the upper embankment. Weaving his way through bushes, he began a circuitous course toward the closed house where Ezekiel Twinton had lived. The Shadow was reserving all encounters with any of Spike's gorillas.

Four men paused in the roadway. One glimmered a flashlight. The voice of Spike Balgo emitted a low growl. The gangleader recognized the spot where he had bumped off old Grantham Breck.

"All right, mugs," stated the mobleader. "This is where we move up the hill. Here's a good spot" – his light turned toward the exact place where Harry and Nubin had struggled downward – "so move ahead while I'm following."

Mobsters obeyed. They climbed the bank by the glimmer of Spike's torch. As soon as their figures were out of sight, Spike followed. This small crew constituted one third of his mob. Two other squads were moving toward the same objective, each by a different route.

When Spike reached the top of the embankment, he made out the shapes of his mobsmen. They had moved ahead. Spike blinked his light to show that he was following. Wisely, the mobleader kept it to the ground. That fact was responsible for a chance discovery.

Spike spotted an object on the ground. Using the light again, he saw Harry Vincent's automatic. The mobleader picked up the gun and discovered that it was loaded. He stood in darkness, pondering upon his find.

There was no telling how long the automatic had lain in this spot. Spike was sure that it must have been dropped since the time of Grantham Breck's death. Otherwise, searchers for the lawyer's body would have found it. But someone could have lost the weapon on the night when Ezekiel Twinton was slain. Confident that such was the case, Spike pocketed the automatic and followed his men.

SEVERAL minutes later, squads were joining beside the little spring house that stood at the edge of the old Pastely farm. Crouched in darkness, Spike Balgo growled final instructions to his mob.

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"This is the place we're after," he declared. "I'm putting you wise to the whole lay – the way the big shot gave it to me. There's only one place where the Dobbin outfit could have stowed the swag. That was in this little house.

"Like as not it's under some stone slabs. We may have to use the soup to get at it. Getting into this joint would have been a job before Twinton was rubbed out. There ain't nobody going to bother us now, though. That closed house up there is a break the big shot hadn't counted on.

"Three of you mugs stick here with me. The rest of you spread. Keep close enough so you can know what's going on. But spread out far enough so you can make trouble for any birds who might come sneaking up on us."

"What about the closed house?" came a question, from Dingbat.

"Keep an eye on it," ordered Spike. "There might be some bums hanging out in there. But don't move into the place. No use in disturbing nobody before we use the soup. That'll bring 'em out quick enough."

Mobsters moved away. Crowbars clicked beside the little spring house. Spike's flashlight glimmered. Tough gorillas began to pry at the metal-sheathed door. Rusted nails yielded. The prying workers grunted and wrenched the barrier from its fastenings.

Spike Balgo was the first to enter. His flashlight glimmered about the stone-walled interior. The walls of the house were damp and musty. Water showed upon the floor. There, Spike pointed out cracks between the slabs of stone.

"We'll use the soup," he decided. "Get started, Kirky. We ain't got no time to be wasted."

Two mobsters used their crowbars to pry up heavy chunks of stone. Spike went outside to see that all was well. When he returned, a whisper informed him that the explosive was planted. Spike gave the word. A fuse was lighted; the door of the spring house slammed shut. Spike and his trio dug out for safety.

The blast was a dull one. Spike growled his approval of Kirky's method. The explosive had evidently been confined to the slabs, for no damage showed on the walls of the spring house as Spike approached with his flashlight.

Smoke spewed forth in thick volume when the door was reopened. Spike and his men choked in the fumes; then, when the air had cleared, they entered. A pleased growl came from the leader's evil lips. Slabs had been uplifted and twisted askew. A gaping hole showed beneath. Spike's light revealed a slab three feet below.

Crowbars clattered. They levered the stone aside. The flashlight showed the lid of an iron coffer. Groping hands descended and gripped the handles at the sides. It was a hard tug, but the mobsmen brought the rusted box from its hiding place. Spike coughed an order to lug it outside, on account of the remnants of the troublesome fumes.

The four men formed a little group as they took the box to the fence line. There Spike's flashlight renewed its glimmer. It showed the box upon the ground. Mobsmen pounded at the lid. The box came open.

SPIKE snarled his gloating triumph when he viewed the contents. Bank notes of high denomination showed in bundles. There were also odd stacks of gold and silver; these had given the box its weight. Securities were stacked beside the currency. Spike's practiced hands pawed the swag while another mobster held the light.

## DOOM ON THE HILL

"Plenty here," asserted the gangleader. "Like the big shot said there'd be. Shut the lid. We'll be moving along. Say this is a cinch. Dobbin's outfit got cooked – we've gabbed the gravy –"

The mobleader paused abruptly. He clicked off his flashlight. He had caught a strange sound from somewhere in the night. It was like a mocking whisper – an eerie taunt that came with the rising tone of a gathering breeze.

