

THE GOLDEN MASKS

Maxwell Grant

Table of Contents

<u>THE GOLDEN MASKS.....</u>	<u>1</u>
<u>Maxwell Grant.....</u>	<u>1</u>
<u>CHAPTER I. FACES OF DOOM.....</u>	<u>1</u>
<u>CHAPTER II. BEFORE THE LAW.....</u>	<u>5</u>
<u>CHAPTER III. THE LAW'S BLUNDER.....</u>	<u>7</u>
<u>CHAPTER IV. MASKED MEN MEET.....</u>	<u>10</u>
<u>CHAPTER V. THE DESERTER.....</u>	<u>13</u>
<u>CHAPTER VI. WHERE THE LAW HALTED.....</u>	<u>16</u>
<u>CHAPTER VII. THE FUGITIVE'S STORY.....</u>	<u>20</u>
<u>CHAPTER VIII. THE SHADOW'S ROUTE.....</u>	<u>24</u>
<u>CHAPTER IX. WHERE BULLETS FAILED.....</u>	<u>28</u>
<u>CHAPTER X. THE SLEEP OF SILENCE.....</u>	<u>32</u>
<u>CHAPTER XI. THE SHADOW'S RUSE.....</u>	<u>37</u>
<u>CHAPTER XII. THE AGENTS MOVE.....</u>	<u>39</u>
<u>CHAPTER XIII. THE NEXT MORNING.....</u>	<u>42</u>
<u>CHAPTER XIV. CHANCE SERVES THE SHADOW.....</u>	<u>46</u>
<u>CHAPTER XV. WORD FROM WITHIN.....</u>	<u>49</u>
<u>CHAPTER XVI. FROM THE DARK.....</u>	<u>53</u>
<u>CHAPTER XVII. THE COMING VICTIM.....</u>	<u>58</u>
<u>CHAPTER XVIII. THE ASHANTI MASK.....</u>	<u>62</u>
<u>CHAPTER XIX. THE DOUBLE TRAIL.....</u>	<u>68</u>
<u>CHAPTER XX. THE MASKS REPORT.....</u>	<u>72</u>
<u>CHAPTER XXI. MASKED BATTLE.....</u>	<u>75</u>
<u>CHAPTER XXII. THE SWIFT TRAIL.....</u>	<u>78</u>
<u>CHAPTER XXIII. THE LAST TRAP.....</u>	<u>81</u>

THE GOLDEN MASKS

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- [CHAPTER I. FACES OF DOOM](#)
- [CHAPTER II. BEFORE THE LAW](#)
- [CHAPTER III. THE LAW'S BLUNDER](#)
- [CHAPTER IV. MASKED MEN MEET](#)
- [CHAPTER V. THE DESERTER](#)
- [CHAPTER VI. WHERE THE LAW HALTED](#)
- [CHAPTER VII. THE FUGITIVE'S STORY](#)
- [CHAPTER VIII. THE SHADOW'S ROUTE](#)
- [CHAPTER IX. WHERE BULLETS FAILED](#)
- [CHAPTER X. THE SLEEP OF SILENCE](#)
- [CHAPTER XI. THE SHADOW'S RUSE](#)
- [CHAPTER XII. THE AGENTS MOVE](#)
- [CHAPTER XIII. THE NEXT MORNING](#)
- [CHAPTER XIV. CHANCE SERVES THE SHADOW](#)
- [CHAPTER XV. WORD FROM WITHIN](#)
- [CHAPTER XVI. FROM THE DARK](#)
- [CHAPTER XVII. THE COMING VICTIM](#)
- [CHAPTER XVIII. THE ASHANTI MASK](#)
- [CHAPTER XIX. THE DOUBLE TRAIL](#)
- [CHAPTER XX. THE MASKS REPORT](#)
- [CHAPTER XXI. MASKED BATTLE](#)
- [CHAPTER XXII. THE SWIFT TRAIL](#)
- [CHAPTER XXIII. THE LAST TRAP](#)

CHAPTER I. FACES OF DOOM

THE outer office of the Oceanic Steamship Co. was deserted. The lights were out, but a big clock on the wall was visible. It showed the time as half past seven. The glow that revealed the clock dial came from the frosted panel of an inner office that bore the lettered statement:

JAMES LENGERTON

President

Within that private office, a tall, stoop-shouldered man was pacing the room in front of a large desk. This man was James Lengerton; his face, though firm, was haggard. At times, the steamship company president paused to thrust long, nervous fingers through his hair.

There was a click at the glass-paneled door. The barrier opened inward. Lengerton swung hastily; his face showed mingled expressions of suspicion and relief as his eyes recognized the man who had entered. The

THE GOLDEN MASKS

newcomer was a middle-aged man; square-built and of medium height. His face though passive, was as strained as Lengerton's.

“What brings you here, Froy?” questioned Lengerton.

“I received another letter,” announced Froy, in a worried tone. “It came a short while ago. There was time to bring it here before eight o'clock.”

“Let me see it.” Froy handed an envelope to Lengerton. The latter noted that it was addressed to Burris Froy, 582 Exton Avenue, New York City. With shaking hands, Lengerton pulled the letter from the envelope; he scanned typewritten lines. Mechanically, he returned the letter to Froy.

“It specifies no new terms,” declared Lengerton. “It is simply a reminder that I must have the cash ready by eight o'clock to-night.”

“That is all,” nodded Froy. “However, there is only half an hour remaining until eight o'clock.”

“I know that, Froy. The cash is here. I shall leave the office before eight.”

“Your decision is a wise one, Lengerton. I am sorry, though, that circumstances forced you to make it.”

With this statement, Froy pocketed the letter. He turned about and went out through the door. He closed it behind him; Lengerton heard the footsteps fade away, then the muffled closing of the outer door.

MINUTES ticked by, while Lengerton continued his incessant pacing. Seven such minutes had passed when the glass-paneled door again opened. A droopy-faced man entered, stared in surprise at the sight of Lengerton.

The arrival was Lengerton's secretary, Sampler. It was plain that he had not expected to find his employer in the office. Stammering, Sampler stated that he had come for a file of shipping reports that he had intended to take home with him. The man's confusion was obviously honest. Lengerton cut Sampler short with a sudden remark.

“Sampler,” declared Lengerton, “I am going to take you into my confidence, regarding a most serious matter.”

Sampler nodded solemnly.

“Yesterday,” reminded Lengerton, “a man named Burris Froy came here to see me. You remember him, Sampler. You ushered him into this office. He is a serious-looking chap. Very wealthy. A director in several banks.”

Sampler repeated his nod.

“Recently,” declared Lengerton, “Froy received an anonymous letter which he saw fit to show to me. It referred to certain securities that I purchased by proxy. Shares in Intercontinental Air Lines.”

“You own such shares?” gasped Sampler, amazed. “Why, they have doubled in value, Mr. Lengerton! But—but Intercontinental Air Lines are expanding so rapidly that they threaten the shipping business—”

“Exactly,” interposed Lengerton, tersely. “That is why I chose to control Intercontinental Air Lines. My shares cost me five hundred thousand dollars. To-day, they are worth a million!”

THE GOLDEN MASKS

“But—but if it were known that you owned those shares—”

“My standing in the shipping business would be ruined. That is why the letter was sent to Froy. It is blackmail, Sampler, with Burris Froy as the unwilling go-between. The letter threatened him with death if he did not communicate with me.”

Turning about, Lengerton went to a safe behind his desk. He swung the metal door open; it was unlocked. Sampler gaped at sight of stacked currency, bundles of bank notes, all of thousand-dollar denomination.

“The terms were these,” declared Lengerton, sourly. “I was told to unload all my holdings in Intercontinental Air Lines, which I did to-day, through my proxies. I was permitted to retain half a million, the amount of my original investment. That sum has been placed in the bank.

“The rest—an equal sum, all profits—you see before you. At eight o'clock to-night, the unknown blackmailer is to enter this office and pick up the money unmolested. That gives us”—Lengerton glanced at his watch—“less than twenty minutes to be out of here.”

SAMPLER gaped helplessly. Lengerton seated himself behind the desk, drummed for a few moments, then yanked open a drawer. From it, he produced a stack of newspaper clippings, which he tossed on the desk with the comment:

“Look at these, Sampler.”

The secretary did as directed. The clippings were ominous. They were of various dates; they were from newspapers in different cities. Each clipping carried its own strange tale. A few told of wealthy men, who had died suddenly.

Others mentioned important persons whose present whereabouts were unknown, but whose absence carried no suspicion of foul play. There were a few clippings that mentioned absent men who had returned; but who had refused to state where they had been. Sampler remembered several of these cases from the current news.

“Those came with the letter that Froy received,” remarked Lengerton. “He believes that the people mentioned were victims of the blackmail ring. Some are dead; others are missing. Only the ones who will not talk have been allowed to return. Since their lips are sealed, it indicates that they must have experienced some terrible ordeal.”

Lengerton gathered the clippings, thrust them into the desk drawer and angrily threw a sheaf of loose papers upon them. He glanced toward the open safe and grimaced. Lengerton did not relish the loss of a cool half a million.

“A double-barreled threat,” mused the shipping president. “First, because I could not risk the exposure of my ownings in Intercontinental Air Lines. Second, the veiled warning of death or injury if I did not comply. Oddly, Sampler, it was the first threat that worried me. I would be willing to face the second.”

“The first threat is ended, Mr. Lengerton,” said Sampler. “Since you have already disposed of your airline holdings, there can be no exposure. At present, it is simply money that you must protect.”

A sharp gleam came to Lengerton's eyes. The gray-haired man pounded the desk with his fist. Hurriedly, Lengerton glanced at his watch. It showed twelve minutes before eight. Without further hesitation, Lengerton snatched up the telephone. Sampler listened while his employer called police headquarters.

THE GOLDEN MASKS

Lengerton's statement was brief. He said simply that he was threatened by grave danger, that he must have protection before eight o'clock. After giving his name and office address, he promised that he would explain matters when the police arrived.

With a satisfied smile, Lengerton hung up the receiver. He glanced at his watch again and spoke to Sampler.

"I talked to an inspector named Cardona," declared Lengerton. "The fellow wasted no time over details. He says that he will be here with a squad of detectives in less than ten minutes. We have tricked our enemies, Sampler.

"Since eight o'clock is the deadline, they will wait until after that hour before they enter. If they are watching the office, they will probably think that I accidentally stayed too long. While they continue their vigil, the law will arrive."

Lengerton chuckled. His lips opened for another statement; suddenly, they froze. From his desk, Lengerton stared straight past Sampler, toward the door of the office. A horrified expression came upon Sampler's face, like a reflection of the terror that Lengerton had registered. Mechanically, Sampler turned about. He saw the sight that Lengerton had spied.

THE door of the office was open. Two men had silently stepped in from the darkened outer office. As they moved forward, side by side, three others followed, like slaves attendant upon their masters. The foremost pair had guns; the rear trio carried a cubical wooden box that measured more than foot in each direction. The box was black, of ebony.

It was not the sight of leveled revolvers or the ominous black box that caused both Lengerton and Sampler to quail. The sight that horrified the trapped shipping president and his secretary was the appearance of the invaders themselves. They looked like monsters, those intruders; creatures who had shed their human features.

Each was clad in a robe of dull gold, with cowllike headpiece that encircled cheeks and forehead. Each wore thin gauntlets of the same material. Their faces, amazingly lifelike, were also of gold. For a moment, Lengerton and Sampler thought that these were real countenances, gilded.

The trapped men then realized that such was not the case. The answer lay in the fact that every one of the five faces were identical. The leaders, with their glimmering revolvers; the followers, with their ebony box—any one of the group could have passed for another.

Each golden face carried an insidious expression. Each visage was perfect in formation; that fact simply added to the demonish touch. Golden lips were curved in half smiles that boded no mercy.

The only difference—and it was scarcely detectable—lay in the eyes that stared from golden sockets. There was variance in the colors of the five pairs of eyes.

The golden faces were masks, beaten from metal that was almost pure. Their thinness gave them realism, despite the fact that the golden features were immobile. Each mask hid the real face behind it; but the golden smiles seemed to tell the feeling that was held by every evil heart.

These Golden Masks were fiends to the core. They had come to claim wealth that they had demanded. Finding that their terms had not been obeyed, they were prepared to deal punishment upon the pair of helpless victims who cowered by the desk.

CHAPTER II. BEFORE THE LAW

AS he shrank before the threat of the Golden Masks, James Lengerton realized the error that he had made. He wished that he had closed and locked the safe; to leave with Sampler and meet the police outside the building. Such a move might have tricked these golden-garbed invaders.

Another thought flashed through Lengerton's brain. The Golden Masks must have guessed that he intended to offset their game. The fact that he had remained within his office almost until eight o'clock had been their cue for entry.

One of the two leaders snarled a command that produced no motion of the metal lips. Immediately, the three followers stepped to the desk. They placed the ebony box there and opened it. Another snarl made Lengerton stare at the enemy in front of him; hence the shipping president did not see what the box contained. Sampler observed it, however. The secretary gasped. One of the golden-faced servitors was removing a large glass cylinder from the box. The cylinder was inverted; its mouth was covered with a sheet of rubber, that had a central slit. Sampler saw a rubber hose stretch snakily from the box as the Golden Mask lifted the cylinder high above his head. The hose formed a tubular connection between cylinder and box.

The cylinder came downward. From in back of Lengerton, the man who held the cylinder clamped it over the shipping president's head. Lengerton started a struggle; the other two servitors promptly gripped him, one on either side. Clamped between these captors, Lengerton could scarcely writhe.

The victim made a grotesque sight, his haggard face staring through the rounded wall of glass. The rubber cap beneath the cylinder had tightened about Lengerton's neck; his head was in an air-tight container.

The struggle that Lengerton made did not last long. The man who had capped his head within the cylinder reached a golden gauntlet into the black box. Fingers pressed a lever. A hissing sound followed.

Sampler saw a yellowish gas issue into the cylinder. The vapor coiled about Lengerton's head; increasing, the yellow cloud obscured the victim's face. Sampler caught one last glimpse of Lengerton's face; he could tell that his employer's breath had given out. Lengerton was forced to inhale the yellowish gas.

THE effect was completed in less than a minute. Lengerton's body sagged back into the chair behind the desk. His head tilted sidewise, carrying the glass cylinder to a precarious angle.

The men who held Lengerton let him slump; one of them caught the toppling cylinder and lifted it clear of the victim's head. Lengerton's neck wobbled; his head tilted backward and thumped against the back of the chair. One of the Golden Masks placed the cylinder back into the black box.

The other two raised Lengerton. The victim was staring, with goggly eyes, as though everything before his gaze was distorted. His muscles lacked action; but his body was loose, like that of a jointed puppet. He seemed to understand when one of the servitors snarled for him to walk; but he was unable to respond to the command.

Supporting their victim, the two Golden Masks moved Lengerton away from the desk. His legs acted mechanically, their footsteps draggy, as the two servitors walked him toward the door.

The last of the three masked underlings closed the black box and lugged it with him as he followed the others toward the door. Forgetful of his own plight, Sampler stared after them. He heard the draggy footsteps cross the outer office; he listened as the hallway door thumped shut.

THE GOLDEN MASKS

Three of the Golden Masks had departed with their prisoner. Overwhelmed by the strange gas, Lengerton had reached a condition that made his removal easy. What Lengerton's fate would be, Sampler could not guess. Vaguely, the secretary realized that the Golden Masks had conquered Lengerton within a few minutes after their arrival. There would still be an interval before the police arrived.

During that period, Sampler knew that he would be at the mercy of the two Golden Masks who had remained. They were the leaders of the insidious throng. They stood with ready revolvers, holding Sampler prisoner. They did not intend to give him the gas treatment; for the ebony box and its glass cylinder were gone.

Had Sampler used reason, he would have seen that his own cause was not hopeless. Lengerton's money was still in the open safe. The leaders of the Golden Masks had further business here. It would serve them best to postpone murder until they were ready for departure. Given five minutes longer, the police would arrive.

Sampler's proper course was to stall, to plead with the Golden Masks; to promise them anything that would delay them. In his terror, the secretary did not grasp the possibilities that such a policy offered. He wanted a chance for flight; and he thought he saw such opportunity.

The leaders of the Golden Masks had turned toward the door. They were listening intently, even after footsteps had died. They wanted to be sure that their followers had made an unhampered get-away with James Lengerton.

The fixed stares on the golden faces made Sampler think that neither of the two men could see him. Shakily, Sampler edged along the desk. He gave a sudden spring toward the man who stood nearest to him.

THE golden-masked rogue spun away, with a fierce snarl. Sampler lunged wide. He was stopped by a sudden jab of the masked man's right hand. The Golden Mask thrust his revolver muzzle against Sampler's ribs; the gauntleted fist went deep beneath the secretary's coat. As Sampler tried to twist away, the Golden Mask fired.

The report was muffled by the folds of Sampler's coat. The secretary jolted; smoke coiled outward from his vest. With distorted lips that failed to give cry, Sampler sagged sidewise, flattened on the floor in front of the desk. The man with the gun looked down at his victim's sprawled body. The unchanged smile upon the Golden Mask seemed to denote the murderer's evil pleasure.

The other Golden Mask looked toward his comrade. His metal smile looked like an expression of approval. Calmly, both men put away their revolvers, pocketing them through slits at the sides of their robes.

One went to the safe, brought out the wads of currency and placed the money on the desk. The other found a cardboard box on a table in the corner. Together, they thumbed the cash, then packed their ill-gained wealth in the box.

Sampler's death had produced one result. Because the shot had been completely muffled, the Golden Masks showed no hurry. They were oblivious to the fact that the law was on its way here. They took four full minutes for work that they could have accomplished in less than two.

One of the evil pair tucked the pasteboard box beneath his arm. The other went to the door, turned the knob, just as his companion pressed the light switch. The inner office was plunged in darkness, just as the door came inward. Simultaneously, the man with the box remembered an important item. He snarled two words:

“The clippings—”

THE GOLDEN MASKS

The other stopped him, with an evil hiss, pointed a gauntleted finger across the outer office, toward the door to the hall. Though both offices were almost completely dark, the rogue with the box detected his companion's gesture and looked in the direction indicated.

The outer door had a glass panel, like the one between the offices. Beyond it was the light of the hallway, dimmed because of the frosted glass. Nevertheless, it formed a semitransparent frame. Against that glass, visible from where the Golden Masks stood, was a shadowed outline that made both villains reach instantly for their revolvers.

THE shadow against the glass was a silhouette that showed a hawklike profile, topped by the brim of a slouch hat. Motionless, it formed an uncanny symbol—a shape that might have stood alone, without human form to produce it. Despite their evil prowess and the darkness that covered them, the Golden Masks were halted by the sight.

The Golden Masks were men of crime. They recognized the silhouette that blocked the hallway light. The hawkish profile told them that their trail had been crossed, that their path was covered by a master foe whose presence meant destruction for workers of evil.

That superfoe had arrived just after the servitors had taken James Lengerton away. Though too late to deal with minions, he was in time to meet the perpetrators of crime, to halt the escape of the two leaders who had seen to the murder of Sampler.

That sinister profile against the door belonged to The Shadow. It symbolized a master of crime detection, whose ways were many, whose moves were hidden. Other crooks had seen that silhouette that marked the advent of The Shadow. They had learned—through their own doom—that it was futile to attempt open battle with an enemy whose actual form they could not see.

Evil though they were, the two Golden Masks feared to move. They crouched by their inner doorway, hoping to evade the search of eyes that they felt might penetrate the frosted outer pane.

Their revolvers were drawn; but the fingers within the golden gauntlets were numbed by fear. Neither rogue dared fire. A shot might prove useless; if so, it would be answered by a peal of mocking mirth. The Shadow would know the location of his huddled enemies.

Great was the terror that had gripped Lengerton and Sampler at the sight of the Golden Masks. Much of that same horror now held the Golden Masks themselves. Their golden garb was a mere masquerade that hid their actual identities. The blackness that enveloped The Shadow was a shroud that rendered him vague and invisible.

As the clock in the outer office ticked off the passing seconds, the masked murderers waited, banking all upon the hope that The Shadow would depart. That seemed their only chance of safety against this famed invader who had arrived before the law.

CHAPTER III. THE LAW'S BLUNDER

TEN seconds passed. Staring, the Golden Masks saw a slow motion of the silhouette beyond the frosted door. With eerie glide, the profile faded to one side. It did not return. Complete silence persisted until a slight click sounded from the outer hall. The dim light was extinguished. Total blackness reigned.

Without knowing it, the Golden Masks had held a temporary advantage. The Shadow had come to the office of the Oceanic Steamship Co.; just outside the outer door, he had discerned the light from the inner office.

THE GOLDEN MASKS

About to investigate, The Shadow had halted when the Golden Masks extinguished the inner light and opened the connecting door.

With no chance to fade away unseen, The Shadow had held his ground. He knew that men within the office would see his blackened silhouette; therefore, he had remained motionless, to make them think that his outlined profile was a ruse. The Shadow timed his stay to perfection; when he did withdraw, his deliberate move still bluffed the Golden Masks.

It was not until The Shadow pressed the hall switch that the rogues realized how close he had been to the outer door. Their knowledge came too late. The Shadow had gained the element that he wanted: darkness. The Golden Masks could risk no light. They were bottled in the office; there, The Shadow intended to keep them until their nerves reached a breaking point.

The Golden Masks were in a tight spot. If this situation had continued for a few minutes longer, they would have been due for a startling surprise. The Shadow had outguessed them; luck was all upon which the Golden Masks could depend. Chance favored them beyond all hope.

ONE minute after the hall light had gone out, the Golden Masks heard a distant sound, like the thud of approaching footsteps. It lasted for a few short seconds; The Shadow must have heard it also, for it came from beyond the hallway door.

The noise ended; without warning, a glare of light flooded the outer hall. Some one had approached to find the hall lights extinguished. The new arrival had supplied the brilliance of a bull's-eye lantern.

The flooding light showed a sight that the Golden Masks had not anticipated. The door from the hall was halfway open. Across the threshold was an unmistakable figure, cloaked in black. It was The Shadow, his gloved left hand upon the doorknob, his right gripping a mammoth automatic.

The light had come at a most inopportune instant. Had The Shadow been less advanced into the office, he could have dived away along the hall before the big light was flashed.

Had he been given a few seconds more, he could have sprung past the door which he had so stealthily opened. By finding darkness in the office, he could have shot it out with the surprised Golden Masks.

As it was, The Shadow stood trapped. His tall form was completely visible to the Golden Masks. Shouts from the hall told that he had been spied by the new invaders. The Shadow needed split-second speed in this emergency. He showed it.

Counting the men within the office as the most dangerous, because of their preparedness, The Shadow took his chances with those in the hall. Spinning outward, he wheeled and dashed along the corridor, away from the revealing light.

The Golden Masks came to life as The Shadow whirled. They fired rapidly with their revolvers; but The Shadow was gone too rapidly. Useless bullets bashed the far wall of the hallway, beyond the opened outer door.

The shouts in the hall were louder. Guns began to bark; at the end of the corridor, The Shadow heard bullets whiz past him. He swung into a side passage; heavy-footed pursuers dashed after him. The Shadow knew the false situation that he had encountered.

The men with the lantern were headquarters detectives. Sent to cover Lengerton's office, they had gone after

THE GOLDEN MASKS

the first intruder whom they saw there. The shots fired by the Golden Masks had simply spurred on the excited dicks. Without stopping to reason, they supposed that Lengerton and others who needed help had opened fire on the black-clad intruder at the office door.

As The Shadow raced along the side passage, the light reached the turn behind him. From a stairway ahead, two more detectives sprang up to block The Shadow's flight. The Shadow met the first man head-on, sprawled him to the stairs with a swift uppercut. As the second detective fired hastily, The Shadow grappled with him and swung the man between himself and the light.

The detectives at the turn could not fire; for their comrade was toward them. Hanging onto the fellow, The Shadow was prepared to haul him down the stairs, away from gun range. Just then, a chance incident started a new commotion.

One detective flashed a light back along the main corridor, to sight two figures hurrying from Lengerton's office. One glimpse told him that they were enemies. The Golden Masks were staging a get-away; they stopped the instant that the light flashed upon them.

Both crooks fired. The detective with the light dropped, wounded. Brief sight of the Golden Masks was lost; amid the gunfire, another detective doused the bull's-eye lantern. Blindly, the detectives fired along the darkened hall. The Golden Masks had dashed in the direction from which the headquarters men had originally come. The crook who carried the swag clung to it.

NEW shouts arose as the Golden Masks reached the beginning of the corridor. A loud, gruff voice was that of Inspector Joe Cardona. He had ordered his men ahead; he was moving up with others when the Golden Masks encountered them on a wide stairway by the elevators.

Arms slashed; guns blasted wildly; flashlights glimmered, to be knocked from the hands that held them. Fleeing men clattered down the stairway. The Golden Masks had broken through, unscathed.

Far distant, The Shadow heard the commotion. The detectives at the turn of the passage were dashing to join Cardona in pursuit of the Golden Masks.

The Shadow flung off the man with whom he grappled, left him at the top of the little stairway and dashed downward. It was The Shadow's only chance to head off the Golden Masks when they reached the street.

There were three flights to the bottom. The Shadow came out through a doorway that opened on a passage beside the building.

Shots were booming when The Shadow reached the front sidewalk. A big sedan careened from the curb; revolvers spat from its windows as the automobile fled. Cardona and three detectives fired wasted shots. The Golden Masks were off to a get-away. No police cars were on hand to chase them, for Cardona had made his approach to the building a secret one.

There was a taxi near the curb, a little below the building. Before the police spied it, The Shadow sprang toward the cab. As he neared the taxi, he came into view. A detective shouted as he saw The Shadow, raised his arm to fire. Before the dick could fire, Cardona grabbed his arm and knocked the man's gun upward.

Joe Cardona had also spied The Shadow. An ace sleuth, the inspector recognized the cloaked combatant. Quicker in thought than the detective was with the trigger, Cardona not only saved The Shadow from a chance bullet; he also realized how great a mistake had been made.

THE GOLDEN MASKS

If Cardona had guessed beforehand that The Shadow intended to visit Lengerton's, the inspector would have ordered his squad to stay in the background. Unfortunately, the law had bungled.

The Shadow snapped an order as he boarded the cab. The driver, a chance hackie who had parked near Lengerton's building, was quick in response. He heard a fierce whisper that commanded him to follow the car that had fled.

THE SHADOW'S commandeered cab sped past gaping detectives, who still could not guess why Cardona had ordered them to stand by. The taxi took the corner; the driver spied the car that carried the Golden Masks. The fleeing sedan was turning a corner two blocks ahead. It had gained too good a start.

When the taxi reached that corner, the sedan was out of sight. Though he did his best, the cab driver failed to pick up its trail as he threaded from street to street.

The Shadow ordered him to halt the cab. The driver obeyed. A five-dollar bill wavered past the hackie's shoulder and flipped to his lap. Clutching the unexpected fare, the cab driver looked into the back of the car, hoping to see his passenger. The cab was empty. The Shadow had dropped off into the night, closing the door silently, behind him.

The Shadow, always in touch with important financial matters, had learned earlier that large sales had been made in Intercontinental Air Lines. Through confidential channels, he had gained sufficient data to link James Lengerton with the stock sales. Scenting mystery, The Shadow had paid that surprise visit to Lengerton's office. Ghostlike, he had arrived to trap the leaders of the Golden Masks. But the law's blunder had allowed a pair of master crooks to escape.

Though he had not even seen his superfoes, The Shadow had observed previous evidence of their depredations. To-night, he had come closer to the Golden Masks than before. The Shadow was confident that his next endeavor would bring him face to face with these master criminals. All that The Shadow needed was one more clue.

Strangely, that clue would soon be in the making. New twists of circumstances were destined to bring The Shadow adventures of a sort that even he had never before experienced.

CHAPTER IV. MASKED MEN MEET

IT was midnight. Four hours had passed since the events at Lengerton's office. The early editions of the morning newspapers had reached the streets of Manhattan; newsboys were already selling them at Times Square. These "bulldog" extras carried sensational news concerning what had taken place at Lengerton's office. It had been inserted as a stop-press item.

"Big skyscraper moider—"

As a newsboy shouted the statement, a peak-faced man stopped to purchase an extra. The man was carrying a suitcase in his left hand; to it was attached a tag that bore the printed name of Clifford Sulgate. The initials on the suitcase corroborated the tag; for the letters were C. S.

With his free hand, Sulgate fumbled for change, found a quarter and gave it to the newsie. He did not wait for the twenty-three cents that the newsboy started to return to him. Instead, Sulgate walked hastily away and did not stop until he had reached the nearest corner.

There, by the light from a pineapple juice stand, Sulgate scanned the headlines.

