

THE CONDOR

Maxwell Grant

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CHAPTER I. THE HIDE-OUT

NEON lights revealed a hunched figure shambling along the sidewalk beneath the structure of an East Side elevated. A wizened face looked up at the ruddy glare of the delicatessen sign; then the hunched man scruffed on toward the blackened front of an empty store.

Reaching darkness, he paused.

This was one of those composite districts of Manhattan. Old buildings lined the avenue; the presence of the elevated had discouraged the erection of more modern structures. Yet there were bright spots along this decadent block; stores that enterprising merchants had opened in hope of mass business. These were the places that the shambling man was anxious to avoid.

He preferred darkness; he gained it as he scudded to the shelter of an elevated pillar. Crouching until a

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taxicab rolled by, the hunched man hustled to the far side of the street. Avoiding the lighted window of a corner pawnshop, he took to a secluded byway.

A cautious glance over his shoulder. The prowler spied no followers. He looked upward to spy the purple speck of light that marked the platform of an elevated station. No watchers there. He shuffled hastily along his way.

He had passed the borders of the bad lands, this shifty, scurrying prowler. He was cutting deeper into the underworld, to districts where danger lurked along forgotten streets. Yet the menace of the terrain was to his liking. He had reached the quarter of Manhattan that he knew.

Ten minutes after his departure from the avenue, the hunched man arrived upon a grimy, deserted street. Foot scuffles softened, he reached the blackened opening that marked an alleyway. His wizened face showed white in gloom as he looked craftily about. Then, like a vanishing jack-in-the-box, he disappeared as he ducked into the alley.

A whitened wall marked his goal. The hunched man moved stealthily as he approached it. Listening, he could hear someone moving about in a darkened niche. He caught the glow of a cigarette, as shielding fingers momentarily uncovered it. The hunched prowler stole forward and delivered a hoarse whisper:

"Cliff!"

THE cigarette glow reappeared, moving up and down as if in signal. Then, as the hunched man crept closer, a guarded voice gave greeting:

"Hello, Hawkeye. Got anything?"

"Yeah." "Hawkeye" was close beside the man who had awaited him. "Real dope, Cliff. I've spotted Luff Cadley's hideout."

"Where is it?" came the question.

"The old tenement past Burry's Garage," replied Hawkeye. "You know the joint. Just the other side of the avenue; two blocks above Lebo's hock shop."

"Thought they were tearing the old dump down."

"They haven't started yet. That's why Luff's using the place for a hide-out. He's been looking for you, Cliff. Don't waste time getting up there. Somebody's gunning for him. He won't be sticking around much longer."

"I get you. Listen, Hawkeye: you put in the report call while I'm heading up there. Don't stall about it."

"O.K., Cliff."

The two men separated in the darkness. Hawkeye headed to the depths of the alley, while Cliff walked out toward the street. That point gained, his pace became a brisk one. Unlike Hawkeye, who preferred circuitous rambles, Cliff was making off in a direct line, straight for the avenue.

It was nearly a dozen blocks to the location that Hawkeye had named. Cliff, when he reached the avenue, decided to make time by elevated. He hurried up the steps of a station and reached the platform just in time to catch a northbound train.

Compared with the others aboard the jolting local, this new passenger presented an excellent appearance. Cliff Marsland had few of the characteristics that indicated a type of the underworld. He displayed the brawny build of an athlete. His expression was sober, almost sedate.

Yet there was a hardness to his chiseled features that marked him as a man who could be dangerous. Cliff Marsland held a reputation in the bad lands. His bearing sustained it; at the same time, Cliff could travel elsewhere without exciting comment or suspicion.

It was different with Hawkeye. The hunched man, when he prowled, was a furtive character – the type that passing patrolmen would watch. The cops, however, seldom saw Hawkeye; his specialty was keeping from their range of vision.

A contrast, Cliff and Hawkeye. Their friendship, had it been known, would have caused too much comment. Cliff was a sharpshooter who could pack a powerful gat; Hawkeye, a spotter who could trail the most difficult quarry. Of different ilk, it was wise for them to keep their meetings secret.

Particularly because of their real missions in the underworld. These two were engaged in the most dangerous of all enterprises, one that would have spelled their doom had it been remotely suspected – Cliff and Hawkeye were agents of The Shadow.

Their meeting tonight had been in behalf of that mysterious chief whose very name brought terror to men of crime. Hawkeye, always on the trail of crime, had heard that "Luff" Cadley was in town. Luff had known Cliff Marsland, at the time when the latter had been in prison, serving time for a crime committed by another.