"D'you hear that?" Spike questioned hoarsely. "Listen!"

This time the sound came with more audible tone. It began as a ghostly, low-voiced sneer. It rose with shuddering mirth, reached a weird crescendo; then broke with a suddenness that left only its whispered echoes quivering through the dark.

"From the house!" blurted a mobster. "That's where it was – the empty house!"

"Gats ready," growled Spike.

The mobleader rose to his feet. Drawing his Luger, he faced the blackened outline of Ezekiel Twinton's empty house. His pals copied his example. Weapons ready, they awaited a recurrence of that sound.

As if in challenge to their preparation, a click sounded from the direction of the house. With it, darkness ended. The glare of a searchlight flashed from beneath the roof of the back porch. Fitted to the wiring of the porch lights, this device sent a broadening beam that rivaled the brightness of day.

It showed Spike and his blinking henchmen against the background of the spring house. Startled, the mobleader and gorillas heard a repetition of the laugh that had sounded twice before. This time, the taunt rang out unrestrained.

They knew that gibing laugh. Weirdly, it gave identifying mockery. Strident, the pealing mirth was delivered in the sardonic fierceness that only one being could match. Mobsters quavered as they recognized the terrifying laugh of The Shadow.

Then, into the searchlight's glare stepped the figure that they feared. A cloaked form, batlike in its mammoth outline, The Shadow moved from cover of the porch. From his fists projected automatics. His weaving figure swept forward with total disregard for the men before him. Contemptuous of the others who were posted as guards, The Shadow moved into the ring of killers that Spike Balgo had formed about the spring house.

Uncanny laughter still bursting from his lips, The Shadow was advancing to claim the spoils that Spike Balgo had uncovered. Casting aside his familiar shroud of darkness, he was exhibiting a boldness that left the ruffians astounded.

Hands were petrified as eyes witnessed The Shadow's daring. Only lips moved as startled mobsters witnessed the approach of that dreaded figure. Hoarse voices gasped the name of the foe who had turned dark into light:

"The Shadow!"

## CHAPTER XX. CHANCE BULLETS

LIKE his minions, Spike Balgo stood astonished. The notorious mobleader knew the reputed power of The Shadow. He had heard that this fearless battler had terrified foemen to an unbelievable degree. But he had also been informed that The Shadow was quick on the trigger. He had never dreamed that the amazing enemy

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of crime would stride into the thick of an ambush before loosing a hail of lead.

It was the very unexpectedness of the situation that left Spike Balgo aghast. One hundred and fifty feet had separated The Shadow from his enemies. The weird avenger had traversed a full third of that distance before Spike Balgo acted.

Wondering, the gangleader backed away from the iron box. His henchmen withdrew with him. Again, The Shadow's laugh burst forth. The Shadow was enjoying this recognition of his prowess. It was an experience which he had reserved for this particular occasion, with a reason which was soon to become apparent.

How long would The Shadow proceed unmolested? The answer rested with Spike Balgo. The gorillas were sheep. They were awaiting his move. The gangleader did not realize it until he felt the corner of the spring house wall behind his shoulders. At that moment, The Shadow had passed the halfway mark to the spot where the box lay in the light.

Then, suddenly, Spike snarled an order. He suited it with action. He raised his gun and fired three quick shots straight toward the advancing figure. The men with Spike copied his example. A dozen rounds delivered, the shooters stared, expecting to see the black form sink, riddled with slugs.

Instead, The Shadow laughed. Unwavering, he kept coming forward. Spike's face turned ashen in the glare of the searchlight. His eyes bulged. Was this being a ghost, through which bullets passed unhampered? As Spike clutched the corner of the spring house, he heard shots burst from all about.

Ambushed mobsters were rising. Like Spike and the other three, they were firing at The Shadow. Yet the laugh continued. The fierce figure moved uninterrupted. Spike Balgo caught the glint of brilliant eyes that glared from beneath the hat brim. The Shadow was almost to the box.

"Get him!" bellowed Spike. "Get him! The Shadow!"

As mobsters opened a new volley, The Shadow turned. Disdainful of the four who stood within the light, he aimed for spots about where flashes told that men were ambushed. His automatics thundered answers to the reports of the Lugers. Cries and gasps sounded from the lips of human targets.

Again Spike fired. So did his men. As The Shadow turned in their direction, the four scattered like rats. Spike Balgo cleared the low roof of the spring house and fell sprawling by the opened door. His mobsmen, free of the searchlight's glare, dropped to the ground and fired back. The Shadow – now beside the box of swag – timed his strident laughter to the staccato jabs of flame that issued from his guns.