THE GOLDEN MASKS

Clifford Sulgate was the type of man whom one would expect to see near Times Square at midnight. He was dressed in a tuxedo; over that attire he wore a lightweight overcoat. His head was topped by an expensive Derby hat. Apparently, he had been to the theater, for a program was sticking out from his overcoat pocket. However, there was nothing in Sulgate's manner to indicate that he had enjoyed the show. Sulgate's face was not only pale and dryish, but was almost the color of the gray hair that showed below his Derby. His lips twitched; his eyes kept blinking. As he studied the newspaper, he set down his suitcase in order to adjust his rimless spectacles. He fidgeted with the glasses until he had them as he wanted them; even then, his blinking and twitching were as frequent as before.

Sulgate's lips ceased their twitching when the nervous man chewed them tightly. Folding the newspaper, Sulgate thrust it into his pocket with the program. He picked up his suitcase and hurried along Broadway, noting the street numbers at each crossing. Several blocks above Times Square, Sulgate turned westward.

On the dimmer street, he paused to look at parked taxicabs. Enterprising drivers leaned out and called to the prospective passenger. Sulgate ignored the hackies until he came to one who was at the wheel of a green cab. The driver had his flag down, to indicate that the cab was hired. Spying Sulgate, the cab, driver gave a nod of recognition. Sulgate entered the taxi.

THE cab started eastward; it turned right on Broadway, then right again, on a westbound street. Away from the glare of Times Square, the driver calmly pressed a special lever located at his left. The effect was unusual.

Thick, tight-fitting blinds dropped at every window in the cab. Clifford Sulgate was confined in complete darkness. Moreover, sharp clicks denoted that the pressure of the lever had locked the rear doors.

The driver chose a twisting course; he drove the cab steadily, but without great speed.

Fifteen minutes later, the taxi pulled into a narrow alleyway between two bare-walled buildings. Continuing through the close-walled channel, it came to an inner courtyard. There, the cab wheeled about. The driver pulled the lever; blinds came up and doors unlocked. Clifford Sulgate stepped out, carrying his suitcase.

There was a dim door at one side of the court. Sulgate entered it, found the door of an elevator. He pressed a button; an elevator thrummed downward, on a long, slow trip.

When the car arrived, Sulgate opened the door and entered. The elevator was dark. Sulgate closed the door behind him. That done, he pressed a light switch. The elevator was illuminated; its glow showed Sulgate's twitching lips and blinking eyes.

Hastily, Sulgate took off his spectacles and put them into a case which he placed in an overcoat pocket. He doffed his overcoat and dropped it to the floor, with his Derby. He pressed an elevator button that bore the word "Up"; as the car ascended, Sulgate hurriedly opened the suitcase.

Gold cloth glimmered as the nervous man drew a long robe from the bag. Sulgate slipped the golden garb over his shoulders. From the bag, he brought another article—a mask of thin, beaten gold. He placed the mask on his face; kept it in place by adjusting the robe's hood about it. The edges of the hood completely covered every trace of Sulgate's gray hair.

From a man of ordinary, almost shrinking appearance, Sulgate had become a robed creature of insidious ilk. His metal face looked lifelike; its mold, its smile were identical with those of the Golden Masks who had invaded Lengerton's office.

The elevator reached the top of the shaft. The trip had been a long one; the floor at which it finally stopped

THE GOLDEN MASKS

was certainly a considerable distance above the ground. There was no way of determining the exact height, however, for the walls of the elevator were entirely closed and gave no glimpse of the floors that were passed.

Sulgate opened the door. He stepped into a gloomy, square-walled room, that had a golden door on the opposite side. A huge African was standing there as guard.

He was attired in a native costume, a leathery shirt crossed by a leopard pelt. The native's arms and legs were bare; they glistened like ebony beneath the light. The guard's muscles tightened; he raised a stocky war spear as Sulgate approached.

The guard was a full six feet six in height; he towered menacingly above the masked arrival. Sulgate stopped and spoke a password:

“Ashanti.”

The guard lowered his spear. Sulgate approached the door and gave another countersign:

“Kumasi.”

The African guard gripped a knotty handle in the center of the golden doorway. He pulled the barrier outward; let it close as Sulgate passed. That done, the guard brought Sulgate's bag, coat and hat from the elevator and stacked them with others that were in a corner by the elevator. The guard closed the elevator door, went back to his post, to await newcomers.

SULGATE, meanwhile, had entered a room where a strange scene was in progress. The room was well lighted; all about its walls were golden hangings, costly draperies that reflected their dull, yellow hue. Within the room was a throng of motionless men; more than a dozen, all attired in the same garb as Sulgate.

Metal faces looked toward the new arrival; all bore the same half smile that Sulgate's golden features carried. The only variance lay in the eyes that stared through the masks. Clifford Sulgate had arrived at a meeting of the Golden Masks; his own attire, his knowledge of the passwords, marked him as a member of that evil band. It was necessary, however, that he identify himself within the meeting room.

At the far wall stood a raised platform; it was set back in the wall like a small stage. Two of the Golden Masks were seated upon that dais, each on a golden throne. They were the leaders of the Golden Masks. Sulgate approached them. He spoke to the Golden Mask who sat upon the left.

“I am Mu,” declared Sulgate. His tone echoed, for the ceiling above the platform was a low one. “I speak to Alpha.”

“Alpha replies to Mu,” returned the seated man, solemnly. “Mu will give the first countersign.”

“Ashanti.”

Sulgate waited a few moments, then turned to the figure on the right. He spoke again:

“I am Mu. I speak to Omega.”

“Omega replies to Mu,” answered the second leader. “Mu will give the second countersign.”

“Kumasi.”

THE GOLDEN MASKS

The procedure finished, Sulgate joined the crowd of Golden Masks who were standing about the room. Like them, he faced the platform, where Alpha and Omega sat with folded arms.

To Sulgate, the scene was not a new one; for he had long been a member of the Golden Masks. Nevertheless, the setting chilled him. Faces of gold were ominous; though he wore one that was identical, Sulgate felt a secret fear amid this masked throng. Even to a member of the organization, the Golden Masks were a mystery; for those like Sulgate had never gained complete initiation.

ONLY two of the group knew the real identities of all. Those two were Alpha and Omega, silent upon their thrones. All others were forced to go through the same routine as Sulgate; they were brought here by taxicabs, behind shaded windows and locked doors. The taxi drivers knew the faces of the men whom they were delegated to meet; but they did not know their names.

Those taximen were mere underlings, who knew the power of the Golden Masks and feared it; they maintained secrecy also because they were promised membership in the Golden Masks after their terms of apprenticeship were served.

Every member, like Sulgate, had a Greek letter name by which he identified himself. While the group remained motionless, another Golden Mask entered. He identified himself as Omicron, speaking to Alpha and Omega, as Sulgate had.

Sulgate often wondered who those leaders could be. All were capable of treachery; all were obedient to orders. All felt security in evil dealings, because of the protective power that the crooked society gave them. The Golden Masks formed a chain of graspers who used crime for profit.

Sulgate was a member of that chain; but to-night, he felt that he might be its weakest link. Sulgate had played a definite part in the move that the Golden Masks had made against James Lengerton.

Sudden regrets had seized Clifford Sulgate. Remorse was not the only emotion that gripped him. Sulgate was qualmish, fearful for his own safety. He was satisfied with the wealth that was already his; he had gained all that he wanted through association with the Golden Masks. Until this Lengerton affair, Sulgate had not been used as an instrument in crime. His present fear was that he would be employed again, more openly than before. That was more than he wanted.

Thanks to his golden mask, none could see the twitching lips and blinking eyes of Clifford Sulgate.

CHAPTER V. THE DESERTER

THE meeting of the Golden Masks had opened. A venomous voice was snarling gloating words. Alpha was the speaker; his statements referred to to-night's crime. The leader spoke facts that concerned Clifford Sulgate.

"Thanks to Member Mu," announced Alpha, "we learned that James Lengerton held a controlling interest in Intercontinental Air Lines. Lengerton's position in the shipping industry was such that he could not afford to let the fact be known."

A pause. Sulgate saw eyes turn in his direction. He repressed the nervous shudders that came over him. The tremor of his robed shoulders was scarcely visible.

"We required contact with Lengerton," resumed Alpha. "We chose a man whose complicity would not be suspected. He carried our message to Lengerton—and handled it capably. Allow me to congratulate you,

THE GOLDEN MASKS

Member Delta.”

With a golden gauntlet, Alpha indicated a robed man who stood close to Sulgate. Member Delta gave a slight bow in acknowledgment, drew his shoulders proudly upward. His mask formed an impressive screen in front of his actual face. Had it been lifted, the features of Burriss Froy would have been revealed.

Member Delta was the banker who had visited Lengerton with the anonymous communications. Those had been faked for Lengerton's benefit. It was true that no suspicion had been placed upon Member Delta.

Lengerton, in his talk with Sampler, had taken it for granted that Froy had acted in good faith. In calling the police, Lengerton had not mentioned Froy's name.

“We had trouble with Lengerton, however,” concluded Alpha, dryly. “Those difficulties were overcome through the power of the Golden Masks. Member Omega will tell you how capably we handled the situation.”

Omega bowed to Alpha, then addressed the throng in an insidious tone that was the counterpart of Alpha's.

“Lengerton placed half a million dollars in his safe,” stated Omega, “to be there for our collection. Alpha and I went to the office in person, accompanied by three of our members. We awaited Lengerton's departure. He delayed.

“That delay was a sign that we did not like. It showed that Lengerton lacked proper respect for our threats. We entered before the stated hour. We found Lengerton in conference with his secretary. They had called the police—a fact which we learned later.

“Alpha and I lost no time. We ordered our followers to give Lengerton the proper treatment. They applied it and carried him away. We had been liberal with Lengerton, allowing him to keep half of the proceeds from his stocks. Since we hold him prisoner, we shall force him to disgorge the funds that he preserved.”

Gloated chuckles of approval came from the Golden Masks who stood about Sulgate. The nervous man joined; his chortle was hollow, for his lips were dry, were twitching inside their mask. Sulgate's fellow members did not note his forced tone.

“As for the secretary,” added Omega, “his death was necessary, for Lengerton had confided in him. The secretary's name, so Member Delta tells us, was Sampler. My companion, Alpha, disposed of Sampler with a single bullet.”

There was a new buzz of commendation. Omega waited until all was quiet, then added a triumphant sequel to his account.

“The police arrived to trap us,” he announced. “They learned the futility of combat with two members of the Golden Masks. We departed through their very midst. With us, we carried Lengerton's half a million dollars as a contribution to our cause.”

THE proud statement brought restrained applause from the thronged members. Alpha and Omega exchanged dark-eyed glances. They had agreed to create the impression that they had handled a simple task. Wisely, they had refrained from mention of the actual circumstances that had aided them: the presence of The Shadow.

It was Alpha who broke the pause. He came to new business; a sort that pleased the members with its promise of further gain.

THE GOLDEN MASKS

“Through one of our members,” announced Alpha, “we have learned of a man who possesses great wealth that he can afford to lose. I shall not state the name of the member who brought this information; nor shall I disclose the identity of our future victim. I shall, however, appoint a member to contact the person whose wealth we intend to gain.”

While Alpha was speaking, Omega reached in the slitted pocket of his robe and brought out a parchment scroll. He unrolled it; brought it to Alpha. Together, the leaders studied the scroll and nodded. It was Omega who spoke.

Gazing at the throng he announced:

“As a reward to Member Mu for his past cooperation, we shall appoint him to the duty of new contact. Member Mu, you will find your instructions on this scroll.”

Both leaders were looking straight toward Sulgate. The nervous man was rooted where he stood by fear.

The evil leaders waited. Sulgate's legs came back to life. Swaying slightly as he approached the platform, Sulgate steadied as he reached the leaders. Summoning all his grit, he stared up toward the pair, reached out his right hand and took the scroll with his golden gauntlet, then returned to his seat.

The rest of the meeting was chaos to Sulgate. The leaders spoke of other matters. Various members made reports. Sulgate scarcely heard a word that passed. He managed only to thrust the scroll within his robe and maintain a firm position on the floor.

When the meeting ended, Alpha and Omega resumed their thrones. The other members started toward the door, leaving Sulgate resting alone and conspicuous in the center of the floor. Suddenly realizing his position, Sulgate got up and followed the departing members.

Sulgate was the last man to take the elevator. He sagged when he stood alone; the car was halfway to the ground before he could summon strength enough to divest himself of his mask and his robe.

THE outside darkness nerved Sulgate somewhat; for there was only one taxi in the courtyard. It was the one that had brought him to the meeting. Sulgate entered the cab; when the curtains clicked shut, he sank back upon the cushions.

During the trip, his breath sounded in long, deep gasps. Though he was away from the meeting of the Golden Masks, Sulgate did not feel safe while still within this vehicle that the organization owned.

The cab dropped Sulgate near Times Square. City lights gave him courage; the glare also served as an excuse for the blinking of his eyelids, which he could not control. Sulgate had put on his spectacles; they improved his vision and gave him more confidence. Knowing that the taxi driver might be watching him, Sulgate did his best to appear steady as he walked away with his suitcase.

Sulgate went directly to the taproom of a large hotel. The place was only half filled; he chose a table near a side door and parked his hat and coat with the suitcase, on a chair at the right of the table. The gray-haired man then ordered a stiff drink; when he had finished it, he followed with another. Then he got up and headed toward a phone booth.

His fingers shook badly as he dialed a number. He had to begin the process over again. At last, Sulgate managed the connection. He seemed reassured by the drawly voice that answered.

THE GOLDEN MASKS

“Hello, Bronden...” Sulgate gulped as he spoke the name. “Yes, this is Mr. Sulgate... Bronden, I—I can stand it no longer!... To-night is the time for the break. I shall join you within the next hour...”

“No, no!” Sulgate's tone was excited. “Not at home! I would not dare come there, Bronden... Yes, you must leave at once. Be sure that no one knows that you have left; that no one follows you... Yes, meet me at the apartment... You say that everything is ready there? Good!...”

COMING from the telephone booth, Sulgate mopped his forehead with a handkerchief. He returned to his table; a waiter approached and Sulgate ordered another drink. Nervously, he polished his glasses, put them back on his nose and looked about as if testing them. It was an excuse to see if any newcomers had entered. Sulgate saw none.

When the waiter returned, Sulgate asked for the check and paid it. He gulped part of his drink, but did not finish it. Just as some people walked in from the front door, Sulgate picked up his overcoat and suitcase. He planked his Derby hat on his head and made a rapid departure by the side door.

A taxi was pulling up to the curb, to discharge passengers at the hotel. It was just the sort of vehicle that Sulgate wanted; for he knew that it could not have been posted here by the Golden Masks.

Sulgate boarded the cab, gave the driver a fictitious address. His plan was to change his destination later, then transfer to another cab in order to reach the apartment that he had mentioned in his conversation with Bronden.

Clifford Sulgate was in flight from the Golden Masks. Depending upon Bronden, a servant long in his confidence, he was bound for a hide-out where he felt sure no one could locate him.

Like other lesser members of the Golden Masks, Sulgate had not heard the full tale of the episodes that had involved the leaders. Therefore, the deserter knew nothing of The Shadow's entry into the game. Had he heard of how The Shadow had arrived to trap the leaders of the Golden Masks, Sulgate might have lost much of his confidence.

The Shadow had located James Lengerton, whom the Golden Masks had threatened. Similarly, The Shadow, wide in knowledge and versed in deduction, might uncover Clifford Sulgate in the hide-out that the deserter had chosen.

CHAPTER VI. WHERE THE LAW HALTED

EVENTS of the next two days brought startling developments in the case of James Lengerton. The Golden Masks, through their use of violence, had forced a police investigation. Lengerton had disappeared; it seemed a certainty that he had been carried away a prisoner. Sampler's murder strongly supported that opinion.

There was a natural consequence. The proxies who had unloaded Lengerton's holdings in Intercontinental Air Lines began to talk.

One rumor had it that Lengerton's associates in the shipping business had learned that he was planning to jump to the field of air transportation, that to block him, they had hired strong-arm men to make him change his mind. Foreseeing trouble, Lengerton had unloaded his air holdings; but he had been too late.

The other rumor was that big promoters in the field of aviation had resented Lengerton's effort to snatch a large plum from their basket; and that they—not the shipping men—were responsible for the trouble that had occurred.

THE GOLDEN MASKS

There was one man, however, who stoutly insisted that these rumors were the bunk. That man was Inspector Joe Cardona. He was playing a hunch; and he based it on certain evidence which he had discovered in Lengerton's desk. This evidence consisted of the clippings that concerned other cases similar to Lengerton's. Cardona believed that those clippings had been sent to Lengerton as a warning. Government men and private investigators did not share Cardona's opinion.

They considered the clippings as evidence of doubtful value. All related to cases wherein there was no proof of crime; some had even been investigated and cleared of any crooked connection. All investigators, except Cardona, fluctuated between two opinions: first, that Lengerton had gathered the clippings himself, because of some mental quirk; second, that the clippings had been planted deliberately by the masked men who had seized Lengerton, as a device to throw the law from the true trail.

Joe Cardona would have been pleased had he known that there was one investigator who shared his opinion that the clippings were important; particularly if he had been told that the investigator was The Shadow. Where Cardona followed a hunch, The Shadow used a process of deduction.

The Shadow recognized that if Lengerton had been fearful, he would have called the police sooner. He saw also that if the Golden Masks had chosen to plant a false trail, they would have gone to greater measures. By this process, The Shadow eliminated the other theories and accepted the one that Cardona held.

Although he had gained no details of such an organization as the Golden Masks, The Shadow could picture such a society. Accepting the newspaper clippings as evidence of their past activities, The Shadow knew immediately that the members of the evil band were surely headed by supercriminals, powerful and methodical. They had covered past crimes to perfection. Lengerton had been their first slip.

There was a new bit of news that interested both Joe Cardona and The Shadow. That concerned Clifford Sulgate, whose quiet disappearance caused some comment, the day after James Lengerton was carried away by the Golden Masks. Sulgate was a business promoter who had Wall Street connections. He also owned a considerable amount of real estate.

When he suddenly slipped from sight, Sulgate left a few business matters unattended. Those caused his disappearance to be reported. Joe Cardona was assigned to the case; the inspector held a long conference with the police commissioner. The result of that huddle was divulged by Cardona himself.

IT was eight o'clock in the evening, precisely forty-eight hours after the fray at Lengerton's, when Joe Cardona stalked into his office at headquarters. Stocky of build and brisk in action, Cardona nearly cracked his swivel-chair when he sat down heavily in back of his old desk.

A satisfied smile showed on Cardona's swarthy face. It was noted by a stolid man who had awaited his arrival. Joe's present companion was Detective Sergeant Markham, the inspector's one confidant.

"How'd you make out, Joe?" questioned Markham. "Did the commissioner take to your theory on Sulgate?"

Joe nodded.

"The commissioner agrees with me," announced the inspector, gruffly. "He thinks I've found a link."

A streak of black slid across Cardona's desk. Joe looked up to see a dull-faced man clad in overalls. The fellow had entered the office with mop and bucket. He was Fritz, the janitor; he had overheard Cardona's statement and was staring stupidly, moving his pasty lips, as if trying to make sense out of Cardona's words. Cardona and Markham paid no further attention to the fellow; Fritz was dumb and harmless to them.

THE GOLDEN MASKS

“A dozen guys have told us that they unloaded stock for Lengerton,” declared Cardona, to Markham. “As near as we can figure it, Lengerton took in a million dollars in cash, through those proxy sales. He only banked half of it.”

“What became of the rest?” queried Markham. “Was it grabbed along with him?”

“We don't know,” returned Cardona. “There's two things we've got to find out. First, why did Lengerton unload in such a hurry? Second, what did he do with one half of his dough?”

“Somebody ought to be able to answer one question or the other.”

“Sure.” Cardona nodded emphatically. “But maybe that somebody wouldn't want to be asked. That's where Sulgate comes into the picture.”

CARDONA opened a briefcase that he had brought with him. From it, he produced report sheets and some heavier, folded papers. It was plain that he had used every source to gain data that concerned Clifford Sulgate.

“Sulgate knew Lengerton,” declared Cardona. “They weren't much more than acquaintances; but they had a lot of friends in common. In the Wall Street bunch, particularly. There's a chance that one of Lengerton's proxies let something slip about that air-line stock. It may have reached Sulgate.”

Markham nodded steadily as he heard Cardona's comment. Continuing with his assumption, Cardona took up various theories.

“When I talked with the commissioner,” said the inspector, “we agreed that maybe Sulgate was the bird who threatened Lengerton. That seemed like a long guess, though; too much like the stuff that the news hawks are shouting. A better hunch, maybe, is that Sulgate was close to Lengerton. Maybe Lengerton slipped him that missing dough, to try and buy back some of the stock. It might have taken a nose-dive on the market, with so much of it being unloaded.

“Or maybe Sulgate has some cute business of his own; he may be in a jam like Lengerton was. Whatever the answer, he's ducked out of sight. He lived out on Long Island; we've made a thorough check-up there. We haven't landed a trace of him.”

Once again, Cardona had taken up the trail that The Shadow had also followed. In some details, The Shadow had worked more thoroughly than the law, in this search for Clifford Sulgate. But Cardona was coming to a point that had as yet escaped The Shadow. It was something that Cardona had chanced upon by luck, through one of the many men whom he had sent out to gain information.

“Look at this,” announced Cardona, opening one of the folded papers, to display a huge chart that was printed in several colors. “This is what made the commissioner sit up and take notice.”

“Looks like a map,” interjected Markham. “A big one, too; but it only shows a couple of city blocks.”

“It's a fire insurance map,” explained Cardona. “A new one, too. It shows who owns the buildings. Look at this block, Markham; it's made up of old apartment houses. Look who owns them.”

“Clifford Sulgate!”

“That's right. He bought up every apartment house in that block, except one. He did it through a little realty company that he owns. The commissioner got a phone call from a cousin of Sulgate's who was going out of

THE GOLDEN MASKS

town; he said he had some of Sulgate's papers in the house. We sent a man up there; he came across the deeds to these properties.”

“Then that shows that Sulgate was doing some buying on the side like Lengerton. Only he was grabbing properties instead of stock.”

Cardona shook his head.

“These old apartment houses aren't important enough to count,” declared Joe. “Sulgate didn't exactly cover the fact that he owned them. He just sort of tucked the business into a pigeonhole. It gave me a swell hunch, though; but it didn't work out.”

Tapping each of Sulgate's properties that were indicated on the map, Cardona added:

“I figured that maybe Sulgate had picked one of his own apartments for a hide-out. The commissioner liked the idea; he sent a whole squad up there to check on every apartment. The hunch was a fliv. They accounted for everybody in every apartment. Sulgate wasn't living there.”

Fritz had approached the desk to stare at the colored printing. Cardona grinned as he saw the janitor study the map in puzzled fashion. With a gesture to Markham, Cardona arose; both headed toward the door.

IT was after their footsteps had faded from the corridor that Fritz showed an amazing change of expression.

The janitor's dull eyes lighted; his pasty lips pursed, to form a slight smile. From those lips came the whisper of a strange, knowing laugh; a dim echo of a strident tone that told the janitor's actual identity.

Fritz was The Shadow.

Stalled in his search of Clifford Sulgate, The Shadow had adopted this disguise in order to visit headquarters. He had wanted to learn, at first hand, if Joe Cardona had gained any important information on the subject of Sulgate. The law had acquired such data; but it had halted at the point indicated by Cardona.

Since a search of the apartment houses owned by Clifford Sulgate had failed to reveal traces of the missing man, Cardona had decided to press this clue no further. But The Shadow, as he viewed the large map on the desk, began new deductions from the place where the law had halted.

In analyzing Sulgate's circumstance, The Shadow had picked the actual part that the man played. The only way that the Golden Masks could have handled such big blackmail jobs as the plucking of James Lengerton was through the cooperative efforts of men whose own status held them above suspicion.

Clifford Sulgate could have known enough to be the betrayer of James Lengerton. Since the deal had gone through, there was little reason to suppose that crooks had turned upon the man who had aided their game.

Sulgate's disappearance indicated that he had become faint-hearted. His nerve gone, Sulgate had decided to dodge the Golden Masks. But his hide-out would have to be a clever one in order to escape both the police and the Golden Masks.

On the very map that Joe Cardona had studied in vain, The Shadow saw the one spot that a wise schemer could well have chosen. It lay in the block with Sulgate's apartment houses. The Shadow rested his finger upon the one apartment house that Sulgate did not own.

Where else could be a better place?

Cardona's searchers had ignored it. After combing the apartment houses all about it, they had given up the hunt. Sulgate, in all probability, had counted upon the Golden Masks to do the same as the law.

Moving quickly, The Shadow stepped outside. Reaching an obscure locker, he donned his garments of black and let the overalls of Fritz slip to the floor. The Shadow was now on his way to the old apartment house that Clifford Sulgate could have chosen for a hide-out.

CHAPTER VII. THE FUGITIVE'S STORY

THE block indicated on Cardona's map lay east of Fifth Avenue. The apartment buildings in that area formed an assorted lot. They varied from four to six stories in height; all had been built during the days when automatic elevators first came into vogue.

The one building that was listed under another ownership stood half a story higher than the apartment houses on either side of it. Its floors were a trifle squattier; hence the extra height included six stories instead of five. That fact was scarcely noticeable from the street. Persons entering the building weren't perplexed when they found that the automatic elevator went up five floors only.

The apartments in this building were good ones; yet prospective tenants never were shown the best that the place had to offer. The largest and most ample apartment in the building was located on the unsuspected sixth floor. It was reached in a most peculiar manner; by ladder through the top of the elevator, when the car was halted at the fifth floor.

THE secret apartment was at present occupied. Two men were seated in a plain, well-furnished living room, where blinds were drawn. One was Clifford Sulgate; the bespectacled man was less nervous than usual. That was partly due to the calmness of the man with him; a stocky, square-faced fellow who was patient of expression. Sulgate's companion was his faithful servant, Bronden.

"I feel safe here, Bronden," announced Sulgate, in a confident tone. "We have provisions enough to last us for two months. In case of an emergency, we have the telephone"—he gestured toward the instrument, which stood on a handy table—"and its number is unlisted."

Bronden nodded methodically. He stroked a squatty hand through his short-clipped hair and settled back in his chair.

"To-day brought me an enjoyable experience," clucked Sulgate. "Watching the police from this front window, while they searched every house but this one. Even if they had come here, they would not have discovered this apartment."

Another matter-of-fact nod from Bronden. The servant was used to hearing his master discuss this subject. Bronden seemed indifferent to any thoughts of danger. Sulgate noted the servant's attitude and became emphatic.

"The Golden Masks are shrewder than the police," he insisted. "We must never discount that fact, Bronden. I have told you enough about the organization for you to recognize its power. You will recall how I insisted upon the utmost secrecy in the preparation of this apartment. There must be no slips."

"I followed every instruction, Mr. Sulgate," responded Bronden, blandly. "There will be no slips, sir. You can depend upon me. But I advise you, Mr. Sulgate, to make no error of your own."

THE GOLDEN MASKS

Nervously, Sulgate began to wring his hands. Thought of the future made him jittery. He turned to Bronden with a look of appeal.

“I’ve got to steady myself,” asserted Sulgate. “It’s this waiting that makes me shaky. I shall feel more settled after the deadline has passed. To-morrow night is the limit.”

Steadying, Sulgate motioned toward the rear door of the room. “Make me some coffee, Bronden,” he ordered. “Black coffee, good and hot. It will steady my nerves.”

BRONDEN arose and went through the doorway, closing the door behind him. Sulgate sat clutching the arms of his chair; restless, he came to his feet and began to pace the room. He paused suddenly, conscious of a slight draught. He eyed the window shades suspiciously, then resumed his pacing.

There was one thing that Sulgate had not noticed. One side of a window shade had inched toward the center; its space no more than an eye’s width. In fact, as Sulgate turned away, an eye gleamed from that very gap. Like a detached creature, a gloved hand crept through the space and grasped the window sill. It moved along the bottom of the shade, waited there while Sulgate turned about.

The nervous man did not observe the halted hand. He turned away again; the black fingers slowly lifted the shade. There was no crinkle as the blind came up; nor was anything visible beyond, except blackness. From that inkiness, however, came a motion; as if a huge fragment of the night were taking living shape. Blackness swung inward, over the sill; as the shade eased down behind it, a tall form was revealed. Burning eyes bored straight toward Sulgate.

Turning about as he reached the door, Sulgate looked straight toward the window. Horror froze the nervous twitching of his lips, caused his eyelids to stop their blinking as if riveted in their open position. The gasp that Sulgate delivered was spontaneous. His hands, as they clamped to his breast, acted of their own, then stilled. For long, tense seconds, Sulgate stared. Slowly, recognition dawned.

Clifford Sulgate had heard of The Shadow, even though the Golden Masks had not mentioned the part that the black-clad avenger had played in the fracas at Lengerton’s. Sulgate knew that The Shadow was a crime-hunter. The fact that The Shadow was here stood as proof that he had delved into the ways of the Golden Masks.

Sulgate was sure that The Shadow knew all. Desperately, the hunted man sought for some way to avoid The Shadow’s wrath. His jittery brain grasped the only answer. He must tell The Shadow the full truth.