Luff had let slip that he was looking for Cliff. Hawkeye had passed that word along. It had reached The Shadow; from the chief had come the order to make contact. Tonight had presented the first opportunity, thanks to Hawkeye's search for the hide-out to which Luff had suddenly dived.

ALIGHTING from the elevated, Cliff Marsland headed for the old tenement building that Hawkeye had designated. Cliff felt no need for caution as he made for the destination. It would be easy to find Luff and learn what the fellow wanted. The best way would be to enter openly, through the main door of the abandoned tenement.

Cliff knew the building. There was a fire escape at the rear; but it would be a mistake to use it. Luff Cadley must be hiding out for a reason. He would be apt to mistake a friend for an enemy should the friend come by the fire escape.

Cliff had ordered Hawkeye to report. That meant word to The Shadow through Burbank, a contact man who relayed telephone messages. The report had been a matter of routine on Cliff's part. His real report would come later, after he had talked with Luff.

Such was the burden of Cliff's thoughts as he entered the front door of the tenement that stood by Burry's Garage. A doorless, blackened entrance, it gripped Cliff in a hollowness as he moved cautiously along a creaking floor in search of a stairway.

Cliff had a flashlight, but he did not use it until he found the steps. Then he blinked the light intermittently, to discover a turn ahead. Past that point, he could use the light less guardedly.

Cliff reached the turn. He pressed the catch of his torch and focused it above.

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Grimy floors, bare walls, crumbling ceiling. Those were Cliff's first impressions as he reached the topmost step. Then, swinging left toward the rear of the building, he discovered a corridor with doors at sides and end.

Cliff paced along the corridor. All the while, his eyes were keen, noting door after door. They centered on the barrier at the end. For a moment, Cliff was on the point of stopping; then he caught himself before he committed the mistake.

Something had glimmered in the light. A shining object wedged from the very edge of that door at the corridor's end. Cliff had recognized it on the instant. The object was the muzzle of a revolver, pointed by some lurker in a darkened room.

"Luff!" Cliff gave the name hoarsely, as he slowed his pace instead of stopping. "This is Cliff. Cliff Marsland!"

Pausing, Cliff let the beam of his flashlight swing upward. The gleam bathed his face. As he stood tense in that barren corridor, a hoarse greeting answered. A door creaked in welcome. Cliff clicked out the light.

Advancing through darkness, he reached the door and entered. A nervous hand gripped his arm. Cliff heard the door swing shut. Then came the flare of a match. Fingers shook as they applied it to a kerosene lantern. A light suffused the room. Cliff Marsland and Luff Cadley stood face to face.

CLIFF had known Luff as a hard-faced, heavy-built fellow who prided himself upon his strength. The man had changed in the few years since Cliff had seen him last. Luff's shoulders were stooped; his face was drawn and pale. Only his eyes still showed a sparkle of what had once been a defiant flash.

"Been hoping you'd find me, Cliff," confided Luff, his voice half wheezy. "I looked around for you; hut I had to give it up. Afraid somebody would lamp me."

"Somebody who's gunning for you?" questioned Cliff.

"Yeah." Luff nodded nervously, and his face looked troubled. "Murk Feeny. Said he was going to bump me after I got out of stir. I heard about it after I hit town. That's why I took a dive out of sight. Say – you ain't seen Murk, have you?"

"What would I want with him, Luff?"

"I don't mean that, Cliff. I just figured maybe you'd seen him hereabouts. Watching this place."

"Nobody outside when I came in, Luff."

Luff looked pleased. He rubbed his hands and looked at the closed door; then blinked suspiciously.

"How'd you find this place?" he demanded. "If you guessed where it is, maybe Luff would, too."

"Pal of mine was looking for you," explained Cliff. "He's the only fellow who could have spotted this hide-out. I put him on the job when I heard you were looking for me. I'm glad I came in the front door, though."

"Say" – Luff blinked again – "I'd have plugged you sure if you'd come in by the fire escape, Cliff. It's just outside the window. I moved into this room so I could watch it."

As he spoke, Luff gestured toward narrow windows. They were covered with old window shades, patched so that no glimmer of light could filter through their tattered surfaces. Cliff studied Luff's pale face. He noted eagerness as well as nervousness.

Something was irking Luff's brain. The crook was thinking of opportunity that he had awaited during his stay behind prison walls. He needed aid in crime; that was why he had sought Cliff Marsland.