A mobster came sprawling at Spike Balgo's feet. This fellow had lingered too long. His emptied Luger fell to earth. A flashlight bounced on Spike's foot. The mobleader, momentarily safe in his temporary shelter, picked up the flashlight. He stood there, listening to the final barrage of the scattered mobsmen.

A savage oath came from Spike's lips. The mobleader turned on the flashlight and threw the rays against the old wall of the spring house. Raising his Luger, he fired point-blank at the wall. Something spattered. Spike stared. The bullet from his gun had left no mark!

ALL came to Spike Balgo in a flash. He and his henchmen had been tricked by the consignment to Grantham Breck. These Lugers had not been ordered by the dead lawyer. The Shadow had divined that the mobsmen would use such guns if they found them. It was he who had ordered the shipment of the box!

## DOOM ON THE HILL

The bullets? There lay the trick. They were as harmless as pellets of wax. Spike Balgo had heard of amalgam bullets – slugs that had metallic content, but would disintegrate when discharged from the muzzle of the gun. Such was The Shadow's game. He had come to claim the box of swag. Taunting the frenzied mobsters, he had added to his gibes with intermittent shots that had clipped half of Balgo's band of ruffians.

Cursing, Spike hurled the Luger to the ground. Instinctively, he thrust his hand to his pocket. It encountered the cold steel of Harry Vincent's automatic – the weapon that Spike had discovered by chance. The gangleader hesitated but an instant. Drawing Harry's gun, he raised his hand and his eyes above the level of the spring-house roof.

The Shadow was standing by the box of swag. By some uncanny ability, he seemed to divine Spike's action. Turning, he brought an automatic toward its enemy, timing his aim without hurry. Spike Balgo, his gun still in motion, fired two quick shots; then dropped for cover, just as The Shadow's gun replied.

One bullet sizzled past The Shadow's ear. The second, a few inches lower, found its mark. The Shadow's left hand dropped as his right hand fired. The black-garbed figure wavered. The Shadow was slumping toward the ground.

Spike Balgo peered from the side of the spring house. He aimed again, just as The Shadow rose. He saw the cloaked form go weaving, wavering away from the box. Spike fired again – a wide shot – as The Shadow stumbled. With a shout of triumph, Spike leaped out to aim.

The Shadow was lying facing toward the large house. Had he tried to swing and aim toward Spike, he would have met disaster. Had he risen to take to flight, he would have been a target for the mobleader. Instead, he fired from the ground. His shot was accompanied by the crash of glass and the descent of total darkness. The Shadow, though weakened, had managed to hit the luminous bull's-eye of his own searchlight.

Spike Balgo had discarded the flashlight. The gangleader fumed. No use to fire now – The Shadow was invisible. Spike dared not approach the wounded fighter. Instead, he cried out to his men. He called for lights and shouted for a mass attack.

Responses came. Mobsmen had seen The Shadow fall. Encouraged by Spike's temporary flashlight, those who had escaped The Shadow's shots came bounding forward to the spring house. They brought forth flashlights. Viciously, Spike gave an order.

"Get after him!" snarled the mobleader. "I got a rod that can clip him. I'll be behind you. If he puts up a fight, I'll plug him!"

Mobsters hesitated; then plunged forward en masse. Their flashlights showed the spot where The Shadow had stumbled. But the interval had been too long. Well had The Shadow counted on their action – the assembling with Spike – the hesitation before they drove forward.

The ground was blank where The Shadow had been. The wounded fighter had arisen; he had headed off beyond the empty house. Precious seconds had aided him in this forced departure. The Shadow had left the field. The swag again belonged to Spike Balgo.

"Scrammed, eh?" jeered Spike, as he approached the box. "Well – let him go. We showed him up. A couple of you mugs hoist this box. The rest of you see about those fellows that he plugged.

"Hang on to them rods. The bullets ain't no good, but people won't know that where we're going. Come along – if any of the mob is done for, leave 'em lay. Bring along the others. That hick sheriff's liable to be up here

## DOOM ON THE HILL

now, after all the racket. But that won't matter. We'll be gone when he gets here. Gone – like The Shadow."

THERE was contempt in Spike's final words. The gangleader was scoffing because he had offset The Shadow's ruse. He believed that he had conquered the feared enemy. He was confident that The Shadow – once he had fled – would not return.

That was because Spike judged all fighters by his own caliber. Spike was yellow when it came to a showdown. He was not keen enough to analyze the keen workings of The Shadow's brain. He thought that the cloaked fighter had lost his nerve when real bullets came his way.

There were two reasons why The Shadow had resorted to his unusual strategy of flight – that is, two reasons other than the fact that he was wounded and therefore at an unanticipated disadvantage. Yet Spike did not guess either reason.