As Sulgate tried to find words, The Shadow spoke in a sinister whisper. His words added impetus to Sulgate’s decision.

“Speak,” ordained The Shadow. “State all facts concerning the organization which you no longer serve.”

Sulgate replied, in quavering tone.

“I served the Golden Masks,” he told The Shadow. “There are—I mean there were—at least twenty of us. All sworn to secrecy. Only Alpha and Omega, the leaders, knew the identity of the others. We all had similar names; I was known as Mu.”

The Shadow’s silence signified that Sulgate should continue.

“All members were gained by secret approach,” resumed Sulgate, his lips twitching as he spoke. “I received

THE GOLDEN MASKS

letters; telephone calls—from whom I do not know—and though they were vague, they promised wealth. After I was initiated to the Golden Masks, I learned that different members gave information that led to helpless victims. I supplied the facts concerning James Lengerton. I do not know who approached him.”

Sulgate's tone was quavering, but sincere. As the deserter paused again, The Shadow prompted him, with a statement that came as a command rather than a question:

“Your meeting place—”

“I do not know its location,” gasped Sulgate. “We were taken there secretly. There were two countersigns: Ashanti and Kumasi. The masks that we wore were brought from the Gold Coast in Africa.”

This information told much to The Shadow. He was acquainted with the African Gold Coast, a district peopled by a tribe called the Ashanti. Their capital was Kumasi; gold was plentiful in that land. In fact, the Ashanti were famous for their handicraft with the precious metal. The Shadow had seen thin masks of beaten gold, fashioned by those natives.

“I feared the Golden Masks,” gulped Sulgate. “I remained a member only through dread. Knowing that matters would reach a crisis, I secretly prepared this apartment as a hiding place. One man aided me— one whom I could fully trust. He was my servant, Bronden, who is here with me.”

His statement ended, Sulgate felt a surge of new fear. He had admitted his complicity in the case of James Lengerton. He sought to make amends.

“I couldn't get out soon enough,” pleaded the nervous man. “I had to supply some information to avoid suspicion. I don't know what happened to Lengerton. But I did desert the Golden Masks in time to avoid an ugly duty.”

REACHING to a table, Sulgate managed to wrench open the drawer. He pulled out the rolled scroll that the Golden Masks had given him; he uncoiled it and thrust it before The Shadow's eyes.

“Look!” begged Sulgate. “Before to-morrow night, I am supposed to visit a man named Roger Barfield, at the Hotel Romera. I am to advise him to buy certain stocks for half a million dollars, securities that have already been offered to him. Those stocks are worthless; if Barfield buys, the whole half a million will be acquired by the Golden Masks.”

“Should Barfield refuse—”

Again, The Shadow's words came like a command for Sulgate to proceed. The deserter supplied the answer, by pointing to a paragraph on the scroll. The Shadow had not deigned to read it; he had kept his eyes full upon Sulgate.

“The instructions are here,” faltered Sulgate. “I am to prepare threatening letters; anonymous ones mentioning a plantation in Dutch Guiana. Barfield, I suppose, will understand; just as Lengerton did about the aviation stock.”

Sulgate's hands were shaking. The Shadow took the scroll; rolled, it and placed it beneath his cloak. He had found a new and important mission—one that could lead him directly to the Golden Masks. The sooner his move the better.

The pressure upon Roger Barfield was different than that which had been applied to James Lengerton. In this

THE GOLDEN MASKS

new case, Barfield was to be swindled through a forced purchase. Since stocks had already been offered him, they must have been handled by some other member of the Golden Masks. Through conference with Barfield, The Shadow could gain the name of another member of the band—one who was not a deserter, like Sulgate.

By moving quickly on this trail, The Shadow might be able to push operations against the Golden Masks before to-morrow night. He could stir up trouble for them—enough to make the organization worry about matters more serious than the punishment of Clifford Sulgate for his desertion.

In fact, by quick moves, The Shadow would have a chance to render Sulgate's position quite secure. The leaders of the Golden Masks might believe that The Shadow had captured Sulgate; hence they would consider Sulgate a prisoner rather than a deserter. It was obvious that no search had yet begun for Sulgate; furthermore, the man had assured The Shadow of Bronden's fidelity. Keen to visualize the trail ahead, The Shadow chose departure as the immediate course.

Without a word to Sulgate, The Shadow turned about and glided toward the window. He swung outward into darkness; his shape was blotted as Sulgate stared. The blind came downward, followed by the click of the clamp as the window was closed.

Sulgate stared after The Shadow in amazement, then looked toward the table drawer for proof that his senses had not tricked him. He froze in his tracks; he still seemed to hear that eerie whisper that no imagination could have produced.

Sulgate realized fully that his experience had been a real one. The closing of the window was proof that The Shadow wanted the whole episode kept silent. Sulgate resolved that he would not even speak to Bronden regarding the strange occurrence.

CLOSING the table drawer, Sulgate went back to his chair and sat down, his nervousness apparently ended after The Shadow's strange visit. The rear door of the room opened. Expecting Bronden with the coffee, Sulgate turned around. He faked a twitching movement of his lips as he swung about to face the servant. The twitching became real. Gasping wildly, Sulgate came up from his chair.

Bronden had entered; but the servant was not bringing coffee. Instead, he carried a leveled revolver; his usually sober face was wearing an ugly leer. His head craned forward, Bronden came closer and closer. Sulgate raised his quivering hands, tried to back away.

He staggered against the chair, shifted forward, to regain his balance, just as Bronden arrived.

The servant jabbed the revolver muzzle against Sulgate's heart and pressed the trigger before his master could twist away. The report was muffled; Sulgate's gargled cry was but a trifle louder. As Bronden stepped back, Sulgate staggered sidewise, twisted about and spread-eagled on the floor. He gave a long, convulsive quiver; then stretched dead.

Bronden pocketed his smoking gun.

With a contemptuous snarl, he stepped to the wall, plucked away a large picture and pulled down a microphone with its wires. That done, the square-jawed man went to the telephone and dialed a number. He recognized an easy voice at the other end of the line.

Bronden spoke a single word:

“Ashanti.”

Across the wire came the answer:

“Kumasi.”

“This is Gamma,” announced Bronden. “I have important news, Omega. The Shadow was here.”

A sharp question followed; Bronden replied:

“Yes. He talked to Mu. I heard it over the dictaphone. I eliminated Mu after The Shadow left. The Shadow is on his way to the Hotel Romera.”

There was a pleased chuckle from the telephone receiver. It brought an evil leer to Bronden's countenance. Bronden hung up, stared gloatingly at Sulgate's body, as he planned for its removal.

Bronden, previously a member of the Golden Masks, had tipped the leaders off to Sulgate's plans. They had let the deserter proceed under Bronden's watchful eye, giving him the full time limit. The Shadow's visit had meant death for Sulgate. Lone-handed, Bronden had not dared to act until after The Shadow's departure.

The Shadow had set forth to deal with the Golden Masks. Posted by Bronden, the members of that insidious band would be prepared for him. The Shadow was due for danger that he had not yet divined.

CHAPTER VIII. THE SHADOW'S ROUTE

SWIFTNESS was The Shadow's forte. To-night, it had begun to serve him ill. He had reached the roof, gone to another building and descended so promptly, that he was out of hearing range when Bronden fired the bullet that ended the career of Clifford Sulgate.

Near the apartment house where Sulgate had died, The Shadow boarded a waiting cab. Its driver was one of The Shadow's own agents, Moe Shrevnitz, the speediest hackie in New York. The cab headed for the Hotel Romera, stopped only once, while The Shadow entered a drug store to make a telephone call.

On this brief mission, The Shadow presented an appearance quite different from the guise in which Sulgate had seen him.

That visage was the one best suited for The Shadow's coming quest. It was the countenance of a man named Lamont Cranston, a globe-trotting millionaire, for whom The Shadow frequently doubled. The role of Cranston was the proper one to impress Roger Barfield, whom Sulgate had mentioned as a traveler and man of wealth.

Riding in the cab again, The Shadow reached the Hotel Romera, which was a secluded but fashionable establishment. Peering from the window of the cab, The Shadow saw a hunch-shouldered man slide way into a gloomy spot. That sight did not disturb him. The man was his own watcher, a clever spotter named “Hawkeye.” Through the telephone call to his contact man, Burbank, The Shadow had arranged for Hawkeye to be on the job. The Shadow wanted news of any events outside the hotel while he interviewed Roger Barfield.

When he gave his name at the desk, The Shadow had only a short wait. The news of a visitor was telephoned up to Barfield, who must have recognized the name of Lamont Cranston. Soon, The Shadow rode up to the tenth floor in an elevator. He eyed the operator, decided that the man was an ordinary employee.

THE GOLDEN MASKS

Similarly, The Shadow looked over the tenth-floor corridor, en route to Barfield's suite. He saw no signs of watchers.

KNOCKING at Barfield's door, The Shadow was promptly admitted, by the man whom he had come to see. Roger Barfield was an eager-faced man of middle age, thin-nosed and wide-mouthed, with eyes that carried a friendly sparkle. He was partly bald; what hair he had was rumpled. That, and the hunch of his smoking jacket, indicated that he had been drowsing when he received the call from the desk.

"Glad to see you, Mr. Cranston," welcomed Barfield, in a booming tone. He shook hands, closed the door and conducted The Shadow into the small living room of the suite. "I have heard of you often, as a globe-trotter like myself. I am pleased that our paths have crossed."

As The Shadow took a chair, Barfield tendered a box of expensive cigars, and raised thin eyebrows, as if inquiring why he had been honored with a visit. The Shadow's thin lips formed a smile.

"I have called to ask you a rather important question," stated The Shadow, in a leisurely tone that was Cranston's. "Recently, I was offered some securities of doubtful value by a man who talked across the telephone. He did not give his name; but he stated that he was conducting a transaction with you."

Barfield pursed his lips and nodded. He inquired, dryly:

"What stock did the chap offer?"

"He spoke of several," replied The Shadow. "Metropolis Oil and Century Motors were two of them. I find that both are bad."

"What kind of a voice did the fellow have?"

The Shadow shook his head.

"That is hard to tell," he replied. "I merely talked with him across the telephone."

"Was it rather sharp?" queried Barfield. "Like this? Abrupt? Short-clipped?"

He gave a good representation of an odd, thin voice. The Shadow nodded, slowly.

"That's the bounder," chuckled Barfield, in his own, deep tone. "He wanted me to buy shares in some Mexican mines that I happened to know about. They've been forgotten for the past thirty years; so has the fact that they were salted the last time that they were sold."

"Did the chap state his name?"

"Not at first. He sent me a letter, afterward. Oddly, he seems to be a man of some importance; not a stock promoter at all. Wait until I show you the letter, Mr. Cranston."

BARFIELD rummaged about the room, finally found the letter and gave it to The Shadow. The letterhead bore the name of Sidney Tallam, with the address 685 Marview Place. There was little to learn from the letter itself; it simply reminded Barfield that the offer was still open.

"That's his home address," announced Barfield, opening a telephone book. "There is also a Tallam Manufacturing Co. listed in the directory. I have learned that Sidney Tallam controls that business; its

THE GOLDEN MASKS

product is automobile accessories. Apparently, Tallam is a wealthy man.”

Closing the telephone book, Barfield puffed at his cigar, then shook his baldish head.

“All I can guess,” he announced, “is that Sidney Tallam has been stuck with an over supply of bad securities and wants to pass them along. After all, that is his privilege, if any dupe is foolish enough to buy.”

“Perhaps,” agreed The Shadow, “but certain forms of persuasion should be taboo.”

“What do you mean?”

“I had another telephone call,” replied The Shadow. “It was also anonymous. I was advised to purchase the stocks mentioned. I was told that refusing such an action might give me worry about certain events that had occurred in the past.”

The Shadow's statements had been a probe; they were becoming more direct as he learned facts from Barfield. The words took immediate effect. Barfield glanced sharply toward his visitor, then chewed hard on the end of his cigar.

“I was afraid of something like this,” he said, slowly. “Do I understand you correctly, Mr. Cranston, when I think that you mean this game is blackmail?”

“You do,” replied The Shadow. “I have had previous experience of this sort. I felt that when your name was mentioned to me, the purpose was double. I have been to Dutch Guiana, Mr. Barfield.”

Barfield stared steadily for a moment; then his face registered consternation. He tried to restrain himself; at last, nervous eagerness overwhelmed him.

“I see,” he nodded. “You would know that I might be blackmailed on account of my experience in Dutch Guiana. That would make you think that you would be due for the same dose, because of some similar episode in your own past.”

The Shadow chanced a new remark; he phrased it in a subtle fashion, his tone leisurely but filled with reassurance.

“Of course,” remarked The Shadow, “I never owned a plantation in Dutch Guiana, but—”

He stopped. Barfield's face had taken on alarm. The baldish man was shaky. He sank to a chair, dropped his cigar to the floor. Leaning forward, Barfield gripped his baldish head with both hands. “Yes, you have struck it, Mr. Cranston!” He looked up suddenly, his eyes wild. “I've done my best to keep that matter hushed! Tell me”—Barfield strained forward—“what do you know about it?”

“Not a great deal. Enough to feel sympathetic toward you.”

BARFIELD looked relieved. He sagged back in his chair, thought for a moment, then spoke in frank tone.

“I bought that plantation in good faith,” he affirmed. “It was the treacherous overseer who misruled the men. He instituted what was practically slave labor; he left the country when I found it out. I wrote some letters, asking for advice. Later, I learned that I and members of my family could be held culpable. The offense would be a penal one.

THE GOLDEN MASKS

“My brother, my nephew are still at the plantation. If my old letters were turned over to the Dutch authorities, both of them would be sentenced to prison. My property would be seized; I would be ruined. I own lands in Sumatra, Java, other Dutch colonies as well as Guiana. Yes, it would be worth a half a million dollars to hush. That is the amount that Tallam wants for the Mexican stock.”

Barfield again buried his head in his hands. The Shadow watched him quietly, then asked:

“Had you thought of blackmail until I mentioned it?”

“No.” Barfield looked up as he spoke. Trembling, he reached for a fresh cigar. “But your opinion, Mr. Cranston, is sufficient to warn me. I am in a bad mess. I hope that you are not so unfortunate?”

“My position is secure,” announced The Shadow. “Therefore, I should be able to help you, Mr. Barfield. Suppose I induce Tallam to concentrate upon me? I may be able to learn more of the game.”

“That might save me,” agreed Barfield, eagerly. “Yes, your exposure of the swindle would certainly end the operations of these rogues, if they are such. But wouldn't Tallam be surprised, if you came to see him? You say that he did not mention his name over the telephone.”

“He named you. I can tell him that I dropped in to see you. That you gave me his name. In fact, I think that I shall call upon Mr. Tallam this evening.”

Noting the address on the letter, The Shadow returned it to Barfield. The baldish man came to his feet, stammering his thanks. The Shadow halted him with a quiet smile, clapped Barfield on the shoulder. They walked to the door together; there, Barfield shook hands warmly.

DESCENDING in the elevator, The Shadow showed a slight smile. Everything that Barfield had said fitted with the instructions given to Clifford Sulgate. In his talk with Barfield, The Shadow had drawn the man out; everything fitted perfectly to show this game as another crime attempt by the Golden Masks.

One point, however, impressed The Shadow. The Golden Masks, in all their past activities, had been careful not to leave a trail. It was not likely that they would appoint one of their number to the actual task of unloading bad securities. Though The Shadow did not know the identity of Burns Froy, he was positive that whoever had visited James Lengerton had done so in a friendly fashion, claiming to be under threat; in as bad a boat as the victim.

This looked like a cunning reversal of the system. The Shadow pictured Sidney Tallam as a dupe. His assumption was that the Golden Masks had forced Tallam to buy bad stocks under threat; succeeding in that, they had told him to unload his worthless holdings on Barfield and turn the new proceeds back to them.

Perhaps they would do the same with Barfield later, using him as a means to shove the same stock on another hopeless victim.

The Shadow had completed these quick deductions when he stepped aboard his cab. He left Hawkeye on duty, to watch Roger Barfield; for The Shadow expected that soon some one might visit Barfield from the Golden Masks. The leaders would have to appoint a substitute in place of Clifford Sulgate.

Seeing new possibilities in Sidney Tallam, The Shadow believed that the retired manufacturer would merely be a link back along a chain of dupes. Therefore, he regarded his coming visit as one that might not bring great results. Keenly intent upon his new conclusions, uninformed of the fact that Clifford Sulgate had been overheard and murdered by Bronden, The Shadow had carried his previous deductions farther and farther

from the proper course.

THE proof of this was demonstrated by Roger Barfield, soon after The Shadow left him. Seated in the living room of his hotel suite, the baldish man was listening intently for any sounds outside his door. Satisfied that there were none, Barfield displayed a wide smile on his thin-nosed face.

He placed his finger on the opened page of the telephone book, noted Sidney Tallam's number. He picked up the telephone, called the number. A crisp voice gave an abrupt hello. Close to the telephone's mouthpiece, Barfield uttered the word:

“Ashanti.”

Tallam's voice responded:

“Kumasi.”

“This is Omega,” undertoned Barfield. “I have good news, Alpha. The Shadow arrived here sooner than I expected; so I have sent him along to you. He calls himself Lamont Cranston. Be prepared to receive him.”

Cackled acknowledgment came from the receiver as Roger Barfield hung it on the hook. Confident that his fellow chieftain of the Golden Masks would overpower The Shadow, Roger Barfield leaned back in his chair and twisted his wide lips into an insidious leer of triumph.

CHAPTER IX. WHERE BULLETS FAILED

THOUGH The Shadow's deductions had caused him to overlook an existing menace, he did not neglect precautions in his coming mission. The Shadow regarded Roger Barfield as a future victim of the Golden Masks; he was inclined to class Sidney Tallam as a past dupe. The fact that there had been no spies watching Barfield at the Hotel Romera did not lull The Shadow into the belief that there would be none at Tallam's residence.

Just as he had put Hawkeye on watch at the Hotel Romera, so did The Shadow decide to cover Tallam's home. He made another stop, put in a call to Burbank. The Shadow ordered Harry Vincent on duty, to cover Tallam's. In choosing Vincent, The Shadow had picked the most experienced agent who served him.

There was one important point, however, that The Shadow did not overlook. Harry Vincent, though competent, did not possess Hawkeye's ability at slipping out of sight. To watch Tallam's house, Harry would need a suitable hiding place. Therefore, The Shadow gave instructions for Harry to contact Moe Shrevnitz and use the latter's cab as a lookout post.

The cab reached Marview Place. Swinging a corner, it passed the front of a tall, pretentious apartment house, where several taxicabs were lined up at a hack stand. The Shadow whispered an order to Moe; the driver nodded. He was to park in back of the other cabs, to await Harry Vincent. Moe might be able to remain in that line for an hour or more without attracting attention.

Number 685 was farther on than the apartment house; and across the street from it. Sidney Tallam's home was a huge, old-fashioned house with brownstone front, that had once been the most impressive building in this neighborhood. It fronted on the swanky street known as Marview Place.

Moe stopped his cab just past the entrance of the apartment house. The Shadow stepped to the sidewalk; he was still attired as Cranston, but his move was not conspicuous. With him, The Shadow was carrying the bag

THE GOLDEN MASKS

in which he had placed his cloak and hat. His automatics were in special pockets under the coat of his business suit. The Shadow waited until Moe had turned the next corner. Then he strode across the street, slackened his gait and strolled past a lighted patch in front of Tallam's.

The Shadow's stroll enabled The Shadow to note the house more closely. He saw that it stretched deep back from the street. He noticed that there were passages between it and the houses on each side. One of these, at least, must lead to a side door in Tallam's house.

THE SHADOW ascended the brownstone steps and rang the door bell. He waited half a minute; when the door opened, The Shadow was faced by a huge African servant, who was more than six feet tall. Though the servant was garbed in American attire, The Shadow recognized immediately that the fellow must be a native-born African. His appearance tallied with statements made by Clifford Sulgate. The Shadow identified this servant as a member of the Ashanti tribe.

As The Shadow stepped through the doorway, the servant spoke in slow English; he inquired the visitor's name. The Shadow produced a card that bore the name of Lamont Cranston; on it, he wrote that he represented Roger Barfield. He requested the servant to take the card to Mr. Tallam. The Ashanti ascended a broad stairway, leaving The Shadow in a sumptuous lower hall.

The presence of the Ashanti servant merely served to strengthen The Shadow's recent deductions. Considering Sidney Tallam to be a dupe of the Golden Masks, it seemed logical that the organization would have men posted in Tallam's own home, particularly if they had already swindled him and had to keep him silent. This African servant would be the best sort of watcher that the Golden Masks could use.

While he waited, The Shadow momentarily compared Tallam's situation with that of Sulgate; for he had not entirely rejected the possibility that Tallam might be a lesser member of the Golden Masks. The fact that Sulgate had a servant like Bronden; and had presumably had no Ashanti in his employ, was sufficient to curb The Shadow's temporary suspicion.

Sulgate had been so emphatic regarding Bronden's supposed loyalty, that The Shadow had taken the deserter at his word. Lacking suspicion of Bronden, The Shadow had not gained the inkling that he needed.

The big Ashanti returned to the ground floor. Stolidly, he ushered The Shadow upstairs, conducted him to a room at the side of the house. Entering, The Shadow found Sidney Tallam; he also viewed one of the most curious rooms that he had ever seen.

TALLAM was a stoop-shouldered man attired in a gray suit that exactly matched the color of his thin hair. His face was sharp and pointed, its skin smooth and dryish. Tallam's eyes were dark; they had a keen glint. His lips were thin; they held a pursed smile. The hand that Tallam extended was scrawny; but its grip was firm.

As for the room, it looked like a combination living room and library. Its center portion was square-shaped; but small. The reason was that the room possessed three deep alcoves, each a trifle higher than the regular floor.

One of these alcoves was at the far side of the room. In its center was a desk; at the back were windows. On each side, the alcove had shelves of books that towered to the high ceiling. There was a similar alcove at the front of the room; it had bookshelves and windows; but no desk.

The alcove at the rear of the room had no windows, for it backed against an inner wall of the house. The rear of the third alcove was composed of bookcases; in its center was a chair and a table that supported a large

THE GOLDEN MASKS

dictionary. This alcove also boasted a huge globe of the world. Almost a room in itself, the alcove was the library; the bookcases in the other niches simply held extra volumes.

Sidney Tallam waved The Shadow to a large armchair in the center of the room. Taking a chair close by, Tallam looked quickly at the briefcase that The Shadow had brought. Tallam's manner indicated that he expected his visitor to discuss some business, that the briefcase contained documents that would be produced during conference.

"I expected to hear from Mr. Barfield," announced Tallam, in a crisp tone. "I wanted to see him in person. I mentioned that fact by telephone. Why have you come instead, Mr. Cranston? Is Mr. Barfield ill?"

"He is somewhat indisposed," returned The Shadow, calmly. "Being interested in the Mexican mining stock that you offered him, he consulted with me. Like Barfield, I am a traveler; but I know more about Mexico than he does."

Naturally, The Shadow had taken a new tack with Tallam. He wanted the retired manufacturer to accept him as Barfield's representative; should Tallam call up Barfield by telephone, the latter would support The Shadow's claim. That, at least, was The Shadow's logical assumption, since he had not yet learned that he was dealing with the two leaders of the Golden Masks.

"I see." Tallam's words were abrupt; his nod a short one. "I presume that you have looked into the mining propositions. I trust that you have recognized its merits."

"On the contrary," informed The Shadow, quietly, "I have classed the stock as very doubtful."

An expression of well-feigned worry showed on Tallam's dryish face. The Shadow was not sure that it was an actual revelation of Tallam's feelings. Nevertheless, there was a chance that it was real. The Shadow decided to sound the man further.

"In fact," he declared, "I wondered how you happened to buy such stock, Mr. Tallam. You have a surprisingly large amount of it; for Mr. Barfield informs me that you want a half a million dollars for its transfer."

Tallam began to chew his lips. He was succeeding temporarily with his bluff. Tallam's game was to make The Shadow think that he had expected no difficulties in the deal with Barfield. That would fit with the idea that Tallam was wise enough to know that The Shadow held: namely, the belief that Tallam was but a helpless instrument in the toils of the Golden Masks.

"I cannot say why I bought the stock," began Tallam; pretending confusion, he added: "That is, it would be difficult to recall the circumstances that forced—or rather induced me to make so large a purchase. I was assured—convinced, in fact—that the stock was good. Indeed, I am rather well conversant with mining matters in all parts of the world."

"That interests me," asserted The Shadow, with a show of enthusiasm. "Forgetting Mexico for the moment, Mr. Tallam, what is your opinion of the fabulous claims concerning gold deposits on the African Gold Coast?"

TALLAM looked startled; he started to come up from his chair. His hands twitched slightly; his eyes took on a faraway stare that indicated a fearful recollection. Calming himself, Tallam shook his head.

"I know the rumors that have come from Africa," he declared. "How great quantities of gold have been found

THE GOLDEN MASKS

in possession of the natives. There is some tribe there that once had large amounts of gold. I forget the name of the tribesmen—”

“The Ashanti?”

“That sounds like it. It seems to me that the British authorities once instituted a search for some golden thrones that those natives were supposed to own. Wait just a moment, Mr. Cranston; I can easily refresh my memory by reference to the encyclopedia.”

Rising suddenly, Tallam moved with spry step toward the alcove at the rear of the room. In his haste, he let his face lose its forced expression. In a single instant, The Shadow knew the truth. Tallam was dropping his role of dupe; that indicated that he must be more than an ordinary member of the Golden Masks.

The Shadow's mind flashed back to Clifford Sulgate. The Shadow had classed the deserter as what he was: a rogue at heart, but a man who had feared for his own hide. Though The Shadow had found Sulgate shivering with fear, there was a chance that leniency had been a mistaken move on The Shadow's part.

Sulgate could have seen an opportunity to put himself back in the good grace of the Golden Masks by passing the word that The Shadow had taken up the trail.

Though The Shadow had not struck upon the actual truth, he had gained its equivalent. It did not matter who had given the tip-off: Sulgate or Bronden. The job had been done. Quick suspicion caused The Shadow to class Roger Barfield as one of the Golden Masks. Just as quickly, he dropped all thoughts of the man whom he had recently interviewed.

SIDNEY TALLAM was the man who mattered at this moment. The Shadow saw the rogue for what he was: one of the leaders of the Golden Masks. Tallam's start for the bookcase in the deepest alcove was proof that the crook intended action. Coming up from his chair, The Shadow made a move of his own.

Whisking his briefcase open, The Shadow shot a glance through the open door to the hallway as he pulled his black cloak into view and dropped it over his shoulders. No one was in the hall; if Tallam summoned aid, The Shadow would have time to meet him. Seizing his slouch hat, The Shadow clamped it to his head; he looked straight toward Tallam.

The gray-haired crook had reached the bookcase at the back of the alcove. He was drawing out a volume of the encyclopedia. Tallam's back was toward The Shadow; his whole attitude indicated that he thought his visitor still duped by his bluff. Tallam drew one hand away from an upright post of the bookcase. He began to thumb the pages of the big book, still with his back toward The Shadow.

Calmly, The Shadow drew on black gloves. Edging backward, he watched both the hall and the alcove. Though the light of the living room was subdued, both the hall and alcove showed considerable glow. Tallam could not move; nor could men approach, without The Shadow's observation.

Tallam laid the encyclopedia volume on top of the big dictionary. He turned toward the globe; spun it and touched a spot with his finger, as though looking for the Gold Coast in Africa.

The Shadow caught a partial view of Tallam's profile; he saw the smug smile that the man's lips showed. Like a form of vengeance, The Shadow stood motionless; one .45 leveled toward Tallam, the other automatic covering the hall.

The Shadow was prepared to deal instant death if Tallam made a false move; for Tallam was a murderer.

THE GOLDEN MASKS

Either he or his companion of the other night had dealt the fatal shot that slew Lengerton's secretary, Sampler.

Tallam's move came. The gray-haired man shifted slightly, bringing his back toward The Shadow. Tallam slipped one clawlike hand to the top of the globe; suddenly, he lifted a portion of the big sphere, like the lid of a box. Tallam's body did not quite cover the action. The Shadow saw the lid come up.

Tallam spun about. In his right claw, he gripped a .38 revolver that he had snatched from the globe. Though he gave no utterance, though his motion was strangely silent, Tallam displayed the venom that he felt. His lips had taken on a leer, as if to deliver an elated snarl. His finger was on the trigger of his revolver, itching for a quick tug. The muzzle was speeding its aim toward The Shadow.

BEFORE Tallam could complete his aim, The Shadow fired. His right-hand automatic delivered three shots with quick precision. At considerable range, The Shadow was taking no chances with the murderer. He expected the arrival of enemies from the hall; he wanted to deal with them without interference from Tallam.

As his third shot echoed, The Shadow halted, staring straight toward the alcove. Sidney Tallam still maintained his pose, leering and unwithered by The Shadow's fire. Upon the floor at the step up to the alcove lay three small objects, silvery and flattened. They were The Shadow's bullets. They had been halted five paces short of Tallam, their flight stopped in mid-air!