Here in his hide-out, Luff Cadley was ready to spill news to a former pal, unwitting that his listener had become an aid of The Shadow.

CHAPTER II. CRIME TO COME

"FIFTY-FIFTY, Cliff," spoke Luff Cadley, in a wary tone. "Fifty-fifty on a job that's going to be a cinch. Are you in?"

"I'm listening, Luff." Cliff had taken a seat on a battered couch and was eyeing Luff, who sat forward on an upturned soap box. "I'm listening. Spill it."

"I can't take no chances, Cliff" – Luff's tone was almost pleading – "and that's why I'm offering to divvy. If you're in, all right; but if –"

"What do you mean by 'no chances'?" Cliff was noncommittal in his interruption. "What's the catch?"

"There ain't none, Cliff. Not if you come in. It's the way I stand, that's all."

Cliff watched Luff steadily. Without making a single promise, The Shadow's agent was cagily leading the ex-convict into further discussion. Luff was anxious to talk; Cliff knew that an indifferent attitude would accomplish more than any other.

"There's Murk Feeny and his crew," explained Luff. "They're gunning for me, Cliff. While I was in stir, Murk said he'd rub me out if I ever showed up in New York. The tip was passed to me."

"And yet, you're here."

"Yeah. It means I'm taken chances with the bulls, too. I wasn't no goody-goody in the Big House. They've got me listed. You know that, Cliff."

Cliff nodded; the gesture encouraged Luff.

"And then, besides that, there's" – Luff hesitated; then leaned forward – "there's The Condor. He won't take me, Cliff, on account of how I stand."

"The Condor?"

Luff nodded. He arose and crept forward, his eyes shining beads that glistened from his pale, hollow features.

"There was a mug in the Big House," stated Luff, "who they called Cuckoo Gruzen. Remember him, Cliff? Kind of a daffy guy? But sort of wise-looking, too?"

"I remember him. Doing a stretch for bumping some guy in a brawl."

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"Yeah. Most everybody thought he was bugs. But he wasn't. I found that out when he talked to me. Cuckoo Gruzen was all set for a sure thing when he got mixed in that fight and wound up in stir. He had a rod on him when he was pinched."

"I remember. What happened to Cuckoo?"

"He croaked. Sickly guy; you remember what he looked like. Couldn't stand the gaff in the Big House. But he knew he was going to kick off. He got a chance to spill me the lay. About The Condor."

Luff paused to lick his pasty lips. Cliff looked unimpressed. His very attitude encouraged Luff to further statements.

"THIS ain't no pipe dream, Cliff," assured Luff. "The Condor is a big-shot; there ain't nobody can match him. Six years ago he started working. He passed the word to smart guys what they were to do."

"Jobs for all of them?"

"Yeah. And most of them have probably cleaned up already. But that ain't all there is to it. That's just the beginning. Figure it like this, Cliff.

"A bunch of smart workers, each starting out. Plenty of time ahead – six years it was, when The Condor passed the tips along. Each guy to bring in his load of swag, making sure, though, that nobody was wise."

"And Cuckoo Gruzen was one of them?"

"Right. But knowing he was croaking, he passed his lay along to me. All I got to do is make the haul and breeze in with the stuff. Providing it's before the thirteenth."

"Of this month?"

"Yeah. That's when the six years is up. That's when The Condor quits waiting. Him and the guys that have pulled their jobs move out. After then, there's no stopping them."

"Who is The Condor?"

"Don't ask me. All I know is how to reach him. Cuckoo spilled the dope. And it don't matter who shows up with the swag. Even Cuckoo had never seen The Condor."

Cliff's lips soured. His expression indicated that he doubted the fanciful tale. Again, Cliff had used the best way to lead Luff along. Spying doubt on his visitor's countenance, Luff became more anxious to convince his listener.

"Don't you get the gag, Cliff?" quizzed Luff. "The Condor wants smooth workers. He don't care who they are. He set the jobs. It don't matter who pulls them. As long as a guy shows up with the swag, The Condor will know he's good."

"I begin to see it," nodded Cliff. "That jam Cuckoo got into put him out of the running. So he passed the tip to you."

"That's the idea, Cliff. But he only wised me to one job, because that's all Cuckoo knew about."

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"And what's the lay?"

FOR the first time, Cliff had made a mistake. His direct question put Luff on guard. Mistrustful even of a man whom he considered a pal, Luff shied away. He backed to the soap box, sat there and eyed Cliff warily.