To The Shadow, the presence of one live gun among the mob was an indication that Spike might have changed his mind about the disposal of the old rods. The Shadow had gained no knowledge of Spike's chance discovery of Harry Vincent's automatic. Wounded, The Shadow had quickly seen the possibility that several men might have their old guns in reserve. That was one reason why he had blotted out the searchlight and taken to the cover of the darkness.

The other reason was one which would have jolted Spike Balgo had the mobleader considered it. The Shadow knew more than Spike suspected. He had guessed what was due to follow the gaining of the swag.

The game of crime had not yet been completed. Crooks had further – and important – work to do. One wound from a chance bullet had never eliminated The Shadow in the past. His plans were changed; but not eradicated.

Spike Balgo and his depleted crew had trudged away with the box of swag when a soft laugh whispered from beside the old, empty house. There was a trace of anguish in the softened tone; yet confidence was the dominating note.

Wavering slightly beneath the enshrouded blackness, The Shadow arose from his resting place. Slowly, his unseen figure moved downward along the slope.

## CHAPTER XXI. MEN FROM THE DARK

THE Union Limited had pulled out of the Chanburg station while Spike Balgo and his mobsmen were heading from the hill. The station platform was deserted when the mobleader brought his crew to a stop in the driveway where only Zach Hoyler's flivver was parked. The box settled in the gravel as Spike growled an order.

"There's only one guy around," asserted the mobleader. "That's the station agent. We want him out here. See? We're going to use the guy."

"How do we grab him?" questioned Dingbat.

"Two of you mugs go in and cover him," responded Spike. "Bring him out around the platform. We'll hold him here until the milk train comes in."

"We've only got these bum gats –"

## DOOM ON THE HILL

"What of it? How'll he know they've got dummy slugs in 'em? Say – he'll crawl out here like a little lamb. If you had real bullets it wouldn't make no difference, anyway. Sock him if he puts up a fight. Shooting is out. Do you think we want to bring yaps up here from the town?"

"O.K., Spike."

Zach Hoyler was sitting at his telegraph key when he heard a sound from the wicket. He looked up to see two mobsters covering him. One was at the ticket window – the other at the opened door from the waiting room.

"Mitts up, bum," ordered Dingbat, who was at the door. "Climb up from dat soft seat an' come along wid us."

The station agent obeyed. He chewed his lips in nervous fashion as he observed the hard faces of the mobsters. Dingbat poked a Luger muzzle into the middle of Zach's back. He marched the weary-faced agent out and round the platform. Spike took charge when they arrived.

"Say, listen, you" – the gangleader chuckled contemptuously as he studied Hoyler's pale face – "we're going to the lower end of the platform. We'll all be out of sight – except you – when that Dairy Express comes in.

"But remember – I'll be there with this rod; and these other boys ain't no slouches. If you try any phony stuff, we'll cut loose – and the first guy to get lead poisoning will be you. After that the train crew. Savvy?"

Hoyler nodded.

"The first thing you do," proceeded Spike, "is to call for the conductor. Bring him up to the engine cab – like there was something important you have to tell him and the engineer. Special orders – any kind of hooey – only pull the stunt right. If you don't –"

Spike paused. He leered. His henchmen muttered imprecations. Hoyler blinked as he heard the threats. Spike added this assertion:

"Well, if you act funny, you won't be selling no more tickets through that window of yours. What's more, there won't be none of that train crew working for this road no longer. But if you do like I say, nobody's going to get hurt. You'll be a hero. You'll get a medal, maybe, for saving lives, after you spill your story."

Spike started Hoyler toward the end of the platform. The others kept in the offing. None of the figures appeared in the light. It was not until they reached the lower end that Spike headed the station agent toward his post. Even then he stopped the man before they came into the end light of the platform.

THE Dairy Express was whistling for the grade crossing. Spike growled a final injunction to Hoyler. Crouched mobsmen heard the words.

"Climb on the platform just as she pulls in," ordered Spike. "And remember, I can shoot the petals off a daisy at thirty feet. I'll be closer than that to you."

Headlight gleamed on rails. Zach Hoyler stepped warily on to the platform as the big locomotive of the milk train came grinding toward the end of the station. As the Mogul panted to a halt, the station agent moved toward the engine cab. Looking along the platform, he beckoned to the conductor. The man came hurrying up.

Engineer and fireman were leaning from the cab when the conductor arrived. They wondered what orders had come into Hoyler's ticket office. Something important seemed to be brewing. It was. As the train crew

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gathered, figures came clambering on to the platform. Mobsters flourished Lugers, covering each man, while Spike Balgo, armed with Harry Vincent's automatic, held the center of the spot.

"Out of the cab, bums" – engineer and fireman sullenly obeyed Spike's order – "and keep your mitts up, all of you. Frisk those guys, Dingbat. Maybe they've got rods."