Tallam, though he gloated, did not utter a sound; nor did he fire. Dark faces appeared at the doorway to the hall. There, The Shadow saw the Ashanti whom he had met below, accompanied by two others. One carried a revolver; the second a dagger; the third held a spear. They made no effort to enter, nor to use the weapons.

Their arrival had been soundless.

The amazing answer dawned upon The Shadow. Reaching the bookcase, Tallam had pressed a switch. Unheard, unseen, sheets of bulletproof glass had slid across to cover the front of the alcove and the doorway of the room as well.

Sidney Tallam, Member Alpha of the Golden Masks, stood protected and his trio of Ashanti servants had the same security. Vicious in pose, Tallam showed a hatred that was imitated by the savage faces of the tribesmen who served him.

The Shadow was trapped, in the power of the Golden Masks!

CHAPTER X. THE SLEEP OF SILENCE

CALMLY, The Shadow put away his automatics; he folded his arms as he let his keen eyes gaze about the room.

Viewing the floor, he could discern the bottom edges of the glass barriers that had enclosed him. He saw that the front and side alcove were also fronted with plates of glass.

Thus there was no chance to reach the windows. The Shadow was confined to the comparatively small area that formed the central portion of the room. Once noting the glass, he could tell when any barrier started to slide back.

The Shadow hoped that his pose of indifference would coax Tallam to silently open either his own glass door or the one that blocked the Ashanti. This would allow an attack from either or both directions. By giving his enemies what looked like an advantage, The Shadow saw prospects of a battle. If it came, he could show his

THE GOLDEN MASKS

foemen that his quickness on the draw would block them.

Tallam, however, did not budge the glass barriers. Instead, the Golden Mask turned to the bookcase behind him.

He reached into the space from which he had removed a volume; there, he pressed a hidden lever. The bookcase performed a slow revolution, showing a room beyond.

Tallam went briskly through the opening. Soon after the bookcase had assumed its original position, he appeared in the hallway with the Ashanti. The Shadow saw him give an order. The tribesmen marched away and Tallam followed.

The Shadow approached the doorway to the hall, pressed his gloved hand against the glass plate that blocked it. Men were gone from beyond; though the barrier was heavy, The Shadow had a way to attack it when unobserved. In the lining of his cloak, he carried two powders, which, when mixed, formed a powerful explosive.

With these substances, The Shadow had disposed of heavy barriers in the past. The glass wall, however looked more formidable than most. It had no hinges; its upper and lower edges ran in grooves. It had moved deeply into the far side of the doorway. Thus there were no weak spots in the barrier; no crevices for explosive powders.

HENCE The Shadow was deliberate as he examined the barrier; it was a few minutes before he decided upon his attempt. All would depend upon that single stroke. The Shadow could not risk failure.

Stooping, he removed one glove, slid his fingers along the stretch where the glass filled a metal groove in the floor. This was the spot to attack. Should the glass crack, The Shadow could break through. He was confident that explosives could succeed where bullets had failed. Stepping back toward the center of the room, The Shadow moved behind a large armchair. He wanted to make sure that no spying eyes saw him obtain the powders from the lining of his cloak. He raised one side of the cloak, began to tug at the hem. Curiously, his fingers slipped from the cloth.

The Shadow's hands were numb. As he moved his arms, he found them strangely slow in motion. He felt his body sway; his legs were failing him. Though mentally alert, The Shadow was becoming physically powerless. Steadying himself against the armchair, he sensed the cause. A sweetish odor had begun to fill the room; looking upward, The Shadow saw thin coils of yellow vapor floating from the arms of a high chandelier, like incense from a burner. The chandelier was beyond The Shadow's reach; though he might have attacked it sooner, he could no longer do so.

The Shadow was experiencing the same ordeal that James Lengerton had undergone. Sidney Tallam had released a soporific vapor that carried a paralyzing effect. The Shadow felt a limpness throughout his entire body. He gazed toward the doorway; beyond the glass, he saw the ugly face of an Ashanti servant who had come to view the prisoner's plight.

Quickly, The Shadow considered the outcome. The fact that he still retained mental alertness made him decide that the gas was not deadly. It was probably an anesthetic; its effects would wear off within a given time. Flashing to thoughts of the past, The Shadow recalled cases of men who had disappeared, then returned to their homes, to maintain silence regarding their absence.

Undoubtedly, they had been subjected to this gaseous treatment; threats of its repetition had caused them to avoid all mention of what they had undergone. The Shadow reasoned also that the length of time during

THE GOLDEN MASKS

which a victim would remain powerless would be determined by the amount of gas he breathed.

To strive against the overwhelming vapor would be useless. A long fight would only increase the succeeding period before recovery. If the Golden Masks intended to slay him when he was powerless, The Shadow's doom was sealed. There were reasons, however, why they would prefer to keep him prisoner.

They had probably guessed that The Shadow had agents who would search for him; alive, he would be bait for the capture of such agents. Stronger, however, was the fact that The Shadow had posed as a man of wealth.

Persons with money were the sort the Golden Masks required as victims. Such men, when prisoners, could be forced to turn over their wealth. The Golden Masks, though they had murdered often, preferred to let their victims live. They applied death only to those who would not accept their terms; they had even spared James Lengerton, although he had partly blocked them. They had slain Sampler; but that was because they had considered the man as useless.

SAGGING as he watched the face of the Ashanti guard, The Shadow decided to make the best of his plight. Slowly, he yielded the little strength that he still retained. His hands lost their pressure against the chair; the weight of his body did the rest. The Shadow lost his balance, tumbled helplessly to the floor. Though he still was capable of slight motion, he did not show it.

The Ashanti loped away along the hallway. Staring upward, The Shadow could see the yellow gas still wreathing from the chandelier. He could detect a slight hiss that announced the escape of the vapor, which was immediately absorbed by the air of the room. Soon, the yellowish curls were gone. Simultaneously, the hissing ceased.

Sidney Tallam appeared at the doorway, then went away. Shortly after, the bookcase revolved in the rear alcove. Tallam again stepped to view. He pressed a lever; sheets of glass slid back. Tallam stepped forward to view The Shadow; the three Ashanti entered from the hallway.

At Tallam's rasped command, the Ashanti lifted The Shadow, inert from the floor. They tore away his black cloak, pulled away his gloves and gave these garments to Tallam, along with The Shadow's hat. It had rolled from The Shadow's head; one of the Ashanti picked it up for Tallam. The big natives found The Shadow's guns; took them from him. They also gathered all the contents of The Shadow's pockets.

Tallam spoke in the Ashanti tongue. He ordered the servitors to overlook such minor items as The Shadow's watch and some coins that were in his pocket. Tallam took the wallet that The Shadow carried as Cranston's; the crook decided that it might contain papers that held useful information.

Carrying their prisoner, the Ashanti marched from the room. Tallam followed them, bringing The Shadow's outer garments. The course led to the rear of an upstairs hall; there, the carriers descended by a back stairway. They reached a basement and stopped by a massive steel door, which marked the back wall of the house.

Tallam unlocked the barrier and slid it back. The Ashanti descended a short flight of steps; they came to a corridor that formed a long, dimly lighted passage deep underground.

THOUGH he lacked all power of motion, The Shadow was conscious of all that occurred during the trip. He saw doors on each side of the dim corridor. They were of glass, like the barriers that had trapped The Shadow; but these openings had steel doors, also. The spaces between the outer glass doors and the inner steel ones measured approximately three feet.

Tallam stopped at one door. He pressed a switch beside it. The Shadow saw the inside door slide back. The

THE GOLDEN MASKS

departure of the steel sheet revealed a lighted dungeon; small, stone-walled and windowless. Motionless in a chair by the far wall sat a haggard-faced man whose eyes stared bulgingly toward the door. The Shadow recognized the prisoner as James Lengerton.

Hands moved feebly; lips tried to utter words. The Shadow knew that Lengerton was recovering from a powerful dose of the yellow gas. Probably Lengerton had inhaled a heavy mixture, the strongest that could be given. That meant that the gas, applied to its fullest power, would render a victim helpless for forty-eight hours.

Tallam pressed the switch that closed the steel door. Lengerton was behind a double barrier. Stepping across the passage, Tallam reached another door; there he pressed two switches. Glass and steel slid back. The Shadow was carried into a lighted cell that resembled Lengerton's. He was dumped unceremoniously upon a cot. Lying by the far wall, he was able to watch the departure of his captors.

The Ashanti left the cell. The Shadow saw Tallam turn to speak to a square-jawed man who had arrived. Tallam addressed the newcomer as Bronden; he chuckled the name so that The Shadow could hear it. That information lifted the last doubt concerning the tip-off.

Contemptuously, Tallam flung The Shadow's cloak and hat upon the prisoner's cot, along with the black gloves. He and Bronden left the cell. The two barriers closed when the switches were pulled.

The Golden Masks had acted as The Shadow had hoped. They believed their prisoner helpless; they were confident that he could not escape the dungeon in which they had placed him. Therefore, they had chosen to keep him alive.

WHEN the doors had closed upon The Shadow, Tallam abruptly ordered Bronden to keep charge of the dungeon corridor. His duty of watching Sulgate ended, it was obvious that Tallam intended to use the man at this headquarters.

Tallam and Barfield, Alpha and Omega of the Golden Masks, had taken Gamma into their closest confidence. Bronden was the only one of the lesser Golden Masks who had gained that particular honor.

Followed by two Ashanti servants, Tallam headed upstairs. He ordered one to duty at the front door; the other, to go outside and make a short patrol of the neighborhood. Tallam continued up to his living room. He took his place behind the desk in the central alcove and began to prepare a letter. He stopped this work to put in a brief telephone call to Roger Barfield.

Twenty minutes later, the Ashanti doorkeeper arrived to announce that Barfield had entered. There was no need for Tallam to order that Barfield be conducted upstairs. Tallam's partner entered while the servant was still making his slow report. Motioning Barfield to a chair, Tallam ordered the Ashanti to return downstairs.

As soon as the pair were alone, Tallam chuckled the details of The Shadow's capture, which he had chosen not to discuss at length over the telephone.

Barfield listened with an air of evil pleasure; when Tallam had finished, he described points of The Shadow's visit at the Hotel Romera. That discussion ended, the heads of the Golden Masks turned to the sort of talk that The Shadow had anticipated.

"I sent Seeklat outside," declared Tallam. "I wanted him to make sure that no spies are close at hand."

"That is not likely," assured Barfield. "I saw no suspicious persons when I left my hotel."

THE GOLDEN MASKS

“If The Shadow has agents,” decided Tallam, abruptly, “they would probably be competent enough to keep out of sight. It would be best for you to stay here, Omega.”

“As we originally planned,” nodded Barfield. “Very well, Alpha. If The Shadow does have workers, we should be able to trap them as easily as we did their chief.”

“More easily. We may find a way to lure them. We are wise to keep The Shadow alive. For more reasons than one. He played the part of a wealthy man to–night.”

“Which may mean that he has money. If so, I think that we can manage to acquire it.”

Wise leers passed between the two conspirators. These men of the Golden Masks had known success in the past, even when they had dealt with stubborn prisoners. They were ready to try for results with The Shadow. Tallam's next remark showed, however, that any such action would not be immediate.

“Here are the papers for to–night's meeting,” declared Tallam, passing them across the desk. “I am following your suggestion, Omega. We shall use Member Epsilon, otherwise Jay Jaffley, as contact in our next endeavor.”

“It will work well,” assured Barfield. “Jaffley is a prominent insurance man, which classes him as something of a conservative. Since we are after a promoter like Freeland Ralbot, we need a contact man who will impress him.”

“None could be better than Jaffley,” agreed Tallam. “He poses as a man of the utmost integrity. When he produces anonymous letters that hint of fake promotions engineered by Ralbot, we can take it for granted that Ralbot will be bowled over.”

“It's always a good set–up,” nodded Barfield, “having a contact who rates higher than the fellow who pays the coin. Froy was a good bet with Lengerton. Jaffley will be even better with Ralbot.”

TALLAM swung the bottom of the bookcase at the right side of the desk. From behind dummy volumes, he produced two flat suitcases and gave one to Barfield. These bags contained the robes and golden masks that were worn by Alpha and Omega.

“We shall go out by the long passage,” remarked Tallam. “I shall speak to Gamma, to tell him that he will not be needed at the meeting. While we are below, Omega, we shall take a look at our prisoners. There is one whom you will be greatly pleased to see. I doubt that he has yet become accustomed to his new quarters.”

With this reference to The Shadow, Sidney Tallam led the way downstairs. Roger Barfield followed, his wide mouth spread in a grin that was as ugly as Tallam's leer.

To these companions in crime, the capture of The Shadow was but another link in a long chain of evil successes. Though they had been chilled by The Shadow's arrival—the night when he had taken them unawares—they had played their recent game well.

Forewarned, these evil geniuses had acted with perfect teamwork. They had bluffed The Shadow, trapped him; small wonder it was that they had lost their fear of the superfoe whom they had blocked. To their way of thinking, The Shadow was in a snare that no living being could untangle.

In that surmise, the leaders of the Golden Masks were wrong. No trap was ever hopeless to The Shadow.

CHAPTER XI. THE SHADOW'S RUSE

DURING the interval that he had spent in the underground cell, The Shadow had experienced a slow but steady recovery from the effects of the gaseous treatment. Lying upon his cot, he found that he could lift his arms, that they were strong enough to half raise his body.

Relaxing, The Shadow indulged in a calm smile. He had acted wisely when he had pretended total collapse in Tallam's upstairs trap. Through that ruse, he had gained prompt removal from the gas-laden atmosphere. Tallam had thinned the paralyzing vapor the moment that he had opened the glass barriers.

Because the process had been halted in its early stage, The Shadow had escaped the usual result. Thus he possessed an advantage that the Golden Masks did not recognize. The Shadow was no longer totally helpless; during the next forty-eight hours he would be capable of action.

Tallam, himself, had given The Shadow a weapon. He had thrown The Shadow's cloak upon the cot. Though guns were gone, The Shadow still had the explosive powders that were hidden in the lining of his cloak. Unfortunately, those materials had become useless to The Shadow.

This cell had a double barrier; steel within, bulletproof glass without. There was a three-foot space between the heavy doors. Even if The Shadow blasted the steel barrier, he would be blocked by the glass beyond it. He could not hope to shatter both with one explosion.

Since the far door was glass, any guard who chanced to pass along the outside corridor would see the wreckage of the steel door. The Shadow's advantage would be lost before he could follow it through.

CONSIDERING his plight, The Shadow came to the conclusion that his best policy would be to keep up a pretense of helplessness. Should he find a chance for a break, he could use it. If the Golden Masks came to remove him, he would be able to give battle once the doors were opened.

The only flaw in this plan lay in the fact that the Golden Masks formed an active band. They would not be idle during the next two days. In all probability, they would proceed with further crime; the very sort that The Shadow had planned to prevent. The only way to thwart the Golden Masks would be through some outside contact, gained without the knowledge of The Shadow's captors.

There were other prisoners here. Tallam had let The Shadow see James Lengerton. To The Shadow, it was obvious that other cells contained additional captives. Some, perhaps, were helpless like Lengerton; others might have already regained their power of locomotion, like The Shadow. Certainly, none of them had managed a means of communication with the outside world; nor had any thought out a plan of escape.

Those facts, however, did not deter The Shadow.

Looking about his cell, The Shadow noted its simple furnishings. In addition to the cot, the room had a chair and a table. Both were flimsy; but chair rungs or table legs might do for cudgels in a pinch. There was another item, however, that pleased The Shadow more.

This was a wall bracket, made of brass. It had a curved arm, twelve inches in length, that could be unscrewed from the plate that was fitted to the wall. The bracket could be of value later. Its present purpose was to hold the single incandescent bulb that provided the room with light. There was a small switch attached to the bracket. Evidently, prisoners were allowed to choose either light or darkness after they had recovered from the yellow gas.

THE GOLDEN MASKS

Rising slowly, The Shadow walked shakily to the wall and examined the bracket. He steadied himself; for a moment, his fingers touched the lighted bulb. The Shadow was considering a plan; he decided to postpone it, until he felt stronger. It was well that he made that decision.

As The Shadow moved back toward his cot, there was a click at the steel door. It indicated that the barrier was about to open. With all the effort he could summon, The Shadow threw himself upon the cot and rolled into the position that he had formerly held. His eyes were toward the door. He saw the steel sheet slide back.

Beyond the glass barrier was Bronden. The square-jawed man was beckoning to others. As The Shadow stared, keeping his eyes in a fixed position, he saw Sidney Tallam and Roger Barfield arrive beside Bronden. The appearance of Barfield removed the last question concerning the set-up of the Golden Masks. The Shadow knew positively that Tallam and Barfield must be Alpha and Omega.

Barfield smiled uglily as he viewed The Shadow. To him, the prisoner's bulging gaze meant that the paralyzing gas had taken full effect. While Barfield gazed gloatingly, Tallam spoke to Bronden.

Though The Shadow could not hear the crisp words that Tallam uttered, he could observe the precise motion of the crook's pursed lips. Tallam's words were plain.

"We are going to the meeting," Tallam told Bronden. "You will remain here, in charge. Keep Lothkal on duty; to-morrow, Seeklat will obtain more men."

The names Lothkal and Seeklat would have been difficult to note, if they had come from the lips of an ordinary speaker. Tallam's clippy pronunciation made the names clear. The Shadow knew that Lothkal and Seeklat must be Ashanti servants. Probably, Tallam and Barfield had decided to keep closer guard, since The Shadow was among their prisoners.

It would be Seeklat's job to find more men of Ashanti origin, if any were in New York. This indicated that the Golden Masks were not oversupplied with tribal henchmen.

Tallam ordered Bronden to close the steel door. As Bronden went to obey, Tallam motioned to Barfield. Together, the two walked away, taking the direction opposite the one by which they had arrived. A few moments later, the steel barrier slid shut.

THE brief interlude had brought important facts to The Shadow. The Golden Masks were meeting to-night; that meant that his conjecture regarding new crime was probably correct. The fact that Tallam and Barfield had continued along the passage proved that there must be a secret exit that would bring them above ground some distance from the brownstone house. Therefore, The Shadow's agents would not observe the crooks when they departed.

Offsetting these two factors were others that The Shadow regarded as advantages. With Tallam and Barfield absent, only Bronden would be in charge. He was not as keen as either of his chiefs; a clever ruse might easily deceive Bronden. Furthermore, the fact that Seeklat was to obtain new African henchmen was something of great consequence to The Shadow.

In fact, it gave him the very thing he wanted. The Shadow had already thought out a mode of communication to persons outside the house. The trouble had been the choice of a message. That difficulty was ended.

The Shadow lay idle for a full ten minutes; the closing of the steel door had made him safe from observation. He gazed toward the light that projected from the wall; his lips, still those of Cranston, formed a slight but confident smile.

THE GOLDEN MASKS

When he was sure that Tallam and Barfield were well on their way, The Shadow arose. His legs were stronger; his steps were unwavering as he went to the wall.

There, The Shadow reached into the pockets of his vest. He found the few ordinary items that Tallam had left him—a handful of small change and a gold watch. Among the coins, The Shadow found a copper cent. He turned off the wall light, unscrewed the bulb and inserted the coin. He screwed the bulb tight, turned on the switch.

Instantly, a fuse was blown somewhere in the house. The Shadow had knocked out an entire circuit. He unscrewed the bulb and let the coin drop into his hand. He replaced the bulb, but kept the coin in readiness.

SEVERAL minutes passed. Suddenly, the light came on again. Its glow showed The Shadow, standing with his watch in his left hand, studying the dial. His right hand held the penny; quickly, that same hand unscrewed the bulb. Bringing his hands together, The Shadow balanced the cent on the metal end of the bulb, pushed both up to the light socket.

He accomplished this with amazing rapidity; in less than five seconds, the bulb was back in position. The Shadow did not screw it fully into place; he withheld the final action while he eyed the second hand of the watch. At the proper instant, he gave the bulb a quick, short turn to the right.

Again, the lights went out.

Unscrewing the bulb, The Shadow caught the coin, he inserted the bulb alone, so that it would bring the light the moment that another fuse was used. The Shadow knew, from the light's behavior, that Bronden must have gone to the fuse box when the lights blew for the first time. The new short circuit would be followed by another replacement.

While The Shadow waited in darkness, his lips phrased a whispered laugh that was confined to the stone walls of his cell. His present game would necessarily be brief; probably too short to complete all that he wanted.

Bronden would not replace fuses indefinitely; sooner or later, the fellow would look for the real cause of the extinguished lights.

That, however, would not matter. Confident that Harry Vincent was on outside watch, The Shadow was sure that the present ruse would bring the result that he required.

CHAPTER XII. THE AGENTS MOVE

THE SHADOW was correct in his assumption that Harry Vincent was on duty. Harry had contacted Moe's cab soon after it had parked at the hack stand near the big apartment house. Seated in the rear, Harry had joined Moe in keeping watch on Tallam's house.

Both had expected The Shadow to reappear from the front door. A long while had passed; then, instead of The Shadow, another person had approached the cab. It was Hawkeye. The little spotter had trailed Roger Barfield from the Hotel Romera. He had spied Moe's cab and come to contact.

Harry saw Barfield enter Tallam's. A brief chat with Hawkeye left Harry undecided whether Barfield's arrival boded good or ill. Harry had decided at last that The Shadow had sent for Barfield, in order to have a show-down with Tallam. Nevertheless, Harry had suggested that Hawkeye prowl about the outside of the brownstone house.

THE GOLDEN MASKS

Hawkeye had returned to the cab just prior to The Shadow's action with the lights. Joining Harry, the spotter whispered news.

“There was a big gazebo came out of the house,” informed Hawkeye. “He took a gander all around the place, like he figured somebody was casing the joint. He nearly spotted me; I didn't lamp him at first, there in the dark. He looked as husky as some of them Ethiopian soldiers they've been showing in the news reels. Maybe he was one of them; but why's he here in New York?”

Before Harry could reply, Moe piped quick news from the front seat.

“See that?” queried the cab driver. “A bunch of lights just went out downstairs. Take a look at the house.”

Harry did. He noted the sudden absence of lower lights. Trained to study any unusual occurrence, a prompt thought came to Harry's mind. Perhaps The Shadow would want a later report concerning those very lights. It would be well to know how long they remained extinguished.

HUNCHING low in the cab, Harry produced his watch and a fountain-pen flashlight. He threw a glimmer on the watch dial. He estimated roughly that eight seconds had passed since Moe had seen the light go off. He told Hawkeye to write down figures when he gave them; he ordered Moe to report when the lights reappeared.

A few minutes later, Moe snapped:

“They're on.”

“Three minutes, twenty seconds,” said Harry. “Put that down, Hawkeye. Then wait while I check it exactly. I had to make a guess at the start—”

“Off again!” called out Moe, from the front seat. “They went out just like before.”

Moe's quick tone caught Harry's instant attention. His eyes already on the dial, Harry noted the exact second with camera-eye accuracy. His voice showed certainty as he spoke to Hawkeye.

“Leave it at three-twenty,” said Harry, “as the time that the lights were off. Put down ten seconds as the period that they were on again. I caught that to the dot.”

To Moe, Harry added:

“Watch for the lights to come on again.”

Two minutes and forty-three seconds passed. Moe snapped the news that lights had come on. As Harry announced the new time to Hawkeye, Moe ejaculated that the lights were off. Again, Harry had it to the dot. He told Hawkeye:

“Five seconds.” Two minutes marked the next absence of the lower lights. Once more the glow reappeared. This time, the lights stayed on for exactly eighteen seconds. Harry gave the figures to Hawkeye. Again, the agent waited. The interval was longer than before.

There was a reason for the new situation—one that The Shadow recognized within his cell. Standing in darkness, The Shadow heard the click that announced the opening slide of the steel door. He knew at once that Bronden suspected that the new prisoner was tampering with the lights.

THE GOLDEN MASKS

Instantly, The Shadow made a sweeping dive for the cot. He did not have to worry about the light bulb; that was in place, ready to tell when the new fuse was inserted. His actions with the coin were to come afterward.

Just as the door slid completely open, the lights appeared, both in the cell and the corridor. Holding his fixed stare, The Shadow saw Lothkal, the Ashanti guard, staring through the outside glass. Half a minute later, Bronden appeared, to question Lothkal.

Though he eyed The Shadow suspiciously for a short while, Bronden finally decided that the prisoner could not have been responsible for the blown fuses.

He pressed the switch that controlled the steel door; The Shadow was again confined from sight. He did not move, however, for he expected that Bronden might again try to catch him off guard. Furthermore, The Shadow's progression had been broken.

WATCHING from the taxi, Harry Vincent soon realized that such must be the case. The lights had come on again, to stay. Studying the figures that Hawkeye had transcribed, Harry could not fathom them, at first; suddenly a solution struck him. He confided to Hawkeye and Moe.

"The chief is in trouble," informed Harry, bluntly. "I think he is a prisoner. He knows that we are watching; the only way he could reach us was by blowing the lights. If I'm right, that gives me an idea."

Holding his flashlight to Hawkeye's paper, Harry picked out the figures that told how long the lights had been on.

"He couldn't have controlled the time that the lights were off," mused Harry. "That's when some one inside was putting in new fuses. All that The Shadow could do would be to extinguish the lights after they came on again.

"Ten—five—eighteen"—Harry named the numbers that Hawkeye had written for those intervals—"those are all that count. Let's take them as letters, according to the alphabet. Ten is J; five is E; eighteen is R."

"J, E, R," spoke Moe. "Guess there aren't many words that begin with those letters. But what good will one word be, even if we do guess it?"

"Jer," remarked Harry slowly. "Jera—Jera—Jeri—I've got it! The word is Jericho! The chief wants Jericho Druke!"

Moe and Hawkeye knew instantly that Harry had scored a hit. Both knew Jericho Druke, a husky African who ran an employment agency in Harlem. On several occasions, The Shadow had called Jericho into service, and had found him capable and reliable.

It was up to Harry Vincent to guess why and how Jericho would be needed. Fortunately, the answer was easy. Harry had been informed of recent events, through Burbank. The Shadow had foreseen that facts might be useful to his agent.

"The Shadow has been trapped," declared Harry, grimly. "Tallam must belong to the Golden Masks; maybe Barfield does, too, since he came here in such a hurry. That big fellow you spotted, Hawkeye, is one of the Ashanti.

"We can't try to crash that house, particularly if The Shadow is a prisoner. There's no use telling the police; they would bungle matters worse than we would. There's only one man who can get in there; and The

THE GOLDEN MASKS

Shadow has named him. That's Jericho.”

“I get it,” put in Hawkeye. “If Jericho can meet up with one of this Ashanti bunch—make them think he belongs to the same tribe—”

“They may able to use him,” finished Harry. “The sooner we can stage the stunt, the better. Slide out, Hawkeye, and keep watching the house. If you spot any Ashanti leaving it, trail the fellow. Learn where he goes.”

As Hawkeye edged from the cab, Harry leaned forward and spoke to Moe.

“We'll get away from here,” declared Harry. “The less watchers, the better; so the job belongs to Hawkeye. I'll call Burbank. He can get in touch with Jericho and have him meet us.”

Moe nodded. He waited a few minutes, for the cab ahead of him was about to move farther toward the front of the hack stand space. As soon as the head cab started, Moe wheeled his own machine out into the street and drove for the next corner.

GAZING from the window, Harry took a last look at the brownstone house. The old mansion looked grim and ominous; its windows were too deep for the lights within them to give any view of the interior.

Harry was more convinced than ever That The Shadow was a prisoner. How desperate his chief's plight, Harry could not guess. He knew, however, that The Shadow's call for Jericho was the surest way to get results. With one worker inside to aid him, The Shadow might accomplish huge results. If Jericho could pass as an Ashanti, fine.

Particularly since Harry and the other agents would stay close by, with Hawkeye watching the house. If he contacted The Shadow inside, Jericho could pass word to Hawkeye, outside. The arrangement would be perfect, if it could only be accomplished. That was the part that worried Harry Vincent.

If, at that moment, Harry Vincent could have gained a momentary glimpse within The Shadow's cell, the agent's troubled mind would have been relieved. The Shadow was stretched upon his cot, his eyes still gazing toward the light that glowed from the wall bracket.

Motionless lips delivered a whispered laugh that chilled the confines of the cell. The Shadow was confident that his trick—signaling had been noted and understood by the outside watchers. He seemed confident that Jericho would manage entrance to Sidney Tallam's stronghold.

Though he remained a prisoner of the Golden Masks, The Shadow was already planning future moves to quell the activities of that insidious band.

CHAPTER XIII. THE NEXT MORNING

AT ten o'clock the next morning, Seeklat stepped from the side door of Sidney Tallam's mansion. The big Ashanti was attired in American clothes; there was nothing conspicuous about his departure from the house.