"I'm grabbing the swag," he volunteered. "That ain't your job, Cliff."

"Go to it," responded Cliff, with a casual shrug of his shoulders. "Good luck to you, Luff."

As he spoke, Cliff arose from the cot and strolled toward the door. His new display of indifference restored Luff's confidence. The pasty-faced crook came to his feet and quickly blocked Cliff's path.

"Don't walk out," he pleaded. "I gotta count on you, Cliff. Listen: I can't go to The Condor after I make the haul. I gotta duck on account of Murk and the bulls. But I'm passing you the stuff, see? So you can join up with The Condor."

"And fifty-fifty means –"

"That whatever you get out of working with The Condor, you slip me half. It's going to be big dough, Cliff. Steady dough and you'll be in on it."

Cliff considered. Luff grinned in pleased fashion. He did not know the thoughts that were rushing through Cliff's brain. The Shadow's agent was balancing future possibilities. He could see that Luff plotted immediate crime; ordinarily, that should be prevented. But if one crime, allowed to pass, should uncover many, the game would be greater.

"I'm spilling you the straight dope, Cliff," assured Luff, misunderstanding Cliff's deliberation. "Listen – I'll give you a tip. You won't have no trouble getting in with The Condor, after I pass you the swag."

"Why not?" inquired Cliff, mechanically.

"Because," whispered Luff eagerly, "there's something in the swag that will let The Condor know you're ready to work with him. Something that you'll keep out, to show at the right time. But I ain't telling you more" – Luff shifted warily – "not until I've pulled the job. Savvy?"

Cliff nodded. He wanted to hear further details; but he knew it would be unwise to press the pasty-faced crook. He had gained an inkling; it would be enough for tonight. The proposition now was to keep Luff waiting until The Shadow could be informed.

"Are you in, Cliff?"

Cliff was still nodding as he heard Luff's question. He was trying to think of the best stall that would hold Luff here in the hide-out until later.

"The job's going to be a cinch for me, Cliff," Luff assured. "I can spring it tonight and pass the swag to you in a hurry. It's down my alley, Cliff, this job."

Still nodding, Cliff understood. Luff's chief ability was safe-cracking; but only on a limited scale. He was contemplating a one-man job. That meant the swag could not be heavy. These would be details for The Shadow.

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A MOTION from Luff ended Cliff's hazy speculation. The pasty-faced man had shifted. He was staring at a window, noting a slight motion of a blind. Cliff saw him fidget, reaching for his revolver.

"The windows are open, aren't they, Luff?" inquired Cliff calmly, as he gripped the crook's arm.

"Yeah," whispered Luff, tensely. "Open, so I can hear anything outside."

"Then it's just a breeze," assured Cliff. "Both of the shades are moving. Don't get jittery, Luff."

The crook grinned weakly. He turned to Cliff and nodded sheepishly. His expression showed that Cliff's presence gave him courage. But as Cliff watched the man's face, he saw a new flicker come over it. Luff was trembling, his eyes staring toward the door.

At the same instant, Cliff heard a sound behind him. He wheeled, to stare with Luff. While Luff was shaking, backing away, Cliff became rigid. While Luff was worrying about the windows, someone had opened the door. Upon the threshold stood a big-jawed man whose dark face wore a malicious scowl.

A grimy fist was displaying a leveled .38; behind the ugly-faced intruder were two backers, each with a ready gun. Cliff needed no introduction to these ruffians. The big-jawed man was Murk Feeny; the others his henchmen.

A killer who held a grudge against Luff Cadley, Murk was here for murder. His leering face showed evil triumph. His glowering eyes indicated his one purpose. Luff Cadley was slated for the spot.

The ex-convict knew it, as he whined from the wall. A few years in the penitentiary had sapped Luff's courage. Pitiful in expression, Luff was showing his fear of death.

It was not so with Cliff Marsland. Stolidly, The Shadow's agent met Murk's gloating gaze. His lips were set, despite the tone of a sneer that Cliff heard from Murk. Cliff knew what was passing in the murderer's mind; he had encountered others of Murk's ilk in the past.

Murk Feeny had come here to rub out Luff Cadley. Such a job, to Murk, included all who might be present with a would-be victim. Cliff Marsland knew that his own plight was desperate. He, like Luff, was due to die.

Yet Cliff was steady, despite the threat of looming guns. He waited stolidly, in hope that some break might come. He was ready to go down fighting when Murk Feeny gave the signal for slaughter.