Dingbat obeyed. His face formed a grin as he discovered three revolvers. He handed these to members of the mob, who pocketed their Lugers. Three of Balgo's six now had loaded guns. Spike grinned.

"Guess you were figuring on trouble along this run," he snarled. "Well – you got it, but you weren't ready for it. Thanks for the rods. We can use 'em."

"Say, Spike," put in Dingbat, "maybe dere's a rod in dis guy's desk" – he indicated Hoyler – "because I didn't look to –"

"We got enough," put in Spike. "Come on, Kirky, cut loose the coupling on this loco. We're going to take a trip in it. You, Dingbat and Beef – shove that box into the cab."

The mobsters obeyed. Dingbat and "Beef" came from the cab. The latter hurried to aid Kirky with the coupling, while the rest of the mob kept the train crew covered with their own guns. The Mogul unhooked, Kirky and the other mobster returned. Spike Balgo looked about; then gazed approvingly toward the panting locomotive.

"Back 'em along the platform toward the station," he ordered. Mobsters obeyed, keeping the train crew in a cluster. "That's it" – Balgo had turned – "we're all set. Come on, you mugs, back up here with me."

Spike was standing alone, behind the others. He reached out to grasp a handle beside the cab. Something made him look upward. The gangleader stood open-mouthed as he stared into the muzzle of a glimmering revolver.

Spike let his automatic clatter to the platform. Mobsters turned at the sound. They were too late. Another revolver had appeared beside the first. The gang was covered. A growled voice hurled its warning:

"Drop those rods."

THE three armed mobsters obeyed. One man came down from the cab, gun moving back and forth while the second covered steadily. The other fellow followed. The members of the train crew were on the job. Pouncing upon the weapons, they used them to cover the crooks.

Dingbat, Kirky and the third unarmed mobster put up their hands. They had only useless Lugers. They did not have time to draw them. The members of the train crew looked toward their rescuers. So did Zach Hoyler. It was the station agent who emitted the gasp of surprise as he recognized the rescuers.

One of the two men was Perry Nubin, the railroad dick. His companion was Harry Vincent. The pair had come through from the other side of the track. Ready with revolvers, they had turned the tables on men of crime!

## CHAPTER XXII. THE BIG SHOT

"LINE up," ordered Nubin, with a grim laugh. "Keep them covered, you fellows. We've got five guns now – that's enough to hold seven."

## DOOM ON THE HILL

Sullenly, Spike and his crew lined along the edge of the platform. Perry Nubin chuckled. This was the kind of triumph that he liked. He shot a glance toward Zach Hoyler and laughed at the stupefied look upon the agent's face. Then, as he again glared toward Spike and the mobsmen, Nubin indulged in another bit of glory.

"Bagged you, did they, Hoyler?" he chuckled, to the agent. "Well, if this boy Vincent hadn't been groggy, we'd have popped in sooner. I had two guns on me, but I didn't like chancing it alone. We were over in that empty freight car, Vincent and I. He wasn't capable of helping until just before the train came in.

"Then I slipped him one of my guns. The two of us came through the cab. Just a little surprise for these hyenas that were going to swipe one of the company's locomotives. That's right – keep your dukes up. When I say stick them up, I mean it –"

"All right," came an interrupting growl. "Stick them up. All of you."

Nubin turned his head. So did Harry and the train crew. They saw Zach Hoyler, glaring with eyes that meant business. The station agent had pulled two forty-fives from his hips. He was using the weapons to cover the train crew as well as the rescuers.

The placid station agent had become a man of fury. He looked more dangerous than Spike Balgo and all the mobsmen. Train men faltered; their revolvers clattered. Helpless by this sudden treachery, Perry Nubin and Harry Vincent were forced to drop their revolvers also.

"O.K., mugs," barked Spike Balgo, as his henchmen hesitated. "Grab those gats. He's the big shot."

WHEN the gangsters gained the guns, Zach Hoyler smiled. With Nubin's two revolvers added to the collection, only one mobster – Dingbat – was unequipped. Hoyler handed one of his smoke-wagons to the unarmed mobster.

"Them Lugers was duds, Zach," growled Spike. "That's why some of the mob is missing. We'd better take it on the lam, with the swag –"

"Don't worry about that sap, Tim Forey," interrupted the big shot. "Maybe he heard the shooting, like I did. He'd be headed for the hill."

"But it ain't just him. The Shadow was –"

"The Shadow?"

"Yeah. He was up there. I clipped him, though. Listen, Zach –"

The big shot made an impatient gesture. He climbed into the cab. He glared at the prisoners; then gave a brisk order to Spike Balgo.

"I'm starting this load of iron," he informed. "We're pulling out – in a hurry – with the swag. Get ready, Spike. Rub out these fellows; then bring the mob aboard."