Part of Tallam's clever method was to let Seeklat come and go. The Ashanti spoke English well enough to excite no suspicion. It was easy for him to pass as an ordinary servant, employed in Tallam's household.

Moreover, Tallam was running no risk. Seeklat, like the other imported tribesmen, was sworn to primitive loyalty. No amount of persuasion or torture could induce any Ashanti to betray a chief.

THE GOLDEN MASKS

If trouble should strike at Seeklat, it would simply give Tallam and Barfield a warning of enemies. Though they pretended otherwise, the leaders of the Golden Masks cared nothing about the fate of their Ashanti followers.

Tallam had told Bronden that Seeklat was to look for new recruits to serve with the Ashanti servants. That was true; but Tallam had another purpose, also. He believed that if The Shadow's agents were on watch, Seeklat might spot them; or they might attack the Ashanti. In either case, Tallam would gain a lead toward The Shadow's aids.

That was one of two reasons why Tallam sent Seeklat out by the side door of the house, and not by the distant secret exit which Tallam had used last night with Barfield. The other reason was that the Golden Masks wanted to preserve the secret of the distant exit. They knew that if Seeklat used it and was spied far from the brownstone house, observers might guess that the secret way existed.

When he reached the front street, Seeklat walked southward. Though the big Ashanti strode along with eyes straight forward, there was little that escaped his observation. Seeklat had spent his boyhood with an Ashanti tribe; his stride was the jungle stalk. While his gaze was ever prepared for sight of prey, Seeklat also possessed the sense that told when he was watched.

Experience in civilized surroundings had not dulled this sense of Seeklat's. It sometimes tricked him, however, for passers occasionally kept looking at the huge Ashanti through curiosity. Seeklat's unusual height was the cause of such stares. To-day, Seeklat felt that he was being watched. As he turned a corner, he managed a glance over his shoulder that swept the street that he had just left.

A HUNCHY, wan-faced man slid out of sight as Seeklat turned. It was Hawkeye; the little spotter found refuge behind a pair of close-placed ash cans. He was quick enough to escape Seeklat's gaze; but the Ashanti had not finished.

At the end of the next block, he made another striding turn. This time, Hawkeye outguessed him. The spotter was deep in a doorway when Seeklat looked back.

Hawkeye was still on the trail when Seeklat reached an avenue that was topped by an "el" railway. The Ashanti ascended the stairs on the southbound side. Hawkeye scurried into a cigar store and made a quick telephone call. At night, he would have risked following Seeklat aboard an "el" train; by daylight, the chance of observation was too great. However, Hawkeye was playing a good bet with his telephone call.

No "el" train had arrived by the time Hawkeye came from the cigar store. It was several minutes before one arrived; soon after it had pulled away from Seeklat's station, Moe Shrevnitz arrived with his cab. Hawkeye boarded it; they sped along beneath the "el" line. The cab caught up to the "el" train at the third station.

From then on, they kept at an even speed with the train. After a few more stations, Hawkeye sighted Seeklat coming from an "el" station. The spotter dropped from the cab, threaded a new trail. As before, he kept from Seeklat's view. The Ashanti seemed less suspicious of followers at this distance from Tallam's house.

The course led to the water front. Near a line of dingy, battered piers, Seeklat entered the side door of a tawdry restaurant that was frequented by seamen. Hawkeye congratulated himself on having kept clear of the Ashanti's notice; for the spotter was now able to come from cover.

Hawkeye's own attire and appearance marked him as the sort found near the water front. Boldly, the hunched spotter entered the eating place.

THE GOLDEN MASKS

Rough-clad men were lounging at a long bar; others were seated at battered tables. Hawkeye chose a corner near the back; he ordered a bowl of Chili. Keenly, the spotter noted a door that led to a back room; also a telephone booth in a corner beyond it.

A SQUATTY Portuguese was standing near the bar. He looked like the mate of some tramp steamer. The fellow was chatting amiably, in good English. Every time he threw his head back for a laugh, gold coins shook from the lobes of his ears. As the Portuguese ended one guffaw, a barkeeper leaned forward and cupped his hand above the Portuguese's earring. When the barkeeper whispered, the Portuguese nodded. Hawkeye saw him head for the back.

Almost beside Hawkeye, the Portuguese opened the door toward himself; he went through and pulled the door behind him. As the door was swinging freely shut, Hawkeye shoved his foot forward to deflect it. The door stopped short, not quite closed. Hawkeye hunched himself over his bowl of Chili; squinted through the narrow opening.

The Portuguese had entered the back room to talk with Seeklat. Hawkeye could see both men; he caught the words that passed between them.

“You bring men?” queried Seeklat, in a low but deep tone. “Three men?”

“I bring one man,” replied the Portuguese. “But maybe I get two.”

“I want three.” In emphasis, Seeklat held up one hand. He used his thumb to crook his forefinger inward, thus displaying his three last fingers. It was the peculiar style used by native Africans to denote the number three. The Portuguese shook his head until his earrings jangled.

“Bring one,” he declared, emphatically. “One more, maybe. Best I can do.”

With that, the mate of the tramp ship came out from the rear room. Hawkeye let him swing the door entirely shut; he watched the Portuguese go out by the front. Hawkeye saw instant opportunity. He hopped across to the telephone booth; made a quick call to Burbank. If Jericho should come here promptly, chances would be good for him to contact Seeklat.

IN about half an hour, a rough-clad African solemnly entered the eating place and walked through to the rear room. Hawkeye was positive that the arrival was an Ashanti. Probably the Portuguese ship had brought one such native to America. There was no sign of the Portuguese mate. He had simply sent the Ashanti to Seeklat.

That was just the way Hawkeye had wanted it.

The spotter paid for his Chili, left by the front door and stopped to shove a cigarette between his pasty lips. Eyeing a near corner, Hawkeye saw a stalwart African waiting there. It was Jericho; the man from Harlem was as husky as any Ashanti, although he did not resemble the members of that tribe. Hawkeye gave a signal, then moved on his way. The rest was up to Jericho.

Jericho stopped a moment, then entered. He saw the rear door, went through it. He came upon Seeklat and the other Ashanti; Seeklat had just signed up the new recruit. Seeklat eyed Jericho with a suspicious glare, then queried:

“You from ship?”

“Je ne comprend pas,” grunted Jericho. “Mon pay est Abidjean, Cote d'Ivoire. Je parle que Francais.”

THE GOLDEN MASKS

Seeklat recognized the names that Jericho uttered. The prospective recruit was claiming that he talked French only; that he came from the town of Abidjean, on the Ivory Coast; the latter being a French colony that adjoined the British Gold Coast.

Seeklat was familiar with that portion of Africa. It seemed likely that a Portuguese ship that had brought an Ashanti would have picked up a hand from the Ivory Coast. In a native babble, Seeklat questioned the Ashanti whom he had just recruited. The native looked at Jericho, gave a noncommittal reply. He was not sure whether or not Jericho had been aboard the Portuguese vessel.

Ordinarily, Seeklat would have rejected Jericho, since he was not an Ashanti. Two reasons made him decide to hire the new man. Seeklat needed Jericho; furthermore, he was impressed by the latter's size. Jericho looked as powerful as any of the Ashanti who served the Golden Masks.

Seeklat beckoned. Jericho followed him, along with the Ashanti. Seeklat took the pair to the "el" station; they rode back to the original station and walked to Tallam's. There, Seeklat took the two indoors, left them downstairs while he went up to report to Tallam.

DURING this interval, Jericho remained as solemn as the Ashanti who stood with him. There was a good reason for his soberness. Jericho had a ticklish game to play. He knew nothing of the Ashanti language; in fact, little of any native jargon used in Africa.

But in discussing that dilemma with Harry Vincent, Jericho had happened to mention that he could speak some French. He had once been employed as doorman at a French restaurant; through contact with waiters and chefs, he had picked up phrases of the language.

That statement had given Harry an idea. He had instructed Jericho to pose as a native of the Ivory Coast, to use his French to the best of his ability. Thereby, Jericho could avoid questions put to him either in English or in the Ashanti tongue.

When Seeklat returned, Jericho sensed that a test was to come. He and the new Ashanti followed Seeklat upstairs; they were conducted to the living room. There, they saw Sidney Tallam, seated at his desk. There was another man in the room; Roger Barfield was looking through the books in the rear alcove that served as a library.

Tallam studied the new Ashanti, spoke to him in the native tongue, choosing words carefully and slowly. The Ashanti made a reply. Tallam was satisfied. He turned to Jericho, put a slow question in French. Jericho understood and answered. Tallam smiled.

He did not realize that if he had been able to snap the question more rapidly, it would have slipped past Jericho's comprehension. Nor did the poorness of Jericho's accent perturb him. Tallam's own French was none too good; and he did not expect the glibness of a Parisian speaker from a native of the Ivory Coast.

Telling Seeklat that both men would do, Tallam drew a revolver from his desk drawer. He carried the weapon forward, let Jericho and the Ashanti examine it to see that the cartridges contained solid bullets. By this time, Barfield had turned about and was facing the living room. Tallam aimed toward his partner in crime, deliberately fired the revolver.

LAST night's phenomenon was duplicated. The bullet never reached the man in the alcove. It seemed to sing back in mid-air; as it fell gleaming to the floor, Tallam fired again. Jericho and the Ashanti stared bewildered at sight of bullets lying on the floor. They did not guess that a glass plate covered the entrance to the alcove. Tallam had modulated the lights of the room.

THE GOLDEN MASKS

Tallam spoke to the recruits. In Ashanti, then in French, he explained that both he and Barfield were invulnerable, that they were potent witch doctors, who could deliver death as easily as they could prevent it. Though Jericho knew that the stunt must be a trick, he pretended the same awe as the Ashanti, who thought the power real.

Barfield, meanwhile, had pressed a switch in the bookcase. Once the glass barrier had glided back in invisible fashion, he came from the alcove. Tallam ordered Seeklat to go downstairs and take the new Ashanti with him; in French, he told Jericho to remain. As soon as the others had gone, Tallam made a remark to his partner.

“We'll keep this fellow up here,” said Tallam, indicating Jericho. “Since he knows no English, he's a good man to have around. We can talk while he is here.”

“Maybe you'll need him as an extra guard,” remarked Barfield. “Unless you bring back one of the Ashanti at the meeting place.”

“We'll use this fellow if necessary,” decided Tallam. “But there's no use pushing him. He can't talk Ashanti any more than he can English; so there's no way for him to understand orders in either language. I'll keep him with me, since I talk French.”

With that, Tallam briskly ordered Jericho to patrol the hall outside the living room. Jericho obeyed the command; as he paced the hall, he could catch snatches of conversation between Tallam and Barfield. As time passed, Jericho decided that he was doing the best that he could, for the present. Talk of guards had convinced Jericho that there were prisoners, with The Shadow among them. If the cells lay below, an attempt to reach them without proper orders would be a foolish, perhaps suicidal, effort. It was better to stay here, close to Tallam and Barfield.

These men, so Jericho had been told, were the leaders of the Golden Masks. If harm was to befall The Shadow, it would be through their order. Thinking that Jericho could not understand English, they would think nothing of discussing their plans with him close by.

Until he learned that The Shadow's life was threatened, Jericho Druke intended to play his part as a new and supposedly ignorant recruit in the service of the Golden Masks.

CHAPTER XIV. CHANCE SERVES THE SHADOW

THE day passed slowly to Jericho, after his arrival at Tallam's. But the passage of time upstairs in Tallam's house was rapid compared to the slow monotony of life in a cell below. To The Shadow, the lingering hours spoke of futility.

Though The Shadow had no way to learn whether or not his agents had received his message, he believed that they had actually gained it. He was sure that steps had been taken to put Jericho into Tallam's household; but there was a chance that some hitch had delayed that game.

The Shadow realized also that Jericho might already be inside; but in no position to reach the cell rooms below. Though The Shadow was confident that he could eventually escape through Jericho's aid, he hoped for an earlier opportunity.

For a while, no plan occurred to The Shadow. Retaining his fixed position on the couch, he watched the occasional opening of the steel door. At those times, spaced a few hours apart, either Bronden or Lothkal looked in to make sure that The Shadow was still powerless.

THE GOLDEN MASKS

It was when Lothkal made another such inspection that The Shadow learned a new fact. As he held his fixed gaze, he saw through the glass outer door; there he observed an Ashanti servant standing outside of Lengerton's cell. While The Shadow watched, the native pressed a switch. The glass door of Lengerton's cell slid open; but the inner steel one did not. The Ashanti stooped and picked up a tray of dishes.

The Shadow's view was suddenly ended as Lothkal pressed the switch that closed the inner door of The Shadow's cell. In that glimpse, however, The Shadow had viewed enough to gain a plan.

Since Lengerton had recovered from his gas treatment, he was receiving food. The system appeared simple. An Ashanti opened the glass door and placed a tray there, then closed the glass door and slid back the steel so that the prisoner could pick up the tray. Later, the steel door was opened, to let the prisoner put the tray outside it. That done, the steel door would be closed.

The Shadow saw possibilities through this. He had two hours to wait; for he could not try his plan until after the next inspection. Looking at his watch, The Shadow saw that it was six o'clock.

That fact spurred him to his purpose. He was sure that the Golden Masks plotted new moves. Night was the time when they would act. It would be wise for The Shadow to move by eight o'clock.

TWO hours moved slowly. Promptly at eight, The Shadow saw the steel door slide back. For the first time, he let Lothkal see that he was no longer under the influence of the gas. Slowly, with pretended weakness, The Shadow came up from his cot. Lothkal flattened his nose against the glass and watched.

The Shadow staggered toward the door, stopped suddenly and clapped his hands to his eyes, as though the dazzle of the cell light troubled him. Shifting toward the wall, he found the light switch, turned off the incandescent. He continued toward the glass door, blundered against it and fell back in the cell, within the line of the steel door.

Lothkal's large features showed a grin. Apparently, The Shadow had not remembered the glass barrier. The big Ashanti slid the steel door shut. The glow from the outer passage was ended. The Shadow lay in total darkness.

A few seconds later, The Shadow arose. He acted with great rapidity. He sprang to the darkened wall, found the bracket and wrenched it with his fists. He unscrewed the rod; ripped the wiring loose.

Reaching his cot, he seized his black cloak; he tore away a strip of the sable-hued cloth. Working with all possible speed in the darkness, The Shadow wrapped the brass rod in the strip of cloth. He donned his cloak and hat, put the cloth-covered rod out of sight.

The Shadow completed his preparation in good time. The steel door slid back again; this time, it was Bronden who peered through the glass. Lothkal had reported The Shadow's recovery. Bronden wanted to see proof of it.

For a few moments, Bronden saw nothing, for the cell was dark. Bronden thought nothing of that fact, for Lothkal had told him that The Shadow's first act had been to turn off the light. As Bronden stared, he saw The Shadow.

Shakily, groggily, the cloaked prisoner again blundered up against the glass door and sagged back, this time in the path of the steel doors.

Bronden leered. This interested him. He laughed at The Shadow's weak effort. Wearing cloak and hat, the

THE GOLDEN MASKS

prisoner was trying to offer feeble challenge, as Bronden saw it. Yet The Shadow was totally helpless, in the power of the Golden Masks.

Bronden scowled a warning through the glass barrier. He intended to slide the steel door shut. He motioned for The Shadow to move back. Weakly, The Shadow obeyed, rolling into the cell. Bronden pressed the switch; the steel door slid into place.

IN watching The Shadow, Bronden failed to notice something else. In his fake sprawl close to the glass door, The Shadow had planted the brass rod on the floor. Cleverly, he had shoved it against the side of the doorway that the edge of the steel door was to meet.

Bronden did not see the cloth-covered rod, for it was black. Nor did he hear the crunch that came when the steel door closed into its place. The outer glass prevented the sound from reaching Bronden's ears; but The Shadow heard it.

On hands and knees, he probed the edge of the steel barrier, to discover a slight crevice. The brass bar had stopped the steel door from coming fully shut. Donning his gloves, The Shadow forced his finger tips into the tiny space.

At first, he could not budge the steel door. He shoved his knee sidewise, against the inner end of the brass rod. The leverage helped; the steel door gave a fraction of an inch. The Shadow squeezed his fingers through, gave every ounce of his strength. The door slid farther open. The Shadow jammed his knee into the space.

Once he managed to work himself to his feet, his task was ended. The Shadow pushed his body between the door and the frame; he leaned against the door edge with a powerful shoulder. The door opened farther.

The Shadow kicked the brass rod back into the cell. Squeezing completely through, he pressed against the glass door and released the steel one. Massive, hidden springs drove it shut with a muffled clang.

The Shadow was confined in closer quarters than before. He had left the cell in order to occupy a three-foot air space between the steel door and the outer glass one. Cloaked and hatted, The Shadow was invisible; for the surface of the steel door was blackened. Moreover, The Shadow shifted to the side of the space that was shaded from the nearest corridor light.

To keep himself unseen, The Shadow needed to remain absolutely motionless. He did so; but for another reason, also. The air supply was limited between these sealed doors. The Shadow was in the same situation as the Hindu fakirs who allow themselves to be buried alive for hours.

The Shadow knew the secret of the fakirs, how they could endure such tests without obtaining their fresh air. Complete immobility was the first requirement; for motion would create friction and thereby use up precious oxygen.

Slow breathing was also necessary. Steadily, easily, The Shadow drew in his breath, held it, then exhaled with the same slow process. He waited several seconds, then drew another retarded breath. He was conserving his air supply to the limit.

An Ashanti paced into view. It was Lothkal, back on guard duty. The huge watcher stopped at The Shadow's door, glanced at the glass and the steel within it. Backed by a darkened barrier, the glass reflected the passage lights. Lothkal did not see The Shadow. He paced onward.

SOON Bronden arrived. He spoke to Lothkal, gestured toward The Shadow's door and shook his head. The

THE GOLDEN MASKS

two walked from The Shadow's view. Apparently, Bronden had reported upstairs; he had been told to do nothing more about The Shadow for the present.

It might be that Tallam and Barfield had decided to deny food to The Shadow. If so, the glass door might not be opened until morning. That would mean a twelve-hour stretch for The Shadow; a long period to remain rigid, clamped between two barriers. A long time, too, to go without fresh air. Nevertheless, The Shadow was prepared for the ordeal.

He had more space than in an ordinary coffin, wherein a living burial can last for a few hours. Every additional square inch of space meant more oxygen. As he calculated, The Shadow decided that under ordinary conditions, he would have enough air to last from seven to eight hours.

He was determined to make that supply stretch to twelve if so required. His breathing became slower than before, so slight that it was almost imperceptible. Body rigid, eyes fixed, The Shadow had assumed an almost hypnotic condition, with his face turned toward the inner steel door. He had reduced his breathing to the absolute minimum. It would stay at that timing.

Minutes passed. The Shadow showed none of the strained impatience that comes with close confinement. He counted upon time to bring its break; though he was prepared for a twelve-hour wait, he believed that the break would come sooner.

Perhaps Tallam and Barfield had merely postponed the matter of a food supply. If they intended to fare forth to-night, they would probably make plans concerning The Shadow before they left; for the matter of his early recovery was something that they could not ignore.

By this time, Jericho might be in the house, almost prepared to make some move that would bring aid to The Shadow. These were the possibilities upon which The Shadow counted as he waited. The likelihood of one chance or another had been the chief reason why The Shadow had undertaken this bold move.

Long hours of contemplation had not dulled The Shadow's keen perception of the future. His senses were at their fullest sharpness. A break would come. The Shadow could foresee it. When the time arrived, inaction would be ended.

Blotted from the view of men who stood five feet away, The Shadow was prepared to use opportunity when it came.

CHAPTER XV. WORD FROM WITHIN

ASIDE from gaining an advantage place between the barriers of his cell, The Shadow had hoped that word of his imprisonment would reach Jericho. It did; and by a very direct route. Bronden had come upstairs to report immediately after his inspection of The Shadow's cell.

Tallam gave the order that The Shadow was to receive no food for the present. After Bronden had gone, Tallam began to discuss his decision with Barfield. Standing as close to the living room door as he could, Jericho overheard their conversation.

"His early recovery is not surprising," asserted Tallam. "This room has a large cubic area. The vapor did not completely saturate it. I calculated that the effects might pass in about twenty-four hours.

"Logical enough," agreed Barfield, "but since he has recovered, why not feed him? You know how it has worked with the others. The better we treat them for a while, the more they fear another gas treatment."

THE GOLDEN MASKS

Tallam shook his head.

“This prisoner is a different case,” he declared. “Soft treatment will not lessen The Shadow's resistance. He needs another stretch of inactivity. We shall give it to him.”

Tallam opened a small cabinet beside his desk. Inside were knobs, each marked with a number. They corresponded to the cells that held the prisoners. Tallam chose the one that represented The Shadow's cell. He turned the knob.

“Five minutes will suffice,” declared Tallam, tersely. “The cell is filling with gas, enough to render him powerless for twelve hours longer.”

“Unless,” warned Barfield, “he manages to somehow plug the pipes.”

“Impossible,” explained Tallam. “The openings are high on the walls and in the ceiling. They can scarcely be detected, and they are out of reach. Furthermore”—he chuckled as he pointed to a dial above the buttons—“this indicator marks the flow of gas. Any obstruction would produce a zero registration on the dial.”

Confident in his tone, Tallam sat back and watched the indicator; he timed the period by a small clock on his desk. When five minutes had passed, Tallam announced:

“That settles The Shadow for the next twelve hours. There is no possible way in which he could have escaped the charge of gas. Remember, Roger, the vapor will persist until the doors are opened. If our prisoner attempted to hold his breath, he merely postponed the outcome.”

Tallam turned off the knob. The dial dropped to zero. Barfield looked pleased; he liked Tallam's precise methods. The keeping of the prisoners and their treatment was Tallam's task. Barfield served as field general of the Golden Masks.

“Cell five.” Tallam spoke musingly, then turned another knob. “That is where we have Gilden Cleatland, the Texas millionaire. He is supposed to be on a yacht cruise; instead, he is enjoying our hospitality.”

“You are giving him another dose of gas?” inquired Barfield. “I thought we intended to talk to him to-morrow?”

“We shall,” promised Tallam, “but he has experienced too long a recovery. Twelve hours more of helplessness will convince him that it would be wise to forget those oil options.”

“And let us bag the million dollars that they will bring.”

“Precisely. Keep your eye on the clock, Roger, while I watch the dial. Tell me exactly when the five minutes are up.”

JERICHO heard much of this conversation; but he did not grasp its importance during the first two minutes. When the truth dawned upon him, Jericho almost forgot himself. He was on the point of driving into the room; battling it out with Tallam and Barfield. However, he managed to curb himself.

From what Tallam and Barfield had said, Jericho understood that The Shadow was merely being reduced to helplessness, not receiving permanent injury. Since Jericho thought that he would eventually have to manage a rescue entirely on his own, he decided it best to let the present deed be done. Tallam and Barfield would be

THE GOLDEN MASKS

less wary when The Shadow was helpless. That would give Jericho a better opportunity for action.

Moreover, Jericho saw the futility of an attack. Barfield had been immune from Tallam's bullets, while standing in the rear alcove. Chances were that the leaders of the Golden Masks would be safe in the side alcove, where they were at present. Jericho realized that if he attacked, he might be trapped; and his service for The Shadow ended.

When Barfield announced the end of the five minutes, Tallam turned off the knob that controlled the gas jets of Cleatland's cell. His chuckle told that he thought two prisoners were immobile. Barfield thought the same. So, for that matter, did Jericho.

It never occurred to Tallam and Barfield that The Shadow could have chosen a new prison between the doors of his cell. In that air-tight space, he was completely immune to the yellow gas that had filled his larger prison.

Tallam glanced at the desk clock and noted the hour.

"We must leave for the meeting," he told Barfield. "Bronden can remain here as before. Member Gamma will not be missed. We shall have a while to wait at the meeting place."

"Matters will go all right at Jaffley's," assured Barfield. "Ralbot is due there within the next hour."

"Every detail is covered," added Tallam. "Member Epsilon is competent. He will see to it that our new prisoner is shipped to the meeting place."

"The truck is ready," reminded Barfield. "It is stowed in back of the garage by this time. It wasn't wise to let it be seen around Jaffley's house until after dark."

"You put the usual driver on the job?"

"Yes. The fellow who used to handle the cab that brought Member Mu to the meetings. It was best to arrange for him to take the truck to the meeting place, rather than let him know about our headquarters here."

"Quite right. We can bring the prisoner here afterward. Well, Roger, let us start. By this time Freeland Ralbot is on his way to visit Jay Jaffley. Good luck to him."

THE two arose and walked from the living room. Jericho had resumed a slow patrol by the time they arrived in the hall. Tallam spoke a few words in French, ordering the new guard to remain on his present duty. Stolidly, Jericho watched the two men depart toward the rear of the floor.

Jericho quickly guessed that he would not have a long time here alone. Some one would have to take the place of Tallam and Barfield, in this vital center spot. The only man who could act in that capacity was Bronden. He would probably be upstairs within the next five minutes.

Believing that The Shadow was powerless, Jericho saw no chance for immediate gain through a rescue of his chief. He wanted Tallam and Barfield to be well away before he took up that task. But Jericho did see a present opportunity. Stepping into the living room, he went to Tallam's desk, picked up paper and pencil, to scrawl a note.

Jericho remembered what he had heard Tallam and Barfield say. A man named Freeland Ralbot was on his way to visit another named Jay Jaffley. There was a truck hidden behind Jaffley's garage, ready to receive a

THE GOLDEN MASKS

new victim, who would be carried to the meeting place, then here. Jericho put down those facts.

The huge African stepped to the window in back of Tallam's desk. He pressed against the pane, gazed downward into the area beside the house. Close to the window, Jericho knew that he could be seen if any one happened to be watching from below. Tallam had left the desk light burning; it gave sufficient illumination to outline Jericho's form.

Three minutes passed. They were all that Jericho could allow. He hoped that Hawkeye had sneaked along below, that the little spotter had spied him. Taking a chance on it, Jericho tried to open the window. He found that the heavy wooden sashes were bolted into place. The thickness of the glass indicated that it was bulletproof.

Using his full strength, Jericho pressed upward against the lower sash. The bulging of his huge muscles told that they possessed gigantic power. The bolts were too solid, even for Jericho; the woodwork could not stand the strain. It gave a trifle as the bolts resisted. The lower sash moved up a fraction of an inch, the bolts loosening within it.

Jericho did not want to break the sash beyond repair; for it would attract Bronden's attention when the lieutenant arrived. As the sash gave a trifle more, it reached the condition that Jericho required. Though the bolts were still in place, the wood about them had yielded.

Jericho forced the lower sash just far enough upward to produce a slight crack between the sash and the sill. Jericho shoved the note through the space, let it flutter down into the darkness.

Jericho gesticulated at the window; a signal to Hawkeye, should the spotter be below. That done, Jericho eased the sash into its original position. He eyed it, saw that it appeared to be in its solid condition. That meant that Jericho would not have to fight it out with Bronden as soon as the lieutenant arrived. Bronden would think that all was well; he would never guess that the new guard had managed outside contact.

JERICHO returned to the hall; he had spent six minutes in his efforts. Bronden had not arrived. Resuming his stolid pacing, Jericho made ready for the man's appearance. Every time he passed the doorway of the living room Jericho eyed a telephone that rested on Tallam's desk.

He would have liked to make an outside call, to Burbank; but he was not sure that it would be safe. Tallam had so many mechanical arrangements in the house that it was possible he had provided against any unauthorized calls.

Jericho could picture a glimmering light somewhere below, that would tell Bronden if the telephone were in use. Therefore, he decided to depend upon Hawkeye. Jericho had been assured that any signal he made from within the house would be promptly noted.

Unfortunately, Jericho had not fully understood the import of the message that he had sent. He was not to be blamed, for Tallam and Barfield had not been too specific in their conversation. Their mention of Member Epsilon had made their speech somewhat ambiguous. Odd consequences would be due as a result of Jericho's message.

Offsetting that was the fact that other results were due within this very house. They, too, were something that Jericho did not foresee. They concerned The Shadow, whose present plight was far different from the sort that Jericho had pictured.

The Shadow, like Jericho, had counted upon a break. He had forced it, by letting his recovery be noted.

Sidney Tallam, contemptuous of his prisoner, had shot through another blast of paralyzing gas. His partner, Roger Barfield, had witnessed the deed.

The Golden Masks had no suspicion of Jericho; they were totally untroubled about The Shadow. Therefore, they felt full security. Their mental attitude had reached the very state that The Shadow had hoped it would.

CHAPTER XVI. FROM THE DARK

STANDING encased between glass and steel, The Shadow was at that moment watching men who stood in the passage outside his cell. Sidney Tallam and Roger Barfield had reached the underground corridor. They stood in conference with Bronden.

The Shadow's hat brim was pressed in front of his eyes; only the slight up-tilt of his head enabled him to observe the men beyond the glass. At one moment, Barfield glanced in The Shadow's direction; he saw nothing but the blackness beyond the glass.