CHAPTER III. GASPED WORDS

"Two of you," sneered Murk Feeny, eyeing the contrasted faces before him. "Well, we didn't figure on you, Marsland, but we ain't kicking because you're here. We knowed you was a pal of Luff's."

Murk beckoned with his gun. He edged into the room, to back Cliff and Luff against the wall. Murk's henchmen followed. A trio in the center of white-plastered walls, they covered their victims from close range.

"We've been looking over some hideouts," snarled Murk, shifting his gaze from Cliff to Luff. "Places you might have picked but didn't. So we took a Brodie and came here. Kind of a dumb cluck, ain't you, Luff?"

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"If you'd used your noodle, you'd have fixed that crack under the door. But you didn't and we wised after we sneaked in here. And we didn't take no chances after we spotted that light.

"These bozos ain't the only torpedoes with me. There's two more guys in the hall, and a couple that I just chased around back. Just so's to cover the fire escape, in case you tried to scam."

"Honest, Murk," whined Luff, "I ain't done nothing to have you gunning for me. I've been in stir. Up there in the Big House there ain't been no chanct for me to queer any racket you've been –"

"Cut it!" snarled Murk. "You know why you're going on the spot. You went away for safecracking, didn't you?"

Luff nodded weakly.

"Yeah," affirmed Murk, "and there was one box that you busted that the bulls never knew about. The one at Tim Rooney's gambling joint, where you snatched the IOU that Flash Lodo wanted.

"You got two grand for the job; and it was worth it to Flash. He was in for thirty on that IOU; and I was Tim Rooney's partner. Both of us took it on the chin for fifteen grand.

"Well, Flash Lodo got his. I gave it to him. And you'd have got yours if you hadn't gone to the Big House right after that. You were sitting pretty when you were up the river, even if you didn't think so."

Murk shifted his gaze to Cliff. His murderous scowl increased.

"So you're Luff's pal, eh?" snorted Murk. "Only one he's got; and I don't know of any mugs that pal around with you. That fixes you, Marsland, along with Luff."

Stepping back, Murk nodded to his henchmen. Their revolvers came up as Murk's lowered. Cliff and Luff were each covered by a .38; the two torpedoes looked toward their chief.

"Give it," rasped Murk.

CLIFF'S body had become rigid. The others had not noticed his instinctive preparation for this moment. Before either henchmen could obey Murk's command, Cliff hurtled forward, diving for their leader.

Murk swung back to ward off the attack. Twisting free, he sent Cliff half sprawling to the floor. His revolver bounded from his hand. Murk sprang to regain it; as he did so, his two henchmen swung to cover Cliff.

At that instant, a ripping sound came from one window. The patched shade was whipped aside. In from darkness bounded a blackened figure. A flash of crimson came from the lining of a sable-hued cloak. Brilliant eyes flashed from beneath the brim of a slouch hat.

Hidden lips uttered a fierce laugh that stopped assassins short. Wheeling toward the window, Murk's henchmen faced the enemy who had made such startling entry. From Murk, who was stooping with hand on gun, came the gasped recognition:

"The Shadow!"

Revolvers flashed as Murk's minions aimed. But as the torpedoes acted, they saw mammoth muzzles that looked before them. Fists had thrust forward from the blackness of the cloak. Thin-gloved hands were ready

with their automatics.

The big weapons boomed automatically. Each .45 spat its tongue of flame. Like ruddy darts, those flashes pointed to their targets. Crooks wavered, fingers on triggers, then sank to the floor, their revolvers unfired.

Murk Feeny was aiming on the rise. He fired one quick shot as The Shadow wheeled. The bullet singed the folds of The Shadow's cloak. Murk swung to aim again. Cliff Marsland, rising from hands and knees, made a headlong dive to stop him.

A single shot thundered in the close-walled room. Cliff heard it while in motion. Then he hit Murk with a flying tackle, bowling the big crook to the floor. Rising above his antagonist, Cliff prepared to deliver a knock-out punch. He stopped his blow; with raised fist he stared at Murk's face.

Those ugly lips were coughing incoherently. Evil eyes were bulging from their sockets. Beyond Murk lay his useless revolvers; the crook's body was sagging limp in Cliff's grasp.

The Shadow had beaten Murk to the shot. The would-be killer had taken a bullet while Cliff was surging forward. Murk had not fired; the shot that Cliff had heard was a blast from The Shadow's automatic.