"You mean –"

"Rub them all out!" snarled Hoyler, indicating Harry, the detective and the train crew. "Do you think I want Tim Forey to know I was the brains of our outfit? He'll think I got mine, too. Go to it. Rub them out."

## DOOM ON THE HILL

Spike Balgo grinned. His mobsters were steady – six men, holding five covered. The gorillas recognized that Zach Hoyler was the boss; but they awaited Spike's order. The mobleader turned to his crew.

"Ready, mugs –"

Spike got no further. A startling sound had come to his ears. It was an interruption from up ahead, just beyond the platform, yet off from the glare of the locomotive's headlight. As clearly as they had heard it on the hill, Spike and his gorillas recognized the shudder of The Shadow's laugh!

INSTINCTIVELY, Spike turned. Others followed his example. They aimed for the source of that strident taunt. It was not the mockery itself that told them where to aim. The Shadow delivered a visible sign of his presence. It came in the form of flashes from an automatic.

Spike Balgo fired, snarling, as a mobster fell. His shot sped wide of that spurting flame in the darkness. A second gorilla sprawled. Spike aimed again. Then a winging bullet clipped the mobleader. Spike Balgo crumpled to the platform and rolled beside the wheels of the locomotive.

With single automatic, The Shadow had dispatched his shots straight into the group of mobsmen. His laugh had swung them from their prisoners; his bullets were riddling the massed thugs without mercy.

While the falling mobsters spattered hasty, hopeless shots toward their unseen foe, Harry Vincent led the flank attack. The Shadow's withering shots had sent revolvers clattering. Harry grabbed the first gun that he found. One second later, Perry Nubin had dived for a revolver. The Shadow's volley ended as the train crew piled upon crippled and dying mobsters. A laugh echoed from up ahead.

Just as the volley ended, the wheels of the big locomotive revolved. Snorting, the big Mogul responded to a hand that had opened the throttle. Released from the restraining train, starting from the top of a slight grade, the engine started forward with a jolt.

Wounded mobsters, half rising, were grappling with the men who had attacked them. They were trying to regain their guns. A hand caught Perry Nubin's weapon. Harry Vincent swung his revolver to settle the fighting crook. Then he swung to see the back of the tender rolling from the platform.

"Zach Hoyler!" roared Nubin, as the train crew came free of the silenced gorillas. "He's the big shot! Making a get-away –"

It was too late. The big shot had made his break. In the far cab, protected by boiler and tender, he was safe from bullets. He was escaping in the locomotive, carrying the box of swag. Furious, futile cries came from the balked men who would have pursued him. They could not see what was happening in the darkness up ahead.

A figure was sweeping along the embankment. The Shadow had foreseen Zach Hoyler's move. His fusillade ended, he had sprung for the right of way, out beyond the platform. He was beside the tracks, sweeping forward, just as the cab came by. His gloved hand clutched the bar.

The big locomotive hit the bend. Its speed was sweeping as Zach Hoyler arose quickly from the seat in the cab. The big shot's face was leering as his eyes turned toward the box that the crooks had loaded aboard. The big shot pulled the coffer toward him. He was taking no chances of losing it. Hoyler had pocketed his revolver. He was raising his hands from the iron box when he spied an unexpected form.

## DOOM ON THE HILL

Swinging in from the swift-passing darkness was The Shadow. Stern eyes glinted above the muzzle of an automatic. The Shadow held the weapon in his right hand. His left arm was limp. But Zach Hoyler did not notice that. He cowered at sight of the deadly threat before him.

THE big shot deserved death. A murderer, he had used killers to aid him in his quest. Amid the madness of that jolting, swerving cab, the cowering crook saw but one chance for life. He faltered, quavering; then, with a wild cry, hurled himself into the face of death.

An attack upon The Shadow. A suicidal attempt – under almost any circumstances. But luck, for the moment, was with Zach Hoyler. He flung himself forward just as the locomotive whizzed around a bend. The steel giant straightened at the instant The Shadow was ready to press the trigger.

The Shadow's limp left hand was clutching a bar beside the fireman's cab. Gloved fingers yielded to the strain. As the right forefinger sought to deliver its shot, The Shadow's form went plunging toward the tender. The automatic barked. Its hot bullet singed Zach Hoyler's ear. Then the big shot landed on his crippled foe.

The Shadow was forced to drop the automatic. Only the clutch of his right hand saved him from destruction. Otherwise, he would have hurtled to the road bed. As Hoyler fell upon him, The Shadow grasped the crook's throat with that lone hand.

Hoyler snapped backward, dragging The Shadow with him. The unmasked station agent was wiry; but his fingers could not loose that grip. Hoyler sprawled into the cab, The Shadow with him. Then, in desperation, the crook swung toward the steps. Catching The Shadow beneath the arms, he tried to hurl the cloaked fighter from the cab.