That was not surprising; for there were men present far keener of sight than any of the Golden Masks. They were two of the Ashanti; Lothkal and the new recruit who had come with Jericho. The Shadow saw Lothkal speak to the new tribesman, as if instructing him. The Shadow knew that the man was a newcomer.

That meant that Jericho was quite likely to be within the house, since Seeklat had obtained at least one new guard.

Tallam, as he spoke to Bronden, gestured toward two cells. One was The Shadow's. Bronden nodded his understanding. Carrying suitcases, Tallam and Barfield made their departure along the underground passage.

Bronden gave an order to Lothkal. The Ashanti went to the cell that Tallam had first indicated. It was the one that held Cleatland, the wealthy Texan. Bronden pulled one switch; the glass door slid back. He pulled the second switch to open the steel barrier. Darkness showed beyond the gap; Bronden entered and found the light. When he turned it on, The Shadow could see a sprawled figure on a cot.

Cleatland had evidently been asleep, with the light out, when the new shock of gas had overpowered him. Bronden ordered Lothkal to remain at the open doors while the cell cleared of gas. He showed Lothkal his watch; tapped it, to indicate the time that the doors were to remain open.

About to walk away, Bronden pointed to The Shadow's cell and made another remark to Lothkal. Bronden headed in the direction of the house; The Shadow promptly guessed the reason for the remark. He knew that Tallam had poured gas into the cell that he had left.

Soon, The Shadow's cell would be opened; if the same process took place, the glass door would slide first. That would leave The Shadow free. Time lingered, however; it was fully fifteen minutes before Lothkal closed the doors.

The Ashanti could apparently tell time quite well without a watch. Moreover, he seemed to expect Bronden's return. If Bronden came back before The Shadow's cell was opened, it would mean a battle with three fighters: Bronden and the two Ashanti. Eyeing the huge Africans, The Shadow saw heavy odds ahead. He hoped that Jericho might manage to come along with Bronden.

WHILE The Shadow considered these possibilities, a different one took place. Lothkal stopped by The Shadow's door, waited there impatiently. Finally, he spoke to the new Ashanti, told the recruit to go upstairs and find Bronden. Lothkal held up five fingers and the Ashanti nodded. Lothkal had signified a number of

THE GOLDEN MASKS

minutes.

The recruit went from the passage. Lothkal stood stolid and immobile, staring toward the closed doors of Cleatland's cell. The Shadow timed the minutes with his slow drawn breaths. At the end of five, Lothkal stirred. The Ashanti had counted the time interval almost exactly with The Shadow.

Lothkal scowled, seeing no sign of the recruit's return. He swung toward The Shadow's cell, placed a huge hand upon the switch that controlled the glass door. Lothkal waited, allowing almost a minute more. His hand seemed reluctant to pull the switch; but finally his hesitation ended. Lothkal started the glass door on its opening slide.

The Ashanti was looking straight toward the barriers as the glass one opened. The removal of the reflecting surface gave him a chance to observe The Shadow, for the darkness was less intense when the glass was gone. In fact, Lothkal did see The Shadow; but his first glimpse came an instant late.

Just as the glass edge cleared him, The Shadow swung outward. His period of immobility was ended. He snapped to action with the power of a long-held spring. Whipping forward, he shot his cloaked arms toward Lothkal. Viselike fingers gripped the Ashanti's throat before the fellow knew what was upon him.

That first advantage was vital to The Shadow. The fight that followed proved it. Weaponless, The Shadow had attacked a formidable battler, who towered a full head above him. Lothkal had more than sixty pounds of additional weight. Moreover, he was schooled to bare-handed combat. Ignoring the grip upon his throat, Lothkal seized The Shadow's shoulders, swept his cloaked adversary in the air. He tried to fling The Shadow across the passage. He would have succeeded, but for a quick move of The Shadow's left foot. Flying wide, The Shadow hooked Lothkal's right knee.

THAT changed the combat. The Shadow had literally climbed up to the Ashanti's height; and Lothkal could no longer shake him off. Desperately, Lothkal performed a sidewise roll, flung himself to the floor of the passage, in hope of crushing The Shadow beneath him. He was doubly foiled.

Not only did The Shadow maintain his hold; he kicked his foot free as they fell. As Lothkal crashed face forward to the stone, The Shadow escaped his weight with a sidewise twist. The only hold that he retained was that merciless clutch upon Lothkal's windpipe.

Lothkal lashed about like a huge crocodile. The Shadow clung, twisting his opponent's head at will. Lothkal's eyes bulged; big veins formed streaks upon his forehead. He grabbed The Shadow with both his hamlike hands, hoisted him straight upward in the air. The Shadow scaled feet first; but Lothkal could not fling him away.

The Shadow's burning eyes met the Ashanti's s bulging gaze. Gloved fingers jabbed harder, deeper. Lothkal rolled, relaxed suddenly. It was his last trick and it partially succeeded. The Shadow's sideslipping weight caused him to loosen his hold for the first time. It was Lothkal's opportunity; had he made the most of it, the odds would have been his. But Lothkal tried to gain the edge too quickly.

As he twisted his head sidewise, he hoisted up on one shoulder, shot a big hand in to grip The Shadow's fingers. Instead of trying to regain his grip, The Shadow let Lothkal's hand intervene, then jabbed both his own hands forward with all his weight behind them.

Lothkal's head bobbed backward; his skull cracked against the stone wall of the passage. Even that jolt could not stun the giant Ashanti; but it shook him. His hand slipped away; The Shadow's fingers instantly regained their former hold, to begin another grind.

THE GOLDEN MASKS

HALF a minute later, Lothkal subsided. The Shadow arose and viewed his prone enemy. He had all but choked Lothkal to death, for the big fighter had resisted to almost the final moment. The Shadow observed that Lothkal was still alive; he had reason to suppose that the Ashanti would soon recuperate.

The Shadow pulled the switch that controlled the steel door of his cell. Grabbing Lothkal's body, The Shadow hauled the unconscious fighter through the doorway. Holding his breath, The Shadow hunched Lothkal face downward; yanking off his cloak, he threw it over the Ashanti's body and tossed the slouch hat to the floor beside him.

Taking a breath as he reached the passage, The Shadow sniffed the strong, sweetish gas that was coming from the cell. He closed the doors quickly, so that the remaining fumes would be sufficient to overpower Lothkal. That accomplished, The Shadow eased against the wall, to recover from the effects of his battle. The struggle against Lothkal had stiffened him, for he had exerted all the strength that he possessed in holding that neck clamp.

It was a few minutes before The Shadow could decide upon his next move. There was no sign of Bronden or the Ashanti recruit. Though neither would prove as formidable as Lothkal, The Shadow could see no wisdom in waiting for a double struggle so soon after his tiring fray with Lothkal. If Jericho came with them, it would put the situation in The Shadow's favor; but The Shadow was not sure that he could count on Jericho's arrival.

The Shadow looked at the doors of other cells. Beyond them were prisoners who needed release, but some were at present paralyzed by gas. If The Shadow opened those doors, he would have to call upon the men who were fit to carry out those who were not.

All this would mean immediate hazard. Any moment, some arriving Ashanti might give an alarm. Meanwhile, Tallam and Barfield were on their way to plot new evil with the other Golden Masks. As he considered the situation, The Shadow saw where he held a marked advantage.

His victory over Lothkal; his planting of the victim in the cell might keep Bronden lulled, until the return of Tallam and Barfield. Nothing would happen to the men in the cells. The best plan was to take up the trail of the men who headed the Golden Masks. If Jericho were here in the house, The Shadow could learn that fact better by making outside contact than by attempting to find Jericho himself. Present moments were precious; for they gave The Shadow a last opportunity to depart before Bronden or others arrived.

CLOAKLESS, hatless, wearing the garb of Cranston, The Shadow hurried along the passage, following the direction that Tallam and Barfield had followed. He came to a closed door, found the switch that controlled it. Opening the barrier, The Shadow descended to a narrower, lower passage; and closed the door behind him.

The new passage ran for more than a hundred yards, with several short turns, and occasional flights of steps. Its width varied, as did its height; the lights that illuminated it were very few in number. At times, the walls changed from brick to stone; their condition was not always the same. These clues explained its construction.

The passage had been hewn between the foundations of old buildings in the back streets. Tallam had probably picked the course, through a study of the neighborhood, and had put Ashanti servitors to work. How long the job had required, The Shadow could not tell; but it must have taken several months and the feat was a remarkable one.

Nothing had been neglected. Certain walls had been patched, so that they would not fall through into the cellars of houses. Where the passage crossed streets, it dipped, to avoid water mains and gas pipes. The Ashanti must have been patient as well as capable in order to complete this long burrow.

THE GOLDEN MASKS

However, The Shadow had long since decided that Tallam held them in a state of awe. Under the direction of a man whose power they dreaded, it was not surprising that they had finished their assigned task.

The Shadow reached a final turn; the passage widened to form a small square room. Despite his cautious tread, The Shadow clicked a loose stone; before he could halt, a huge man stepped into view from beyond a corner of the room.

The fellow was an Ashanti guard, dressed in leather shirt and leopard skin. He held a sturdy war spear, with a sharp point; he had the weapon at shoulder level, the instant that he appeared. Long fingers gripped the spear; an arm was ready to drive the pike straight for The Shadow's body.

Attack would have been useless. A feint was almost hopeless. One move; one step forward, The Shadow would have been an instant victim. Stopping where he was, The Shadow still stood in danger. The Ashanti was giving him brief moments only. That time space was sufficient. It made The Shadow know that the guard's action was a challenge.

In the calm tone of Cranston, The Shadow spoke the first word that Sulgate had mentioned as a countersign:

“Ashanti.”

The jungle-garbed guard half lowered his spear. Meeting the Ashanti's gaze, The Shadow added:

“Kumasi.”

The Ashanti turned to a metal door. Above it, The Shadow saw a wired object that looked like a loud-speaker. The guard drew a large bolt, pulled the handle of the door and slid the barrier aside. The Shadow strolled through, came into a small stone room. He heard the door slide shut behind him.

Outside of a few battered chairs, the room had no other furniture. There was a slope in the corner that denoted a flight of stairs; and The Shadow saw a small closet beneath the slant. He opened the door; probing deep in darkness, he found wires and touched a tiny round microphone that was set in the baseboard.

Any one coming into this room from outside could gain admission through to the passage quite easily. He had only to open the door of the closet and speak the word: Ashanti; followed by Kumasi. The guard would hear and open the metal barrier.

Because of visits from Barfield and Bronden, with other persons in prospect, Tallam had instructed the distant guard to pass any one who gave the countersign. That had served The Shadow well; by avoiding battle with the outside guard, he had again managed to keep his escape unknown.

THERE was a door in the far wall of the room that The Shadow had reached. Passing through it, he found himself in the rear of an old garage, which was only about half filled with cars.

A partition cut off this empty section of the garage; and there was a back door that could be reached without going past the cars. The Shadow chose that secluded exit; reaching a street, he took survey of his whereabouts. He knew the neighborhood well enough to recognize that he was almost two blocks from Tallam's house.

With swift strides, The Shadow made in the direction of the brownstone house. There was no need for stealth, for this neighborhood was unwatched. It was not until he turned the corner of Marview Place that The Shadow slackened his stride.

THE GOLDEN MASKS

He saw Moe's cab at the hack stand across the street; he was about to head for it when he noted a hunched figure edging out from beside Tallam's mansion. Close to the wall of another building, The Shadow made a half a dozen quick strides. A wizened face turned suddenly toward The Shadow; a quick hand jabbed to a jacket pocket.

The Shadow caught the moving arm; in hissed tone, he gave the command:

“Report.”

Eyes blinked both wonderment and delight. The Shadow had encountered Hawkeye; the spotter was completely flabbergasted to find his chief at large.

For a moment, he could not speak; then, flattened against the wall, he whispered hoarsely.

“I got a tip from Jericho,” the spotter told The Shadow. “Shot it to Burbank; he sent Vincent on the job. Here it is.”

Hawkeye pushed Jericho's message into The Shadow's hand. Pocketing the paper, The Shadow ordered the spotter to join him in the cab. Both took a separate course; they arrived almost without notice. Moe heard the opening of a door, however; he turned around, then gave an audible gasp as he heard The Shadow's hissed whisper.

The Shadow ordered Moe to drive to the garage two blocks away. As they rode past the lighted corner, he held Jericho's message to the window; read it by the light of the street corner. The cab reached the garage and stopped there. The Shadow ordered Hawkeye to leave the cab and keep watch near the rear door of the garage.

As soon as Hawkeye had left, the cab rolled away. Upon the seat, he discovered a bag which he knew contained hat, cloak and guns. Burbank had ordered Moe to carry this new outfit in readiness. No matter what plight The Shadow might find, Burbank always anticipated his return.

The cab reached a corner drug store. The Shadow alighted, entered the store and went to a telephone booth. He dialed Burbank's number. A methodical voice responded:

“Burbank speaking.”

“Report.”

THE SHADOW'S whispered word did not astonish Burbank. Stationed for long intervals in a hidden contact post, handling the threads that linked The Shadow with his active agents, Burbank was too methodical to be astonished. It was his task to move the active agents during intervals when The Shadow was unable to give instructions.

“Vincent has gone to Jaffley's,” stated Burbank, taking it for granted that The Shadow had already learned of Jericho's message. “Address 810 Shore Road, Silverbrook, Long Island. Telephone temporarily disconnected. Impossible to communicate with Jay Jaffley, except by personal call.”

The Shadow questioned Burbank as to the time of Vincent's departure. He learned that the agent had left fifteen minutes before, in his own car. Briefly, The Shadow gave new instructions to Burbank; told him to have agents in readiness for new action. That done, The Shadow came from the drug store.

His leisurely manner ceased the moment that he boarded the cab. His call was for speed, and Moe gave it.

THE GOLDEN MASKS

The cab wheeled eastward, headed for the nearest East River bridge. It was bound for Silverbrook, a Long Island suburb within the New York City limits. Moe could reach Jaffley's within the next half an hour.

Temporarily, The Shadow had dropped Sidney Tallam and Roger Barfield, the insidious chieftains who ruled the Golden Masks. They could come later; for the present, The Shadow was faring forth to block a scheme of crime. Alone, Harry Vincent might fail. He had gone to carry a warning to a victim threatened by the Golden Masks. That was not enough.

Knowing the insidious measures of which the Golden Masks were capable, The Shadow saw the need of action. Moreover, in his brief reading of Jericho's note, he had found its details meager. Much might be beneath the surface of the scheduled episode at Jay Jaffley's Long Island residence.

The Shadow knew. He had been at grips with the leaders of the Golden Masks. He knew their subtle methods. The Shadow alone could offset the strategy of the Golden Masks. From the dark, he had struck to gain escape. From the dark, The Shadow would strike again.

CHAPTER XVII. THE COMING VICTIM

AT the very time when The Shadow was starting his swift trip to Long Island, a coupe pulled up in front of Jay Jaffley's home at Silverbrook. The young man who alighted from the car was Harry Vincent. The Shadow's agent had made an unusually rapid trip to his destination.

Harry had started from the Hotel Metrolite, in New York; he had been there, temporarily off duty, when he had received Burbank's call. Harry's coupe had been outside the hotel; he had taken a direct street to an East River bridge. On the Long Island side, he had caught traffic at an ebb. As a result, Harry had not lost a single minute in his trip.

As he viewed Jaffley's house, Harry recalled certain facts that Burbank had given him over the telephone. At his contact post, Burbank kept stacks of reference books from which he could obtain needed information. The contact man had gained data concerning Jay Jaffley and Freeland Ralbot, for both were men of some prominence.

Jaffley rated high. He was an insurance man of considerable standing. Ralbot, on the contrary, was a promoter of questionable record. Several of his enterprises had been investigated; and although Ralbot had been cleared in every case, he was not the sort to be accepted with full confidence.

Therefore, Harry had formed a definite idea of the set-up. Jay Jaffley, a wealthy man of a conservative type, was to receive a visit from Freeland Ralbot, a man of doubtful character. Secret steps had been taken to post a truck in back of Jaffley's garage; in readiness to receive a captured victim. Unquestionably, underlings who served the Golden Masks would be on hand to make the seizure.

Noting the secluded situation of Jaffley's house, Harry saw how easy it would be for a man like Ralbot to take Jaffley unaware. Aided by a strong-arm crew, Ralbot would have no trouble carrying Jaffley from the house. Harry pictured Jaffley as another Lengerton, due for serious trouble if he failed to accept the terms offered by the Golden Masks.

There were no cars in front of the house. Harry took it for granted that Ralbot had not arrived. Knowing that time was short, Harry went directly to the front door and rang the bell. He was admitted by a butler, who nodded when Harry asked if Mr. Jaffley was at home. Harry gave his name; the butler went away and returned to announce that Jaffley would see him.

THE GOLDEN MASKS

HARRY found the insurance man in an enclosed sun parlor near the rear of the house. Jaffley was short of stature, keen-eyed and dark-haired. He received Harry with an affable handshake; but it was apparent that he wondered why this stranger had come here. Harry waited until the butler was gone, then opened conversation.

“Mr. Jaffley,” he said, “I understand that you expect a visit from a man named Freeland Ralbot.”

Jaffley nodded. His face looked puzzled. He seemed to wonder how this visitor had learned of to-night's appointment.

“I suppose that Ralbot will be here shortly,” resumed Harry. “Therefore, I should like to give you a warning before his arrival. The man is not to be trusted.”

Jaffley smiled indulgently. He seemed to be impressed by Harry's clean-cut appearance and obvious sincerity. Otherwise, he might have displayed anger at Harry's blunt statements.

“I know all about Ralbot,” remarked Jaffley. “The fellow has a doubtful past. Men like myself have invested in his enterprises, and have lost money doing so. I do not intend to make a similar error. I thank you for your warning, Mr. Vincent; but unless you have new and startling information regarding Ralbot, we will simply waste time in discussing him.”

Harry took the opening that Jaffley's statement offered.

“I have new facts,” declared The Shadow's agent, slowly. “Startling ones, too. Freeland Ralbot is more than an ordinary swindler. He is linked with a criminal band that has managed to evade the law in all its operations.”

The insurance man registered intense interest.

“Let me mention the most recent case,” declared Harry, making his tone more brisk. “A shipping man named James Lengerton was forced, under threat, to dispose of a million dollars' worth of air-line stocks. Lengerton has disappeared; his secretary was murdered.”

“I know!” exclaimed Jaffley. Then, in a startled, tone: “You believe that Ralbot was responsible?”

“Not necessarily,” returned Harry. “But I believe that he is linked with the organization that threatened Lengerton. Tell me, Mr. Jaffley; have you received any veiled threats from an unknown source?”

“None at all.”

“Then Ralbot is probably the missionary of the group in question. He will make the threats.”

“If he does, I shall turn him over to the law.”

Jaffley spoke with assurance. His smile showed a contempt for any threat that Ralbot might make. Harry saw need to play a stronger hand.

“The threats will come,” he promised, “but Ralbot will probably be cagey enough to insist that he is acting against his will. He will deliver an ultimatum from the criminal band. If you refuse it, you will suffer.”

Jaffley laughed; his tone showed disbelief and annoyance. He acted as though he took Harry for a crank.

THE GOLDEN MASKS

“Tell me then, Mr. Vincent,” suggested the insurance man. “If such an organization exists, what is the name of it? And how could such a band manage to harm me? Why do you think that they would strike immediately? Answer those questions, and perhaps I may believe you.”

HARRY hesitated a moment; then, realizing that Ralbot might arrive at any minute, he staked everything on a complete reply.

“The organization is called the Golden Masks,” he declared solemnly. “It is composed of criminals who have harmed others, and can, therefore, molest you. As proof that the Golden Masks intend to strike to-night, you will find a truck hidden in back of your garage, ready to carry you away if necessary.”

Harry's words hit home. Jaffley came to his feet in alarm. He started to call a servant. Harry halted him.

“I would not advise sending men to the garage,” warned Harry. “A dangerous squad may be posted there. Your best step, Mr. Jaffley, is to leave here at once. Tell your servants that you will return shortly, that you want Ralbot to wait for you. You can go with me, in my car. We can call the police, have them capture Ralbot and his crew.”

Jaffley nodded, then paused. He eyed Harry sharply, then questioned:

“Just how do you think Ralbot would work his game?”

Harry decided that a prompt answer would be the best method to convince Jaffley that departure was necessary.

“He will blackmail you,” Harry told the insurance man. “That is the method that was used with Lengerton and others. Ralbot may know something that you would prefer to have forgotten.”

Jaffley shook his head emphatically.

“My past is entirely clear,” he declared. “That could not be Ralbot's method, Mr. Vincent.”

“Then he will simply demand a sum of money—”

“Wrong again, Mr. Vincent. Your answers do not fit the circumstances. I suppose you think that Ralbot approached me regarding his visit here tonight?”

“Of course.”

“The case is quite the opposite.” Jaffley's smile became hard. “Ralbot's visit is of my arrangement. He is coming here with cash and stacks of securities, which he intends to show me as proof that he is worthy to be my partner in a huge enterprise.

“When Ralbot arrives”—Jaffley reached to a table and picked up a small folio, from which papers protruded—“I shall show him these. Ralbot will read confidential reports and affidavits concerning some of his past promotions. These papers are faked; but Ralbot may not suspect it.”

Laying the folio aside, Jaffley indulged in a harsh laugh.

“Freeland Ralbot will either turn over to me the quarter of a million that he has with him,” declared Jaffley, “or he will become a victim. You are right, Mr. Vincent, when you say that the Golden Masks are dangerous,

THE GOLDEN MASKS

that they have made arrangements to carry away a victim. But I shall not become the prisoner. The man who will be taken is—”

“Freeland Ralbot!”

EJACULATING the name, Harry came to his feet. In an instant he had seen through the game. It was Jaffley, not Ralbot, who worked with the Golden Masks! The whole situation was the reverse of the one that Harry had pictured!

With Jaffley at their service, the Golden Masks had the edge on Ralbot. Jaffley was a man with a high reputation, falsely built. Ralbot was one upon whom doubt had been cast. No one would ever suspect that Jaffley, man of supposed integrity, had been instrumental in an attack upon a person of Ralbot's poor repute.

Just as The Shadow had walked into trouble with Barfield and Tallam, so had Harry entered a mesh by this visit to Jaffley. With his quick realization, Harry saw need for fast action. He jabbed his hand to his coat pocket, gripped an automatic with his fingers. His only chance was to whip out a gun and cover Jaffley before the crook could move.

Harry never pulled the weapon. As Jaffley leaned back to deliver a disdainful laugh, two husky servants pounced through from the house door. Jaffley had witnessed their sneaky arrival, while Harry had not. The brawny pair was upon The Shadow's agent before Harry could bring his hand from his pocket.

Though his arms were clipped from in back, Harry put up a fierce struggle. He twisted half free, dragged his foemen in Jaffley's direction. Then Jaffley himself came into the fray. He jabbed stout hands for Harry's throat, choked the prisoner into submission while the others stopped Harry's flaying arms.

As he sank back in the grip of his captors, Harry saw Jaffley step to a cabinet at the side of the porch. From it, the crook brought a huge glass jar inverted, and with a rubber-sheeted bottom. A coiled hose unwound as Jaffley came toward Harry.

While the servants gripped their victim, Jaffley clamped the jar over Harry's head. Rubber edges rubbed against Harry's face, then formed a collar about his neck. Another servant arrived to steady the glass jar while Harry tried to struggle. Jaffley sprang back to the cabinet, pulled a lever there.

Gas hissed about Harry's ears. His nostrils scented a strong, sweetish odor. The scene faded in a cloud of yellowish vapor which swirled before Harry's eyes. Through it, he caught glimpses of Jaffley's leering countenance; he could see the grinning faces of the servants who held him.

WEAKNESS followed. Harry's whole body seemed paralyzed. His eyes bulged; they could stare, but he could not move them. His neck loosened; Harry's head thumped the inside of the glass jar. He could not feel the thud.

Yellow blurred his eyes; he was lost in a swirling chaos. Harry's sense of time was gone; the period that followed seemed interminable, for Harry had no way of measuring the minutes that passed.

Actually, the time of Harry's ordeal was short; for Jay Jaffley was in a hurry to dispose of this victim. The dark-haired man choked off the gas within four minutes after the flow had begun. Jaffley gauged his action by watching for the sag of Harry's body.

Once the gas was off, Jaffley wasted no additional time. He ordered the man who held the cylinder to lift it. Away it came; the servants cleared it by spreading the rubber bottom. The gas that drifted out was quickly

THE GOLDEN MASKS

absorbed by the air of the enclosed porch.

Hurriedly, Jaffley replaced the cylinder in its cabinet, along with the coils of hose. Harry, his eyes fixed in a rigid stare, could see the events that followed. Though his body seemed nonexistent, his mind was clear. He heard the order that Jaffley gave.

“Take him out to the truck,” rasped the self-admitted crook. “Tell the driver to take him to the appointed place, then return at once. There will be another man for him to carry.”

The servants lugged Harry through the door to the house, choosing that route to gain a back door that led outside. Propped between two huskies, Harry was no burden. His legs dragged, walking almost of their own accord, as Lengerton's had done that night when he had been removed from his office. Like Tallam and Barfield on that other night, Jaffley watched the victim's departure.

Standing with one servant still beside him, Jaffley listened. Soon, he heard the throb of the truck's motor. In less than fifteen minutes after his arrival at this house, Harry Vincent was being carried away, a prisoner of the Golden Masks.

The truck's motor faded into the distance. As the sound ended, a new noise came. It was the tingle of the front door bell. With a hard grin, Jaffley turned to the servant beside him.

“It is Freeland Ralbot,” remarked Jaffley. “Admit him and bring him here at once.”

As the servant left to obey, Jaffley's hard manner altered. Once again, he was smugly pleasant, as he awaited his next victim. Jay Jaffley felt sure that the leaders of the Golden Masks would express their full approval of Member Epsilon's smooth work to-night.

CHAPTER XVIII. THE ASHANTI MASK

HARDLY had Jay Jaffley seated himself beside the sun-porch table when the servant reappeared, bringing a portly, gray-haired man. Jaffley looked up to see a pudgy, wide-smiling countenance. He recognized Freeland Ralbot. Jaffley arose to shake hands with the visitor.

Ralbot looked the part of a glib promoter. He was jolly, affable, warm with his handshake. He placed a briefcase beside his chair, sat down and began to put an unnecessary apology for being late.

“I just left a big conference,” confided Ralbot. “Whatever your proposition is, Mr. Jaffley, I can line up half a dozen investors who will be waving money in their fists. Stock promotion is my specialty.”

“So I understand,” remarked Jaffley, in a dry tone. “I have heard a great deal regarding your former enterprises.”

Ralbot showed a flicker of worry, then shook his head and smiled.

“They didn't all pan out,” he admitted. “When a big deal falls through, there are always squawks. I didn't make it a practice to be too particular in choosing investors. Some of them talked big, then didn't put up money when it was needed. Whenever a proposition flopped, they blamed it on me.”

“I understand.”

“I know you do, Mr. Jaffley.” Ralbot spoke in a tone of real sincerity. “That's why I agreed to put up a quarter

THE GOLDEN MASKS

of a million of my own money, to match the amount you've promised. With half a million as a starter, we can get plenty more investors interested in this new mutual insurance company. Insurance is your business. You stand high in that line."

Ralbot paused to motion toward the briefcase.

"The funds are there," he told Jaffley. "The total profits from all of my promotions that turned out successfully. I'm putting it all in your hands. Just give me full receipt; and sign our business agreement. If—"

Jaffley waved an interruption. A servant had stopped by the door; he could hear the others coming into the house.

"You have the key to my coupe?" queried Jaffley, speaking to the servant. Then, as the man nodded: "Very well. Drive it into the garage. Return here afterward."

As the servant went away, Jaffley turned to Ralbot, to ask:

"Did you drive here?"

"I came by train," replied Jaffley. "A cab brought me up from the station. Say—it's great out here in the country. Fresh air everywhere."

He paused to sniff; his fatty forehead furrowed.

"You must have some fine flower beds, Mr. Jaffley," remarked Ralbot. "There seems to be a perfume in this sun porch."

"Yes," agreed Jaffley, with a slight smile. "You must come here in the daytime, Mr. Ralbot. The flower gardens are magnificent. But let us get back to business, Mr. Ralbot. Before we proceed further, I want you to look over these."

JAFFLEY handed Ralbot the folio that was on the table. The promoter drew out papers with his pudgy hands, began to study the documents. His gaze narrowed; his lips stiffened as they lost their smile.

"These are lies!" exclaimed Ralbot. "I never swindled the investors who put money into those Pacific Coast companies! I can disprove every statement!"

"Some of those are signed affidavits," remarked Jaffley, indicating certain papers. "Look them over more carefully."

"The men who signed them have committed perjury!" stormed Ralbot. "These are lies, I tell you!"

"What if they were made public?" queried Jaffley, in a speculative tone. "Do you think they would help us in the promotion of a new insurance company?"

"Of course not," retorted Ralbot. "But there is no need to make them public. They would cause me annoyance, of course."