Two figures wavered back between cab and tender. One instant both seemed on the brink of destruction; a jolt of the Mogul hurled them into the cab; another jounce brought them out again. Freakishly, they fought this furious battle. Hoyler was frenzied; The Shadow, wounded, relied wholly upon that clutch that he would not yield.

The big shot's eyes were bulging. He saw nothing – not even the burning gaze before him. He twisted; his body swung wide. It overbalanced at the steps. Wavering, the choking crook toppled backward into space.

Until that instant, Hoyler had clutched The Shadow with the wild strength of a drowning man. But in the instant that he was swinging clear, a sudden pressure on his wind-pipe made him shoot his hands upward for a last clutch at those throttling fingers. Then the weight of Hoyler's body did what his hands had failed to do. It wrenched him clear of The Shadow's deadly grasp.

As Hoyler hurtled backward, The Shadow pitched forward. The cloaked right arm swung with split-second speed. The gloved hand clutched a bar; The Shadow's figure poised. Keen eyes, staring downward, saw Zach Hoyler's body twisting toylike into the depths beneath a trestle.

While The Shadow clung hopelessly upon the edge of similar fate, the pounding locomotive hit the solid roadbed. One side of the big engine seemed to leap in the air as the monster took a curve at terrific speed. With that jolt, The Shadow's body twisted helplessly. Fingers lost their grip. The black-clad form went sprawling back into the tender. Where a curve to the left would have meant The Shadow's doom, this curve – to the right – had saved him.

Rising as the Mogul thundered on the straightaway, The Shadow pitched forward to the cab. His fingers gripped the throttle. The speed of the locomotive slackened. When the pounding wheels came to a stop, the engine was near the B and R junction.

It was then that a whispered laugh came hollow in the cab. Wounded – wearied – the master fighter had won his victory. There was triumph in the final note of mirth.

## CHAPTER XXIII. WEALTH RESTORED

"LET'S get it all straight," growled Sheriff Tim Forey as he stood in the center of Elbert Breck's living room. "There was trouble on the hill – I've just come from there. I figured those crooks were after the Dobbin swag and now I hear they got it. But I want to know what brought this finish."

Four men were listening. Harry Vincent and Perry Nubin were seated side by side. Elbert Breck, relieved of bonds and gag, was resting wearily in an easy chair. Craven was standing as solemn as a crow.

"I'll give you my story, sheriff," volunteered Perry Nubin. "I had a reason to be working on this line – the Union Valley. They thought things were getting lax. They wanted a man to tighten them. So I was sent out to look for trouble.

"I spotted something phony. That shack by the right of way. Fellows around there looked like mobsters. When old Grantham Breck was bumped, I figured they'd done it. So I began to look around for clues. I came around this house; I went up on the hill. I figured maybe there was some hidden big shot in it.

"I never suspected Zach Hoyler. When Ezekiel Twinton was murdered, I was there on the hill. I saw the struggle; I heard the shot. I tried to follow the killer but I lost him. I had a hunch it might have been somebody from this house.

"There were thugs back at that shack tonight. I came over here to see if there was going to be any contact. I spotted someone going to the hill. It was Vincent here. I followed him and grabbed him. I'd sort of suspected he was in it; and I thought I had the right man until I found that note that he was carrying to give you. Then I lined him up on my side."

The sheriff nodded. He turned to Harry. The Shadow's agent spoke.

"You told me to watch things here, sheriff," he declared, "and I did. Elbert Breck was out the night that Ezekiel Twinton was killed. I went out to look for him. I went up to the hill. I saw a struggle and saw the shot. I approached and found the body.

"Somehow, I felt that Elbert was innocent" – Harry paused; he was shaping his story to suit events – "and I feared that I might be suspected if I said I had been up by Twinton's house. I decided to watch things here. I wanted to see if I could clear Elbert.

"I saw some suspicious characters near the station last night. I remembered your talk about the Dobbin gang and the possibility of buried swag. I had a hunch they were after it; and it seemed logical that they would ride the milk train if they got it. So I put all that in my note to you."

"Why did you write a note?" inquired Forey, gruffly. "Why didn't you come in to see me?"

"On account of Elbert," explained Harry. "I wanted to put him out of the game. So you would know he was innocent. I thought I might have to send word to you, so I prepared the note in advance."

"Go on."

## DOOM ON THE HILL

"I switched the padlocks on the smoke house. Tonight, Elbert sneaked out. I grabbed him and locked him in there. Then I had a hunch that I ought to go up toward the hill, to see if a gang was prowling there. I got as far as the road; then someone landed on me. When I woke up, I was lying in the freight car. Nubin was trying to get me into shape. He had read my note. He thought my hunch was right. He needed me to aid him."

"All right, Vincent," decided the sheriff. "Things worked out right, so I've got to give you credit. What about you, Elbert?"