"I see. Then they would just about ruin any new promotion that you might undertake."

Ralbot chewed his fattish lips. He saw Jaffley's point. Spiking these charges would be a difficult task; one

THE GOLDEN MASKS

that might not work out to Ralbot's benefit. Jaffley emphasized it.

"If the signers of these affidavits appeared in court," he told Ralbot, "and stood by their sworn statements, the burden would be thrown on you. Perhaps those men believe that they were swindled. I think that a jury would be inclined to stand by them. Of course, if we could manage to get new affidavits from the same persons, repudiating those, matters would be better. Similarly, I think that the confidential reports could be forgotten."

"Maybe you're right," admitted Ralbot. "You want me to settle these matters before we go ahead with our new promotion. Very well. Twenty or thirty thousand dollars would do it. I can scrape that together, without touching the quarter million that I am turning over to you."

"You misunderstand me," returned Jaffley. "The terms are these, Mr. Ralbot. You can keep these affidavits and reports. I shall obtain retractions and forward them to you. Everything will be perfectly smoothed, out of the money that you leave with me to-night."

"About twenty thousand dollars of it?"

"No, no. All of the quarter million. It is quite simple, Mr. Ralbot. I keep your funds, but give you no receipt. You leave here, a bit wiser than before you came. Wise enough, in fact, to say nothing about the matter—"

Ralbot bellowed an interruption as he came to his feet. He shook a fat fist in Jaffley's face.

"This is a holdup!" roared Ralbot. "You're a crook, Jaffley, but you can't get away with it! I'm too wise for you! There are securities here that need my signature for proper transfer—"

"So I supposed," interposed Jaffley. "Of course, you will sign them?"

"Never! No threat can make me do so!"

Jaffley snapped his fingers. His three servants appeared with precision. Ralbot turned clumsily about, gaped as he saw the strong-arm crew in the wide doorway.

"Will you sign over your securities, Mr. Ralbot?"

"No." Ralbot scowled the retort, in reply to Jaffley's question. "You can't thug me into it, Jaffley. If this mob of yours murders me, the law will know that something is wrong. You'll never cash that stuff, Jaffley. It will be too hot for you."

"You will be persuaded later," remarked Jaffley. "Fortunately, I know that you have wisely refrained from telling any one that you had business with me. I know a form of treatment that makes men glad to do as they are told, and keep quiet into the bargain."

ANOTHER snap of Jaffley's fingers. As one, the three servants sprang upon the pudgy man. They buckled Ralbot's arms behind him, stifled the cries that he tried to give. Two were enough to hold Ralbot. The third servant produced the gas cylinder. Jaffley nodded for them to proceed. Calmly, he walked into the house.

Purple of face Ralbot collapsed before the cylinder was clamped over his beefy head. He was no match for the men who grappled with him; the two who held him were actually propping his shaky body when the third applied the big glass jar. Substituting for Jaffley, that third servant turned on the gas. A new supply of the yellowish anesthetic enveloped Ralbot's head. The servants gave good measure. Five minutes were gone before the cylinder was lifted. Two men still supported Ralbot; the third drew away the big glass.

THE GOLDEN MASKS

Ugly-faced, Jaffley's servitors surveyed their handiwork, jesting as they looked at Ralbot's bulgy eyes, which formed a ludicrous sight as they stared from above the victim's fatty cheeks.

The man with the cylinder turned away, just as the others swung Ralbot about. He chanced to observe the inner door before the others. The gulp that he gave was so sudden that it halted the others in alarm. They saw their comrade staring with a glassy gaze that was as fixed as Ralbot's. For a moment, they thought that he had received a dose of the paralyzing gas.

Then their own eyes bulged.

This trio had expected Jaffley to return. Instead, an intruder had stepped from the house door. He had come like a ghost, this invader, and his garb made him appear as a being from another plane. He was cloaked in black from head to foot.

Jaffley's minions were faced by The Shadow. Eyes burned upon them. Looming automatics displayed their yawning muzzles.

A hissed command told crooks to stand as they were. The two who held Ralbot trembled; the bulky man slipped slowly from their clutch, to flop in huddled fashion on the floor. The third man was shaky; the glass cylinder nearly clattered from his hands. The Shadow stepped forward, to back him to the table.

The Shadow gestured with a gun; trembling, the servant turned to set down the cylinder. The jar gave a clang as it thumped upon the table. The glass delivered a sharp echo; it was that resonant sound that changed the situation.

The peculiar clang drowned another noise; that of approaching footsteps. The Shadow did not hear them for the moment. He was an instant late when he sensed the approach of danger. The Shadow wheeled about, in the very midst of his three foemen, to see another enemy coming from the house door.

It was Jay Jaffley. He had arrived, carrying a suitcase with him. At sight of The Shadow, Jaffley had leaped forward. The bag bounded from his hand and fell to the floor; with his other fist, Jaffley whipped forth a revolver from his pocket.

JAFFLEY'S attack was instinctive. Another fighter might have depended on his gun alone, or made a bare-handed forward spring. The Shadow could have frustrated either form of attack. But Jaffley's double mode of action put The Shadow at a disadvantage.

For the instant, he could risk neither a quick shot nor a grapple. The Shadow faded; in so doing, he sidestepped almost into the arms of the men who had dropped Ralbot. He twisted, expecting to be away before they saw their opportunity to fall upon him. A hoarse shout from Jaffley inspired them to action.

One from each side, the bruisers grabbed for The Shadow's arms. Each was lucky enough to gain a hold. As they wrested The Shadow back, his gun hands swung up; the weapons pointed above Jaffley's head. With a snarl, Jaffley aimed; his men bent at The Shadow's arms, to poise their prisoner in front of Jaffley's gun.

The Shadow doubled as the grip tightened. He lunged forward; his feet swung up from the floor. Jaffley, jabbing his gun close to The Shadow's chest, was at the very spot The Shadow wanted him to be.

As the weight of his body lurched him from the clutching servants, The Shadow hit Jaffley's shoulder, feet foremost. His body had the drive of a battering ram. Jaffley spun about, hit the floor. His revolver clattered away.

THE GOLDEN MASKS

Coming to hands and knees, Jaffley saw his gun lying six feet distant. Twisting into a sprawl, The Shadow was throwing his body upon the weapon, hauling the men who grasped him. They were stumbling with their temporary prisoner. Neither one dared to loosen his grip.

The third servant had dived for the corner where the cabinet stood. He was reaching in his pocket for a revolver. Jaffley saw the futility of shots while The Shadow was twisted in a struggle with two men who were too valuable to lose. He roared a command to the man at the cabinet, telling him to start the gas.

The servant obeyed. Jaffley seized the glass cylinder; he pounced toward The Shadow, coming low, to avoid the gun muzzles that still pointed upward. Gripped tightly, The Shadow was motionless for the moment. Jaffley saw his chance to jam the hissing cylinder over the head that wore the slouch hat. With a long sweep of his arms, Jaffley brought the big jar forward.

With a hand that was tight against his body, The Shadow pressed the trigger of an automatic. His aim was not for Jaffley; he fired at a closer target. Tilted at the upward angle of a howitzer, The Shadow's .45 was set for a mark it could not miss.

Flame tongued straight for the glass-filled cylinder. A bullet crashed the rounded object, shattered it in Jaffley's very grasp. Glass clattered everywhere; chunks pummeled The Shadow's hat as he ducked his head. Large slivers rattled about Jaffley as the dark-haired crook sprang back with a loud cry. Unlike the barriers that were in Sidney Tallam's house, the glass jar was not shatterproof. The Golden Masks had not foreseen a catastrophe such as this. In one well-chosen shot, The Shadow had changed the entire fray.

Like Jaffley, the men who grappled with The Shadow tried to avoid the chunks of flying glass. It was an instinctive move on their part—one that The Shadow himself might have performed, had he not known that the smash was to come. In that brief falter, the servants lost their hold upon The Shadow; for his lurch was a forward one.

The only man who could have stopped The Shadow was the servant by the cabinet. He not only saw the cloaked fighter snap upward, free and ready for battle; he spied the end of the hose that had been attached to the gas cylinder. From it, a sweep of yellow vapor was pouring into the confines of the enclosed porch.

THE fellow tried to perform two actions at once. He aimed for The Shadow with his gun; with his other hand, he grabbed for the valve that controlled the gas. Hastily, he snapped the revolver trigger; a bullet sizzled six inches wide of The Shadow's cloaked shoulder. That one shot was the servant's last chance.

The Shadow stabbed a reply. His bullet clipped the man's gun arm; sent the rogue spinning to the floor, howling as he fell. The wounded man forgot the lever on the cabinet. The flow of gas maintained its hiss.

The two men who had grappled with The Shadow were coming to their feet, while Jaffley dived to regain his lost revolver. The Shadow drove directly toward his foemen. As the first tried to grab him, bare-fisted, The Shadow sprawled him with a sledgelike blow from an automatic. The other servant stopped halfway to his feet, yanking a revolver, to aim. The Shadow beat him to the shot, winged his shoulder with a scalding bullet.

Only Jaffley remained. He had taken his revolver on a pick-up; he had the gun leveled as he swung about in the doorway. Jaffley hoped to drop The Shadow, then take to flight. He saw The Shadow spinning toward the wall, almost beside him. They were separated only by the width of a door that was opened outward, flat against the wall of the sun porch.

Gripping an automatic, The Shadow's left hand had reached the wall to stop his spin. His right was still aiming its gun toward the man whom he had wounded. Instead of pausing to aim, The Shadow hooked the

THE GOLDEN MASKS

loose door with his left hand gun, swung it shut with a terrific slam. Jaffley ducked sidewise from the doorway, stabbing vicious shots. Like the man at the cabinet, he made the mistake of trying two moves at once.

Jaffley had not only lost his aim; by leaping back to a corner of the porch, he had increased the range. His shots zipped wide. Right-handed, The Shadow fired for Jaffley's body. The single bullet found the crook's heart. Jaffley's leap ended in a long dive to the floor. A member of the Golden Masks, Jaffley was a murderer. His doom was earned.

The Shadow viewed the three servants. One was stunned; the wounded men were groaning as they crawled along the floor. Those two had no fight left. Their gasps were coughed; for yellow gas was forming a rising layer on the low level of the floor. Thrusting his automatics beneath his cloak, The Shadow hoisted Freeland Ralbot.

The Shadow breathed the full strength of the sweetish gas as he stooped to the floor; but his stay was only a matter of seconds. Shoving Ralbot's loosened form through the doorway, The Shadow stopped inside the house. He closed the porch doors; through the glass, he saw Jaffley's servants succumbing to the creeping gas. Soon they would forget the pain of their wounds. None of them would talk or act for many hours to come.

Leaning Ralbot's body against his shoulder The Shadow steadied the gassed man in balanced position. With a free hand, The Shadow picked up Jaffley's suitcase, then walked Ralbot along in mechanical fashion. Halfway to the front door, The Shadow was met by Moe Shrevnitz, who had dashed in from the cab after hearing the shots. Together, they took Ralbot out to the taxi.

COMMOTION had begun in a neighboring house. Shots had been heard; probably a call had gone to the police. The Shadow ordered Moe to drive for Manhattan, to place Freeland Ralbot in some safe spot. With that, The Shadow moved away in darkness, taking Jaffley's bag with him. The cab sped off.

Soon afterward, sirens sounded. The Shadow heard them, from a lurking spot behind a hedge, where he had a distant view of Jaffley's house. Far enough away to elude any searchers, The Shadow shielded a flashlight and focused its rays upon Jaffley's suitcase. He opened the bag. Gold glimmered from within.

There, set upon a crinkly robe, was an Ashanti mask; the one that Jaffley wore as Member Epsilon. Golden lips wore their half smile. That fixed face seemed to express the insidious spirit that guided the Golden Masks in their reign of crime.

Jericho had written the title of "Member Epsilon" in his note to Hawkeye. The Shadow knew that it was the name that Jay Jaffley bore. As Member Epsilon, Jaffley had intended to attend tonight's meeting of the Golden Masks.

That was a fact that would be useful to The Shadow; but there were other facts that he also recognized. The Shadow knew that Harry Vincent must have been captured and carried away, a prisoner in the truck. Since Freeland Ralbot was to be a later victim, the truck would soon return.

Posted on the route by which the truck was due to come, The Shadow intended to await later developments. He needed a trail to the hidden meeting place of the Golden Masks; and he had chosen the best way to gain it.

The flashlight's glimmer ended. The lid of the suitcase closed. The Shadow waited silently. His vigil was intent as the minutes passed. Opportunity had come The Shadow's way, and it was a golden one. Golden in the shape of an Ashanti mask that was to become The Shadow's passport to a throne room of crime.

CHAPTER XIX. THE DOUBLE TRAIL

ONE factor had aided The Shadow immensely in his escape from the dungeon of the Golden Masks. The Ashanti whom Lothkal had sent upstairs to Bronden had not returned within the specific time. That was why Lothkal had decided to open the doors of The Shadow's cell, for no word had come to restrain him from that task.

There was a simple reason why the new Ashanti had not returned. He had met Jericho in the hallway on the second floor.

Jericho had let Bronden pass through to the living room, for he knew that the lieutenant was too important a person to be dealt with early in the game. With Tallam and Barfield gone, Jericho had formed a simple and primitive plan. That was to dispose of persons who would not soon be missed, taking them one at a time. While still debating on the merits of such policy, the arrival of the recruit had caused Jericho to proceed.

Meeting Jericho in the middle of the hall, the Ashanti had stopped to talk in sign language. He pointed toward the doorway of the living room, to indicate that he had a message for Bronden. Jericho had answered with a headshake, and a pointed finger toward a side door that led into a darkened bedroom.

Wondering, the Ashanti had entered; and Jericho had followed, to close the door after him. When the door had opened a few minutes later, only Jericho had returned, to resume his patrol in the hallway.

During the next hour, Jericho stopped often at the living room, to see Bronden seated at Tallam's desk, deeply engrossed with stacks of papers. At intervals, Jericho had been tempted to creep in upon him; but he had remembered the peculiar immunity that the alcoves offered. Therefore, Jericho waited.

It was Bronden who ended the idle spell. He appeared suddenly at the doorway; looked at Jericho and demanded:

“Where's Lothkal? Didn't he come up here?”

Jericho looked blank. “Did he send that fellow who was with him?” queried Bronden. “I told him to let me know before he opened the other cell.”

Jericho stared soberly. Bronden suddenly recalled that this new servitor did not speak English. With an impatient gesture, he ordered Jericho to follow him. Wisely, Jericho obeyed. He guessed that Bronden was going down to the cells. This would be a good opportunity to see what could be done to aid The Shadow.

WHEN they reached the cell passage, Bronden stared in puzzlement. He had expected to see Lothkal. Motioning to Jericho to remain on guard, Bronden went to the front of the passage, opened the big door and raised a shout for Seeklat. Soon, the fellow appeared from somewhere. Bronden questioned him in English.

“Where is Lothkal?” demanded the lieutenant. “He was supposed to be in charge here, with the new man.”

“Not see Lothkal,” replied Seeklat, solemnly. “Me sleep.”

Bronden looked toward The Shadow's cell. Angrily, he thrust his hand into his pocket and brought out a large revolver. Ordering Seeklat to back him, motioning Jericho to do the same, Bronden pulled the switches that controlled the doors of The Shadow's cell. Ready with his revolver, he produced a flashlight as soon as the door came open. Flicking the light, Bronden threw the glow upon the floor.

THE GOLDEN MASKS

The lieutenant chuckled harshly when he saw the prone, cloaked figure. He waited for the gas to thin. All the while, Jericho was tightening in preparation for a double struggle. If harm threatened The Shadow, he intended to take out Bronden first.

About to enter the cell, Bronden stopped. He turned to Seeklat.

“This doesn't tell us where Lothkal is,” snarled Bronden. “He knows enough to stay on duty. Where could he have gone to, Seeklat?”

Bronden had brought away the flashlight; but the glow from the passage stretched across the threshold of the cell, once the doors were opened. In answer to Bronden's query, Seeklat stared. Trained to sharp observation, Seeklat had noticed a bulkiness about the cloaked figure on the floor. He pointed; then announced:

“Look there.”

“Where?” demanded Bronden. He turned the flashlight toward the walls of the cell. “Lothkal isn't in here. Wait, though—there's something —”

Bronden had spotted the broken wall bracket. He went over to examine it. Sensing that something was wrong, he turned about to see Seeklat stolidly stepping into the cell. Framed against the light from the passage, Seeklat pointed to the cloaked shape and again stated:

“Look there.”

With a sudden understanding, Bronden came over with his flashlight. He stopped and pulled away The Shadow's hat and cloak. He fumed as he saw the figure beneath. There was the face of Lothkal, staring upward with huge, bulging eyes.

Bronden stood dumbfounded. The odor of gas still persisted in the room; Lothkal was plainly paralyzed by the fumes. Yet The Shadow had managed to withstand the dosage, to overpower Lothkal and leave the Ashanti in his place.

Jericho viewed all this from the door. He repressed the elated grin that crept to his lips. To Jericho, also, the escape was a mystery; but he was used to such exploits on the part of The Shadow.

Events had taken an amazing turn. If any one should be blamed for cooperating in The Shadow's escape, it would be the new Ashanti, whom Jericho had left in an upstairs closet. Bronden himself knew that Jericho had been guarding the second floor. Bronden, however, was too excited to think of anything but the fact that The Shadow was at large.

“You stay here, Seeklat,” snapped the lieutenant. “Keep this big fellow with you. Better wake the other men who are asleep. Have every one ready when I get back.”

Bronden hurried to the rear of the corridor; there, he stopped to open the door of an unoccupied cell. He brought out a suitcase of his own, then headed toward the distant exit. He was off for the meeting of the Golden Masks, to inform the leaders that The Shadow had escaped.

Seeklat motioned to Jericho. His gestures signified that the latter was to stay on patrol duty in the passage. Seeklat intended to rouse the remaining Ashanti tribesmen, to have them ready when Bronden returned. That would mean a search of the house, for traces of The Shadow.

THE GOLDEN MASKS

Jericho regretted that he had been lenient with the recruit whom he had bound and gagged upstairs. If the fellow could be found unconscious, his plight might be attributed to The Shadow. But Jericho felt sure that the recruit had recovered; he knew that the man would tell who had attacked him. Foreseeing trouble, Jericho took the best way out.

He sprang for Seeklat, as the huge Ashanti was turning toward the front of the passage. Seeklat sensed the attack, swung quickly to meet his antagonist.

JERICHO was powerful; he had proven that in his quick disposal of the man upstairs. There, Jericho had dealt with an opponent just about his equal in size. Seeklat was more formidable. The huge Ashanti was almost the twin of Lothkal, whom The Shadow had overcome only by a superhuman fight.

Inches taller and pounds heavier than Jericho, Seeklat had an advantage as the battle began. He did not have the edge that Lothkal had held over The Shadow; for Jericho was heavy enough to hold his footing when Seeklat tried to sling him. Nevertheless, the fray looked hopeless for Jericho.

It was a strange match, this one. Seeklat fought with the savage instinct of a jungle battler. Jericho used methods that he had employed against thugs. In the back of Jericho's head were recollections of surprising methods that he had seen The Shadow introduce in conflict.

The fighters were eye to eye; Seeklat glaring like a savage war dancer, Jericho grinning as though he enjoyed the fray. They staggered back and forth across the passage, each trying to hurl the other against a wall. Each stopped himself by a brace whenever his back neared the wall. Both were able to absorb the jolts.

Though the fight was equal for the first few minutes, it was obvious that Seeklat would wear down Jericho. The latter knew it. He watched for a break. One came, just as Seeklat jammed Jericho against the wall beside Lengerton's door.

As he took the jolt and rallied, Jericho saw beyond Seeklat's shoulder. Across the passage was the doorway of the cell that had once held The Shadow. Bronden had left the two doors open.

The space became Jericho's objective.

Heaving against Seeklat, Jericho drove the Ashanti backward. Seeklat let himself be shoved, expecting a quick opportunity to rally. As they reached the far side of the passage, Seeklat braced. He prepared for a rebound when his shoulders struck the wall.

Jericho gave harder impetus. Seeklat let his shoulders go back. Instead of encountering solid wall, they went through the open doorway. The huge Ashanti toppled off balance; Jericho hurled him to the floor inside the cell, only three feet from Lothkal's prone body.

Seeklat was not through. His hands grabbed for Jericho's throat. Seeklat's head came up; Jericho drove a big fist to the Ashanti's jaw. The blow flattened Seeklat; but failed to stun him.

Jericho was smart enough not to try again. Instead, he sprang away from Seeklat's clutch and leaped from the cell before the Ashanti could regain his feet. Jericho yanked the lever that controlled the steel door.

Looking toward the cell, Jericho caught a last glimpse of Seeklat's glaring face beyond the closing barrier. The Ashanti was too late to make the exit. He pounded against the steel door from inside. Jericho pulled the second lever; closed the glass barrier. It deadened any noise that Seeklat made.

THE GOLDEN MASKS

The gas had thinned within the cell. Seeklat would not succumb like Lothkal. Nevertheless, he was bottled up helplessly. He had lost his chance to rouse the other Ashanti servants. Jericho began to pace the passage. His idea was to be on duty when Bronden returned, to dispose of the lieutenant when he inquired for Seeklat.

THERE was a reason, however, why Bronden did not return. The lieutenant had headed for the meeting of the Golden Masks, to appear there as Member Gamma. Bronden had passed the secret exit; he had gone through the side door of the garage. Carrying his bag, he was walking briskly, pausing at intervals to make sure that no one was on his trail.

Bronden soon satisfied himself that he was unfollowed. He was wrong. Hawkeye had spotted him and was artfully keeping him in sight. The course led along secluded streets; darkened flights of steps and doorways gave the trailer an easy task. Following Bronden was much simpler than trailing Seeklat.

After a circuitous route of nearly one mile, Bronden came to a large warehouse. He turned and entered an alleyway between the warehouse and another building. Listening, Hawkeye heard the echoes of Bronden's quick footsteps, then noted that the sound made a sudden fade-away.

Hawkeye guessed that there was a larger area at the end of the alley. He was right. Bronden had gone to the same place where Sulgate and other members of the Golden Masks had traveled by cab. Holding the full confidence of Tallam and Barfield, Bronden had been given the location of the meeting place.

Hawkeye decided to enter the alleyway. He reversed his decision suddenly, as he saw headlights swing from a corner of the outer street. Diving away, Hawkeye made for the building across the alley from the warehouse. He found a doorway and hunched himself there.

The headlights were those of a truck. The vehicle slowed as it came to the alley; it turned in and rolled through to the courtyard. Hawkeye bobbed from his hiding place. He peered into the alley, saw the truck's tail-light, stopped some distance ahead. Hawkeye crept in the direction of the truck.

When he reached the side of the truck, Hawkeye heard mumbled voices from the front seat. Edging closer, he caught snatches of conversation between two men.

“Take the note up in the elevator,” growled one speaker. “Give it to the big guy there. He'll recognize you.”

“Maybe I'd better wait there—”

“Not a chance. The guard won't let you stay. We gotta scam and stow this truck somewhere.”

“But we was supposed to bring in another mug from Long Island—”

“And we couldn't get near the house. The bulls was there. That's all in the note. If we're needed, they'll know where they can get us.”

One man alighted, while the other remained at the wheel. Hawkeye edged back along the truck; he stopped abruptly as his ears caught a slight sound near the back of the vehicle. Hawkeye breathed tensely; his presence was suddenly detected. Not by the truck driver, but by an unseen being who stepped from behind the truck.

AN action that had occurred more than an hour ago was suddenly repeated. A gloved hand clamped Hawkeye's arm. Hard-pressing fingers were as sure a symbol of identity as was the subdued hiss that sounded in Hawkeye's ear.

THE GOLDEN MASKS

The Shadow had come from the truck. He had boarded it on Long Island, near Jaffley's house. He had ridden into Manhattan, straight to the meeting place of the Golden Masks.

The Shadow drew Hawkeye out through the alleyway. They stopped in the doorway; there, Hawkeye heard a suitcase thump as The Shadow set it down. In brief tones, The Shadow gave instructions. Hawkeye was to report to Burbank, with orders for the contact man. Hardly had The Shadow completed his instructions before a whine sounded from the alley. The truck was backing out to the street.

Both The Shadow and Hawkeye escaped observation as the truck pulled away. The Shadow gave a commanding hiss; it was the order for Hawkeye to start off and deliver his call to Burbank. Nodding, Hawkeye stepped from the doorway. He darted a look up and down the street, to see that the way was clear. He paused a moment, to blink; he turned toward the doorway and saw its dim outline in the darkness.

The Shadow was gone, taking along the bag that he had brought. Though The Shadow had stepped away, Hawkeye had not seen him in those sharp glances along the street. The answer dawned on Hawkeye as he started off upon his mission.

There was only one place where The Shadow could have gone so suddenly. That was into the alley that led to the courtyard. Realizing the fact, Hawkeye gained an inkling of The Shadow's own plans.

The Shadow had gained the end of a double trail; one that both he and Hawkeye had traced. Lone-handed, The Shadow was going to the meeting of the Golden Masks.

CHAPTER XX. THE MASKS REPORT

WITHIN their room of gilded draperies, the Golden Masks were in session. Upon their platform, with its crimson backdrop, stood Tallam and Barfield. Masked, their identities were unknown to their followers. Here, Tallam and Barfield were known only as Alpha and Omega.

Except to one man, who stood near the platform. He was a member who had but recently entered, to identify himself as Gamma. This man was Bronden; called to the dais, he had delivered a confidential report to the leaders.

Tallam was speaking, in the harsh voice of Alpha. His words came through the fixed smile of motionless metal lips.

“Member Gamma brings an unusual report,” rasped Tallam. “He states that a prisoner has escaped us. Such an event has never occurred before. Nevertheless, it gives us no occasion for alarm. The prisoner was an enemy who sought to thwart us. While he was making his escape, we captured another who will serve as hostage in his place.”

Tallam turned about; Barfield did the same. As token of their mutual authority, Alpha and Omega each gave a clap with their golden-gloved hands. Crimson curtains parted, to show a room beyond. From it stepped two Ashanti warriors.

Across their shoulders, they carried two spears, like the bars of a stretcher. Thongs formed a crude resting place between the spears. Upon the improvised stretcher lay the prisoner. The captive was Harry Vincent.

Advancing to the front of the platform, the two Ashanti set the stretcher near the edge. They lifted Harry from it, placed him at the feet of Alpha and Omega. Lifting the lashed spears, the warriors went back through the curtains. The draperies closed.

THE GOLDEN MASKS

Tallam gestured a gauntlet toward Harry, while the Golden Masks thronged slowly forward to view their prisoner. In the tone that he used as Alpha, Tallam pronounced:

“This prisoner is a tribute from Member Epsilon. Soon we shall have another captive; the one whom Epsilon was assigned to bring. Our new prisoner will be Freeland Ralbot, whose capture will produce a quarter of a million dollars for our coffers.”

There were subdued buzzes from the lesser Golden Masks. Some of them had heard of Ralbot. Tallam silenced the slight commotion, then looked toward the door as Barfield pointed in that direction.

THE Ashanti who guarded the outside barrier had entered. Spear in one hand, he was placing the fingers of his other hand to his forehead, as token of his servitude. Tallam noted a sheet of paper that the Ashanti clutched in the hand that held the spear. He sent Bronden to bring it. As soon as Bronden received the paper, the Ashanti retired to his post.

“Let me have the message, Member Gamma,” ordered Tallam. Receiving the paper, he opened it, then said to Barfield: “Read it with me, Omega.”

The two studied the paper. It was the message from the truck driver. Tallam crumpled the sheet, rasped a command for silence.

“Our plans have been hindered,” he informed. “Men went to gain the prisoner we wanted; but they have not brought him. Possibly Member Epsilon has failed to capture Freeland Ralbot. Since Member Epsilon has not appeared, this meeting must be adjourned.”

Deep silence gripped the Golden Masks. Lying on the floor, Harry Vincent could sense the stillness. His eyes, staring upward, saw the gold faces of Alpha, Omega and Gamma. Harry knew that all the other members must be wearing identical masks.

In his urge to count the remainder of the throng, Harry instinctively turned his neck. He had moved it but an inch when he found himself wondering at his own action. Ever since he had been paralyzed by the gas, Harry had realized the futility of attempting motion. At times, he had felt a slight bodily sensation, but had classed it as his imagination.

The response of his neck had told him the truth. Jay Jaffley had been too brief with the gas dosage. He had removed the cylinder the moment that Harry had become limp. Instead of being under for a forty-eight-hour spell, Harry had already recovered.

Elation seized Harry, then faded. Though he wanted to rise, he restrained himself. He kept his eyes straight upward, fighting against a growing desire to blink them. None of the Golden Masks had noted Harry's slight motion. It would be suicidal to let them know that he had recovered.

Harry's only hope was to pretend that he was helpless, on the chance that he would be able to make a break later on. He was too concerned with his own situation to wonder about what had happened at Jaffley's. Harry still thought that The Shadow was a prisoner. Harry had taken it for granted that his own mistake had made Ralbot's capture a certainty.

Barfield, as Omega, pronounced his agreement with Alpha's order for adjournment. The lesser members stepped back to the center of the room; Bronden joined them, for as Gamma, he was but one of the group. The leaders went through a brief ritual, turned about to take their places on their thrones, as final token that the meeting was ended.

THE GOLDEN MASKS

AT that moment, the outer door opened. Tallam and Barfield halted, as a new member of the Golden Masks stepped into view. The only absentee was Member Epsilon. The leaders gazed with eyes that showed elation as the newcomer approached the platform. They were ready to receive Jay Jaffley's last-minute report.

Approaching Tallam, the final member paused; in low monotone, he pronounced:

"I am Epsilon. I speak to Alpha."

"Alpha replies to Epsilon," voiced Tallam, eagerly. "Epsilon will give the first countersign."

"Ashanti."

The newcomer turned to Barfield:

"I am Epsilon. I speak to Omega."

"Omega replies to Epsilon," answered Barfield. "Epsilon will give the second countersign."

"Kumasi."

Immediately, Tallam and Barfield hissed in low tones. Breathlessly, they called for Epsilon's confidential report. Bronden edged forward, to try and overhear it. To Harry Vincent, lying face upward at the very feet of the men on the platform, all the words were plain.

"Ralbot offered trouble." The words were calm as they came from the mask of Member Epsilon. "Others came to his aid. I was forced to carry Ralbot away myself."

"Your servants?" queried Tallam. "What happened to them?"

"I left them to explain matters to the police. There was a great commotion at the house. People reported it."

"Ralbot's money?" quizzed Barfield. "Did he bring it?"

"Yes. I acquired it. I have placed it in a safe spot. Ralbot received the gas treatment. I have put him where no one will find him."

WORDS of approval came from Tallam and Barfield. Their eyes glistened with evil delight. Harry Vincent, looking straight up, saw the eyes of Member Epsilon. He seemed to sense that they were looking downward toward him. By this time, Harry could no longer repress a blink. He winced as his eyelids closed. He thought his game was finished.

Instead, Harry heard another low tone from the metal lips of the arrival who called himself Member Epsilon.

"I brought certain of Ralbot's documents with me," announced the newcomer, "so that you would have proof of my success. Let me give them to you, Alpha. Then you and Omega can announce that all went well."

As he spoke, the masked arrival drew away his golden-hued gauntlets. He performed the action with his hands palms upward. Tallam and Barfield saw the gold circle of a ring within the third finger of his left hand; to them it meant nothing.

To Harry, staring upward, unnoticed by any save Member Epsilon, the ring revealed the truth. He could see a

THE GOLDEN MASKS

glimmering stone on the lowered back of the hand. The gem was a resplendent fire opal that showed depths of ever-changing hues. Harry recognized the jewel the instant that he saw it.

The gem was The Shadow's girasol! Lone emblem of The Shadow, that stone was a mark of identity. It meant that Member Epsilon was The Shadow.

Alone, The Shadow had come here not only to effect Harry's rescue, but to deal with the Golden Masks within their own domain.

CHAPTER XXI. MASKED BATTLE

QUICK realization came to Harry Vincent. He knew that The Shadow must have escaped from imprisonment; also that his chief had reached Long Island in time to conquer Jay Jaffley and take the latter's place.

The flash of the girasol told all that; it specified more that Harry understood. The Shadow had seen Harry's motion; he knew that his agent was recovered and ready for action. Harry gave a response.

Tightening, he set his muscles, delivered a slight nod with his head against the floor. This signified that his recovery was complete. The Shadow, however, had taken that for granted. He had experienced a prompt recovery of his own, after the gas treatment in Tallam's house.

Stepping down from the platform, The Shadow thrust his ungloved hands into the slitted pockets of his golden robe. His move was not too hasty, for he was still playing the part of Jaffley. The Shadow was actually reaching for automatics, not for documents. Before he could gain them, a sudden interruption came from Bronden.

The lieutenant saw Harry move. Bronden uttered a warning cry. Tallam and Barfield thought that the warning referred to a false move by Member Epsilon. They reached for their own guns, just as The Shadow whipped forth his weapons.

A laugh burst from the false lips of Jaffley's mask. Weird and shivering, it echoed from above the platform.

Half turning, The Shadow aimed one gun for Tallam and Barfield; he pointed the other .45 toward the lesser members, congregated in the center of the room.

TALLAM and Barfield sprang back, their guns unlevelled. The Shadow stabbed his first shot toward the murderers. He wanted to drop those leaders, knowing that their fall would throw confusion into the ranks of the Golden Masks. He fired one shot at random; he had Barfield covered for the second.

But as The Shadow pressed the trigger, a chance attack spoiled his aim.

Bronden was leaping for The Shadow. Though wild in his dive, he managed to clutch the robed fighter's arm. The bullet that The Shadow dispatched went wide of Barfield, who made a dive after Tallam, toward the curtains.

The Shadow flung Bronden aside. Harry, rolling from the platform, pounced upon the fellow, snatched away a gun that Bronden tried to draw. The Shadow aimed for the curtains; just then, a darkish face and ebony arm appeared between them. One of the Ashanti had arrived with a war spear. He flung the weapon for The Shadow.

THE GOLDEN MASKS

Diving forward, The Shadow was beneath the spear as it slithered toward his robed form. The point barely grazed the cowl above The Shadow's golden mask. Almost to the platform, The Shadow aimed, ready to riddle the crimson curtain with a fusillade of shots.

From the edge of the dome, a glass curtain thudded to the platform. Either Tallam or Barfield had pulled a switch, to release one of their bulletproof barriers. The leaders of the Golden Masks were cut off from The Shadow's vengeance. They were ready for flight by another exit, trusting to their followers to dispose of The Shadow.

In this swift conflict, The Shadow had not forgotten the danger from the horde behind him. The rest of the Golden Masks had waited momentarily, dazed and startled by the kaleidoscopic shifts near the platform. The Shadow's shots; Bronden's leap; the dive by Tallam and Barfield; the fling of the Ashanti's spear—all had come within scant seconds.

Nevertheless, the horde of Golden Masks had moved by the time The Shadow wheeled. Most of the crooks were armed; more than a dozen of them were whipping revolvers from the pockets of their robes. Had The Shadow halted against such numbers, he would have been doubly doomed. First, from the crowd itself; again, from some return attack by Tallam and Barfield, who had delayed their flight to watch through the glass barrier.

Harry Vincent had rolled to a corner, dragging Bronden. Half shielded by the prone lieutenant, he was ready with the revolver to give The Shadow aid. For the moment, the odds seemed hopeless to Harry. Then came the move that changed the entire scene.

The Shadow flung himself squarely into the ranks of the aiming throng.

Guns barked; they were too late. The Shadow had arrived. From then on, the crowd of Golden Masks began to break.

Grappling with the first foemen whom he met, The Shadow stabbed shots; slashed with his automatics; pitched men into sprawling groups. He was wheeling through the melee, first low, then high. Guns were aimed too late in his direction; slugging fists missed him as they descended downward.

For The Shadow had a perfect camouflage. Every face about him was the same as his own. All lips wore the leering smile that adorned The Shadow's mask.

It was like a battle in darkness, where one fighter, sought by a group, holds a marked advantage. To The Shadow, every leering face of gold represented a foeman. To the Golden Masks, only one was the enemy they sought; and there was no way to single him from the rest.

But, where darkness would have forced The Shadow to hit or miss tactics, light did not. Every shot he fired, every blow he sledged, was a perfect hit. From beyond their screen of glass, Tallam and Barfield saw that the outcome would be victory for The Shadow.

They could not intervene. If they raised the glass and tried to mow down The Shadow along with all their followers, they could expect sudden bullets in their own direction.

Tallam and Barfield dropped their curtains, took their path to flight. Harry saw them go; he turned to watch the battle on the floor. He could not fire to aid The Shadow; he was unable to pick out his chief.

Some of the Golden Masks ripped away their Ashanti faces, shouting as they did so. They thought that they

THE GOLDEN MASKS

could thus confine attention to The Shadow. Nearly a dozen of the fighters were down; of the eight who remained, only two retained their masks. One of the masked men shouted to get both.

Five unmasked men sprang upon the pair; riddled them with bullets. As they stepped back, sure that one of the victims was The Shadow, a fierce laugh made them turn. They saw one robed fighter standing alone, unmasked.

The Shadow had whipped off his mask with the others, knowing that they could not recognize one another. He had revealed the face that he had worn at the time of his capture: the visage of Lamont Cranston. Five members of the Golden Masks had taken him for a bona fide member of the band. They had slaughtered two of their own number.

Bewildered, the five survivors were covered by The Shadow's guns. Some of them had used all their bullets in that last slaughter. The others were too few to fight. Harry had sprung forward to join The Shadow, bringing a third gun into play. Sullenly, the five Golden Masks let their revolvers drop to the floor, amid the sprawled bodies of their comrades.

At this moment of The Shadow's triumph, there came a double attack that threatened disaster. Bronden, flattened upon the floor, came to hands and knees unnoticed. He recognized The Shadow. With a quick move, Bronden snatched up a revolver that a Golden Mask had dropped.

Simultaneously, the outer door swung wide. The Ashanti guard was there; he singled out The Shadow. Viciously, he raised his arm to fling his spear.

The Shadow spotted both moves from where he stood. He picked the Ashanti as the more formidable. An instant more, both spear and bullet would be on their way. There was a chance to stop the Ashanti's lunge; but it was impossible to prevent Bronden's snap of the trigger.

Fading, The Shadow fired. He clipped the Ashanti; the big warrior twisted to the floor. His lunging aim went sidewise; the spear skidded from his hand and pierced a curtain on the far side of the room. As the spear slithered wide, Bronden's gun barked. The Shadow's feint was sufficient. The bullet hardly grazed his golden robe.

THE SHADOW delivered an answering shot as Bronden tried to take new aim. So did Harry, for he had spotted Bronden's move. These bullets spelled the end of Member Gamma. Bronden's supporting arm gave way; his chin thudded the floor. Others of the Golden Masks, about to leap for revolvers, stopped short.

With Harry following, The Shadow circled to the outer door. He and his agent passed through the opened doorway, covering the remnants of the Golden Masks. The Shadow gave a command; Harry clanged the big door shut and bolted it.

Five Golden Masks were trapped in their meeting room, between bolted door and locked glass barrier. With them were the dead and wounded who had lost out in the fight against The Shadow.

In the outer anteroom, The Shadow ripped away his golden robe. He yanked open a suitcase that was in the corner; from it, he drew garments of black. He and Harry entered the elevator; The Shadow donned his own garb and they descended.

Outside the alley, The Shadow contacted Moe's cab. He and Harry boarded it. There was no need to inform the law of what had happened. Already, sirens were sounding close at hand. The heavy barrage of shots had been heard, despite the thickness of the warehouse walls. Soon, the meeting place of the Golden Masks

would be uncovered.

Moe expected a command to start. Instead, The Shadow ordered him to wait. A whispered laugh sounded within the taxicab. The tone carried deep significance.

The Shadow had another quest; the pursuit of Sidney Tallam and Roger Barfield, leaders of the Golden Masks. He was willing that the law should share in the final victory.

That was why The Shadow ordered the cab to wait.

CHAPTER XXII. THE SWIFT TRAIL

THE wait that followed The Shadow's command was of less than one minute's duration. That interval ended, a police car wheeled suddenly into view from the nearest corner. It stopped near where Moe's cab was parked.

The lights of the taxi were out; but the headlamps of the police car showed that the vehicle was a cab. A burly policeman came from the patrol car, flashed a light into the front seat. Moe held his arm before his eyes to avoid the light.

"How long have you been here?" demanded the policeman. "Hear any shots?"

"Some were fired in the warehouse," came a calm reply from the back seat. "You will find an elevator entrance in the courtyard at the end of the alley."

The policeman flashed his light toward the rear seat, wondering about this speaker who seemed to know so much. As the glow fell upon The Shadow, the cloaked passenger gave a single word to the driver:

"Start."

Moe shot the car ahead, snapping on the lights as the gear whined forward. The policeman fell back from the running board, shouted madly for the patrol car to take up the pursuit. It did; but Moe had wheeled around the corner by the time the pursuit began.

More police arrived. The lone cop informed what had happened. Another police car went off in pursuit; a squad of bluecoats hastened through the alleyway to investigate the warehouse.

Matters had worked as The Shadow wanted them. Riding ahead, he knew that the law would find the trapped members of the Golden Masks. But although the cab had gained a long start on the first cab, The Shadow did not call for full speed. Instead, he ordered Moe to slacken.

Within a few blocks, the police car gained close range, picking up the trail through Moe's obedience to The Shadow's order. Guns began to pop; Moe wheeled around a corner. The Shadow ordered him to increase speed to the limit. As the cab roared for the next corner, The Shadow added:

"To Tallam's."

NEW police cars joined the chase within the next three blocks. Moe stuck to his task, changing his course to avoid a blocking car. The direct route was closed; but Moe still had a chance to make a circuit that would bring him to Tallam's house.

The Shadow counted Moe to be the speediest taxi driver in Manhattan. Moe proved the claim on this night.

THE GOLDEN MASKS

He sped through red traffic lights; took corners on two wheels. He hit the straight stretches like a racer.

Shrieking sirens followed close behind, with gunshots punctuating their wails. Moe outdistanced the pursuers; when he cut back toward Tallam's, he was a full block ahead of the nearest police car.

The cab came into Marview Place from the wrong direction; but that was a small matter. Moe whizzed across the path of another car, skidded his cab to a stop on the left side of the street, squarely in front of Tallam's brownstone steps. The door on the sidewalk side swung open; The Shadow propelled Harry Vincent to the curb, then followed.

“Through by the near side of the house,” ordered The Shadow. Harry made for the spot indicated. To Moe, The Shadow added: “Travel. Lose the trail.”

The cab shot away. The Shadow sprang for the brownstone steps. He fired two shots, just as the first patrol car swung from the corner. Instantly, the officers saw that the cab had discharged its passenger. The headlights of the police car gave a momentary view of The Shadow, on the house steps.

As the police car halted, The Shadow sprang from the side of the steps. He swung away through darkness to join Harry. Officers piled out, focused their flashlights upon the spot that The Shadow had left. They saw no one. A bluecoat pointed to the house door.

“He must have gone in there—”

The suggestion was sufficient. The police hammered at the door. Others who arrived took to the spaces beside the house, searching for other means of entry. They were too late, however, to find The Shadow and Harry.

The Shadow had led the way through to a rear opening between two buildings. With Harry following, he threaded a swift course for a new objective: the garage that offered secret access to Tallam's home.

More police were coming; they were forming a cordon around the block; but The Shadow whisked Harry across a street and off through a darkened stretch between two old houses. The Shadow and his agent had a clear path.

ON the street in front of Tallam's, a car pulled up. It had come from headquarters; the man who stepped from the machine was Joe Cardona. The inspector received a prompt report, then turned to Markham, who was at the wheel of the headquarters car.

“Get this, Markham,” stated Cardona. “I told you The Shadow was on the move, when we heard about that find on Long Island. Well, they saw The Shadow up by that warehouse that's been raided. They grabbed a bunch of phonies with gold faces when they broke in there.

“Now The Shadow's been seen here. They think he's gone into this house. If he has, he's got some more of the tribe to handle. We're going in there and give him a hand.”

With that, Cardona issued an order for the police to smash down the front door without delay. Bluecoats set to work, while Cardona stood with ready revolver, to be the first man through.

MEANWHILE, The Shadow and Harry had reached the old garage. Stopping in darkness, they heard motion ahead. Hawkeye's whisper came to The Shadow's ears. The spotter had spied Harry, even though he had not seen The Shadow.

THE GOLDEN MASKS

“They blew in here a couple of minutes ago,” voiced Hawkeye. “Two of 'em, with a couple of those big guys that work for 'em. They left their car in the garage.”

“Marsland and Tapper,” returned The Shadow. “Where are they?”

“Due any minute.”

“Wait for them.”

Ordering Harry to follow, The Shadow entered the garage. As he had expected, Tallam and Barfield had experienced a delay in getting a car for themselves and the two Ashanti who had fled with them. The delay had been even longer than The Shadow had estimated. There was still a chance of overtaking the leaders of the Golden Masks.

The Shadow reached the room outside the secret entrance. Harry saw him go to the door of the closet, open it and speak one word:

“Ashanti.”

A pause. There was no response. The Shadow added:

“Kumasi.”

Nothing occurred. The Shadow knew then that Tallam and Barfield had ordered the inside guard to admit no others. A huge door blocked further progress; but The Shadow had provided for it.

He had provided for other things as well, such as a call by Burbank to the police, telling them where they could find Freeland Rabbot, the owner of money and securities that had been recovered at Jaffley's Long Island home. But most important for the present was a means of entry through this secret door that led to Tallam's dungeon room.

There were hasty footsteps from the rear of the garage. Hawkeye arrived, followed by two others. One was Cliff Marsland, square-shouldered and firm of jaw. Cliff was a good teammate for Harry in the attack that was to come. The other was “Tapper,” a man whom The Shadow seldom used. The Shadow had ordered Tapper on duty to-night; and he had brought a useful service along with him.

AT The Shadow's order, Tapper opened an elongated box that he had gingerly placed on the floor. He produced a drill, approached the metal door and quickly cut three short holes. From the box, he brought a container that held a powerful charge of explosive far more potent than the powders that The Shadow ordinarily used.

The Shadow stooped forward. A fuse fizzed. As The Shadow gestured, his agents hurried out into the desolate garage. The Shadow followed them, closed the door of the little room. Quietly, he commanded Harry and Cliff to be ready with him; he ordered Hawkeye and Tapper to remain here on guard.

Only the burning time of a short length of fuse remained. When that period had ended, The Shadow would be ready for his final foray. He had coaxed the law to the task of battering in through the front of Tallam's house. While that attack was in the making, The Shadow had prepared this surprise.

Soon Tallam and Barfield, leaders of the Golden Masks, would find themselves harassed from two directions. Yet The Shadow did not count the conflict won. Even though he had vanquished the massed horde at the

meeting place, he knew that there would be heavy strife ahead.

The final battle would come inside the portals of a stronghold where Tallam and Barfield were prepared to resist attack. The lives of helpless prisoners were at stake. Vast wealth, the swag reaped by the Golden Masks, would be on hand.

The Shadow knew that strategy, as well as force, would be the deciding element in the final fray.

CHAPTER XXIII. THE LAST TRAP

TALLAM and Barfield had stopped when they reached the passage between the dungeon cells. They had good reason for their halt. They wanted to talk with Seeklat, to learn if Lothkal had been located. They wanted to find out what else had happened since Bronden had brought news of The Shadow's escape.

With Tallam and Barfield were the two Ashanti warriors who had come with them from the meeting place. The four made a formidable group. Tallam and Barfield still wore their golden robes, though they had stripped the masks from their faces. They were carrying revolvers; the native-garbed Ashanti had their short spears.

Tallam and Barfield had not found Seeklat. The only man whom they discovered was Jericho. Standing on sentry duty, the big African looked like a loyal guard. In fact, Bronden had reported him as such.

In English Tallam queried for Seeklat. Jericho stared, expressionless. Tallam put the question in French. Jericho pointed to the door at the front of the passage. Tallam went through the door; beyond it, he raised a shout for Seeklat.

Soon, two Ashanti appeared. They were the men whom Bronden had ordered Seeklat to summon. They shook their heads as they returned with Tallam. They had not seen Seeklat. Nor had they seen Lothkal. They had been asleep.

“We know where The Shadow stowed Lothkal!” snarled Tallam to Barfield. “In his own cell, for that's where Bronden found him. But what's happened to Seeklat?”

“Maybe The Shadow came back here,” suggested Barfield, “and managed to handle Seeklat like he did Lothkal.”

Tallam nodded slowly, then looked toward The Shadow's cell. He reached for the levers that controlled the sliding doors. Jericho saw the action; his muscles tightened. Jericho pressed a revolver that was in the pocket of his coat.

He was in a bad spot. There were six enemies against whom he must contend. Once Seeklat should be questioned, Jericho's part would be known. Jericho saw hopeless battle due within the next few minutes. All that he could hope for was to thin the ranks of the enemy before he fell.

A LUCKY interruption halted Tallam. There was a clatter at the rear of the long passage. In came the Ashanti who guarded the rear exit. He was shaking his spear, babbling his native dialect.

One of the other Ashanti translated the words:

“Him say man speak through wire. Give words the same like you give.”

THE GOLDEN MASKS

“What else?” demanded Tallam. He spoke to the arriving guard. “Tell me the rest yourself.”

The guard thought slowly to find the English words.

“Make noise, man do,” he declared. “Noise on door. Noise like I make here.”

To illustrate the sound, the big guard scratched the point of his spear upon the stone floor. Barfield interjected a statement to Tallam.

“They're going to blow the door!” he exclaimed. “We'd better get back there!”

“Wait,” suggested Tallam. “We can handle them later.”

He pulled the levers on which his hands rested. The door of the cell slid open. From within came Seeklat, blinking at the light. Seeklat's face showed viciousness and anger. Just as Tallam was about to question him, a distant rumble sounded. It came from the rear corridor, the long echo of a heavy blast. There was a quiver of stone under foot.

“They've blown it!” shouted Barfield. “Quick, Tallam! We've got to stop them!”

“The prisoners!” bellowed Tallam. “Get them through to the front! We'll hold the door between here and the house!”

Tallam gestured to Seeklat, to help him open the cells. The order was useless at that moment. Seeklat, staring past the Ashanti warriors, saw Jericho. With a savage roar, Seeklat forgot all else. He drove between the warriors, his hands shooting straight for Jericho.

THIS time, Jericho had no need for silent action. His revolver was out; he was prepared to meet others after Seeklat. Jericho fired a shot straight for Seeklat. The bullet found the Ashanti's body, but did not stop his charge. Plunging on, Seeklat fell squarely upon the enemy who had crippled him.

As Jericho rolled to the floor, Seeklat's two Ashanti sprang for him. Jericho gave two shots; one Ashanti staggered. The other grabbed Jericho's throat with one hand, wrenched away his gun with the other. The Ashanti warriors leaped up with their spears.

Shots ripped from the rear of the passage. Tallam and Barfield leaped toward the front of the passage, shouting for the Ashanti to forget Jericho. It was too late.

Three invaders were closing the range, firing as they came. The Shadow was foremost, his automatics blasting. Cliff and Harry were close behind their chief. Their guns were booming past The Shadow's shoulders.

Ashanti warriors swung to hurl their war spears. One managed the deed; but his throw was short, thanks to the low ceiling of the passage. Then he sprawled wounded with the others, who were already crumpling beneath a hail of high-aimed bullets.

Shots were devastating along this corridor. At long range, the bullets ricocheted. Jericho lay safe beneath Seeklat's body; falling Ashanti sprawled about him. Only Tallam and Barfield were safe, for they were protected by the bodies of their servitors.

The golden-robed men dived through the door to the house. They had no chance to close it. The Shadow

THE GOLDEN MASKS

prevented that with his swift fire. The leaders of the Golden Masks were off to flight.

The Shadow paused, only to order his agents to remain below. Their task was to release the prisoners, to see that the wounded Ashanti offered no more fight. Jericho was on his feet, beside Harry and Cliff. Promptly, Harry and Cliff took charge of the passage, with Jericho standing by to follow orders.

AS The Shadow reached the first floor of the house, he heard the front door shatter. A flood of police poured inward; shouting, they took to the stairs. The Shadow knew that they had spied Tallam and Barfield at the top. The crooks had reached the second floor. The Shadow headed for the rear steps.

Foremost in the law's charge was Joe Cardona. He had spotted the leaders of the Golden Masks, making for the front of the second floor. Joe took the step by twos, a whole squad behind him. He reached the hallway where Jericho had once stood guard. Cardona saw the light of the living room.

He reached that objective, paying no heed to closed doors on the way. As soon as he entered, Cardona saw Tallam and Barfield. They had reached the alcove at the rear of the room; they had donned their golden masks, to face the police.

Twin faces showed their half smiles. Hands that wore golden gauntlets were raising revolvers. Cardona and seven of his men aimed to fire at the Golden Masks, hoping to riddle them where they stood. Tallam gave a tug at the rear bookcase.

Police revolvers spoke. Bullets mashed flat, seemingly in mid-air. Glass barriers had dropped in time to save the Golden Masks. Cardona and his men gaped, amazed; then they sprang forward.

One member of the squad blundered against the glass sheet that protected Tallam and Barfield. He sank back. Another officer discovered the glass that barred the doorway to the hall.

There was a hiss from the chandelier. Greenish vapor poured forth; Cardona detected an odor that resembled chlorine. This was not the yellowish gas that paralyzed its victims for a temporary period. It was a deadly vapor that would kill within fifteen minutes.

The Golden Masks had pronounced doom upon the men whom they had trapped. To ridicule their victims, they hauled away books at the sides of the alcove. They brought forth bundles of crisp cash; huge stacks of gold; tray-loads of resplendent gems.

Tallam tugged a cord. The floor of the alcove jolted; it quivered upward. The floor was an elevator that could carry the Golden Masks to a heavily barred third floor. By an exit through the roof, they could escape across the tops of adjoining houses, carrying their swag with them. These partners in crime intended to divide the shares that they had promised to the lesser members of their band.

Cardona fumed as he held his useless revolver. The Golden Masks stared through the glass, their eyes glowing with delight at the sight of men who were to die. Intent upon that view, they did not notice what occurred behind them. Only Cardona saw the next event.

Slowly, the center of the rear bookcase began a revolution. It was high enough from the rising floor to do so; but as it turned, the floor reached it. The pressure of the heavy bookcase stopped the elevator's rise. Instantly, the Golden Masks wheeled.

ON the threshold of a dim room beyond the bookcase stood The Shadow.

THE GOLDEN MASKS

He had guessed the game that the Golden Masks would play. He had picked the right room; the one by which he himself had once seen Tallam make an exit. Entering that room, he had solved the secret of a hidden spring that operated the bookcase.

Tallam and Barfield did more than turn. They leveled their revolvers as they wheeled. Simultaneously, The Shadow raised his automatics; but not with long sweeps of his arms. He tilted them upward from his hips, tugged the triggers as he aimed at two angles. His short move enabled him to beat the gun thrusts that Tallam and Barfield offered.

Joe Cardona saw silent flames spout from the muzzles of The Shadow's guns. No flashes came from the weapons held by the Golden Masks. Instead, the robed men sagged. One dropped his revolver and huddled motionless upon the stopped floor. The other tried to hold his balance, also attempted to deliver a shot. He failed in both endeavors. His efforts ended with a headlong spill.

No crash or thud marked those falls. The heavy glass deadened the sound, just as it had blocked the roar of The Shadow's guns. Cardona saw The Shadow manipulate hidden levers, then step away, through to the rear room.

The hiss from the chandelier ended. The greenish gas faded. A click reached Cardona's ears; it marked the closing of the rear bookcase. The fact that he had heard the sound made Cardona guess something else that had occurred. Springing forward, Joe reached the alcove. No barrier stopped him. The Shadow had raised the sheets of glass.

Golden masks, hastily donned, had fallen from the faces that wore them. No longer were Sidney Tallam and Roger Barfield an insidious, smiling pair, whose countenances made them appear as a pair of demonish twins. Their own faces were on view; Tallam's vicious, with its pursed lips; Barfield's drawn into a contorted smile that showed fiendishness rather than mirth.

The faces of these supermen of crime were fixed in death, like the golden masks that they had worn in life. Their long career of evil had been ended by The Shadow. With the death of its founders, the organization of the Golden Masks was dissolved, never to be revived.

SOON afterward, Joe Cardona and a squad of men found the dungeon rooms in the passage that led underground from the house. There they were greeted by James Lengerton and half a dozen other prisoners who had been released. Men of prominence—some whose disappearance had not yet been guessed—began to pour their stories to the law.

All had the same tale. They had failed to listen to threats. All had been treated with the paralyzing gas and then imprisoned. During each respite, they had been subjected to new demands. Failure to agree had been followed by another period of forced immobility.

In three cells, Cardona found prisoners who were undergoing the treatment that the Golden Masks had devised. One was Gilden Cleatland, the last to be gassed. Cardona knew that these men would recover within the next two days. Then their stories could be recorded like the others.

The Shadow and his aids were gone. The ex-prisoners had been placed in charge of the wounded Ashanti servants, who had become peaceable when told that their masters were dead. Staring along the passage, Cardona saw the door at the rear. He knew that The Shadow had come from far beyond it, and had gone again by the same route.

As he listened, Cardona fancied that he heard a quivering tone that echoed from some distant underground

THE GOLDEN MASKS

corridor. Faint, fading, it formed an evanescent peal of mirth that spoke of final victory.

Though other listeners had not caught it, Cardona was sure that he had heard The Shadow's laugh of triumph.

THE END