"I was in Laporte, sheriff," blurted Elbert, "before my father died. I lied to you about being in New York. That put me in a bad spot to begin with. I had a wild theory. I thought that maybe Ezekiel Twinton had killed my father. That's why I sneaked up to the hill.

"I ran into Twinton that night and fought with him. Only so I could shake him off – that was all. Then came the shot, close by. At first, I thought Twinton had fired it himself. I headed the wrong way when I ran. I laid around for a while before I had nerve enough to come back here to the house.

"I thought that Twinton had tried to shoot me; afterward, I decided that maybe someone else had fired the shot. Then I remembered something. The shot came just as Twinton bowled me over. I believe now that Zach Hoyler tried to murder me instead of Ezekiel Twinton. He might have believed that I knew about the money on the hill."

"You are right, Mr. Breck," declared Craven, speaking before Tim Forey had a chance. "I knew that your father had suspicious visitors, sir. I had never glimpsed them, but I believed that they were concerned with crime."

"When did these visitors come in?" questioned Nubin, suddenly.

"Always well after midnight, sir," answered Craven.

"Zach Hoyler," nodded the detective, turning to the sheriff. "It fits. He was the bird who put back the gun – and stole it from your office later."

"I became apprehensive," resumed Craven. "First, I wanted to protect my old master's name. After that, I feared for young Mr. Breck. I prowled a bit myself on his account. I was out that night that Mr. Twinton was slain; but I did not venture on the hill. I looked about a bit for young Mr. Breck; then I spied a cord from his window and waited for his return."

TIM FOREY paced back and forth. The sheriff was piecing all that he had heard. He finally paused to express his final verdict.

"Zach Hoyler fooled us," asserted Forey. "He must have been a member of Dobbin's outfit – one of the bunch that went through here. He came to this town and landed a railroad job. He was always trying to get located in the Chanburg station. They finally put him there after two agents went sour on the job.

"But there was somebody else in all this. I don't know who he was; but he ought to get plenty of credit. He mopped up that mob on the hill. Got the outfit again down there by the station. Who is he? What's become of him?"

The sheriff paused. Harry Vincent was solemn. He was anxious to know what had happened to The Shadow. In the silence that followed, there was a ring of the telephone. Forey answered it. His eyes were gleaming when he hung up.

## DOOM ON THE HILL

"Got the swag!" exclaimed the sheriff. "Down by the B and R junction! Engineers on the Limited saw the engine of the milk train stalled there. They're backing the locomotive here to Chanburg, swag and all."

"Which means," decided Nubin, "that somebody got Zach Hoyler. He'd never have beat it without the swag; and somebody must have stopped that locomotive by the junction."

Harry Vincent smiled in satisfaction. All had been cleared. Missing wealth would be returned. Crooks had gained the end that they deserved. The Shadow's agent knew his chief was safe. Moreover, he had a sudden hunch regarding The Shadow's whereabouts. Harry was thinking of the Limited.

THE guess was correct. On the fast train, speeding into New York, a passenger was lying in the lower berth of a compartment. His face – a trifle pale – was that of Lamont Cranston. This passenger had presumably boarded the train at Torrington, the last stop of the Limited before the Union Valley junction. But he had not encountered the conductor until after the train had pulled away from the junction.

Resting on his right side, The Shadow smiled. He was thinking of what was going on in Chanburg; of the explanations that would be made; of the one mystery that Sheriff Tim Forey would not clear. Later, The Shadow would return to Chanburg, to reclaim his autogiro and lift it from the clearing at night.

Then came thoughts of Zach Hoyler, the hidden crook who had managed crime. The Shadow had recollections of one night outside the station; to his throbbing brain came the ticks of the telegraph key.

Zach Hoyler was sending telegrams. Pauses between the wires – three pauses that The Shadow could remember. Zach Hoyler had been given only three telegrams. One from Harry Vincent, one from Perry Nubin, one from Elbert Breck. Three telegrams, yet three pauses. Why? Because The Shadow had heard four telegrams that night.

The fourth had been Zach Hoyler's own. A wire to a blind in New York. Signed with a fictitious name. The summons to the gang. The Shadow remembered more. A note on Hoyler's table, left there after the arrival of the box of Lugers. The Shadow had read it. So had Spike Balgo. The mobleader had taken the note with him. It had ordered him to steal the box and return it; to keep the Lugers if they proved to be its contents.

Throbbing thoughts, the aftermath of a titanic struggle. The fight on the hill, the battle at the station, the grim conflict in the cab of the thundering locomotive. A soft laugh whispered from The Shadow's lips. It died within the confines of the compartment.

The Limited plunged onward. Its whistle blared through the silent countryside. Its shrill blasts were unheard by the passenger in the compartment. Wearied at last, The Shadow was asleep.

THE END