STARING upward, Cliff caught sight of a bolting figure. Luff Cadley had dived for the door; he was making a mad dash to the corridor. Beyond the open portal, Cliff caught the sudden glimmer of flashlights. Revolvers barked their echoes from the bare-walled hall.

Cliff heard a whining cry; then into his path came the wheeling shape of The Shadow. Cliff heard the challenging laugh of his black-clad chief. He saw the flashes of automatics; he heard the double thunder of two guns.

The Shadow was pumping hot lead down the corridor. Flashlights made distorted glares as their holders let them fly through the air. Hopeless shots responded from half-loosened revolvers. With those echoes came the thud of bodies.

A clatter outside the window. Henchmen were coming up the fire escape. The Shadow swept in that direction. Again he laughed, a sinister challenge as he leaned out to meet the foe. Oaths spat from the lips of the men who had been below.

On watch, they had not seen The Shadow crouched outside Luff's window. They had witnessed the ripping of the blind; that was all. At last they saw The Shadow's outline; they aimed upward for their target.

Automatics were already delivering. Clanging bullets ricocheted from the open ironwork. One crook gave a wild cry as he lost his hold and plunged to the concrete just below. The other dropped and fled. He had been lucky; a step of the fire escape had shielded him from those bullets that The Shadow had dispatched in darkness.

Cliff Marsland had gained Murk Feeny's gun. Standing in the center of the room, Cliff stared about. Prone bodies on the floor. Blackness at the window. The Shadow had swung out to the fire escape.

The kerosene lantern, shining from atop a soap box, had escaped all attention. Its illumination had persisted through every scene. For a moment, Cliff thought that the strange drama had reached its close.

Then, from the hall came a creeping figure. A hoarse cough issued from whitened lips. Hopeless eyes looked up toward Cliff. Luff Cadley had returned.

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THE ex-convict was in bad plight. Murk's henchmen in the corridor had stopped his flight with a barrage of bullets. The Shadow's intervention had saved Luff from immediate death, but Cliff saw that the wounds were mortal.

Luff's cough was a dying one. Minutes alone would mark the remainder of his life. Yet Luff had somehow regained the nerve that had once characterized him. His lips managed a grin as his fading eyes saw Cliff. Luff's hand rose pleadingly. Cliff stooped beside the dying crook.

"The swag," coughed Luff. "You – you can get it, Cliff. For – for The Condor. All – all yours, Cliff. I – I'm through."

Cliff nodded as he crouched close to Luff. He made no effort to prompt the crook. He could see that Luff was trying to tell all he knew.

"Walpin," gasped Luff. "Michael Walpin. He – he has pearls, Cliff. Worth – worth a hundred grand. With them – with them – the Blue Pearl. Show it when you see – see The Condor."

Luff's eyes closed. For a moment, Cliff feared the man was through. Then Luff's lips moved weakly, his statement barely audible.

"Take – take the swag," groaned Luff, feebly, "to a place – a place called Paulington. Paulington, Cliff – then Mountview – Mountview Lodge."

Luff's lips weakened. Apparently the dying man's strength was gone. Cliff whispered a question in Luff's ear, hoarsely, so it could be heard.

"I'm to keep the Blue Pearl out?" he quizzed. "To show it when I get to Mountview Lodge?"

Luff nodded. Then, with eyes still closed, he whispered:

"Look for the big bird – The Condor – when you see it – show the Blue Pearl –"

A final cough racked Luff's frame. The dying man's eyes opened; then bulged. Cliff saw their glassy stare as Luff's body slumped from his grasp. The crook was dead.

SIRENS were whining from the distance. Cliff caught the faint blasts of police whistles. Shots had been heard from the old tenement building. The law was on its way.

A whisper from the window. Cliff came to himself. He sprang to the lantern and extinguished it; then groped to the window and reached the fire escape. He descended.

Sirens were closer. A whistle, oddly muffled, apparently came from the front of the tenement house. Cliff heard a whispered order in the darkness. The Shadow was pointing him to an outlet between buildings at the rear.

Cliff stumbled off toward the path to safety. He threaded his way to the next street; crossed and took to the cover of an alley. Another block brought him to a deserted street. Cliff headed toward the avenue where the elevated loomed.

Cliff knew that The Shadow had followed; but his course and that of his chief had parted. The law, arriving, would find Luff Cadley, dead among his would-be slayers.

Luff's life was ended; his story told. Cliff alone had heard those dying words. Perhaps The Shadow, outside the window, had caught some of the statement; but not all. He would be waiting for Cliff's report.

Two blocks up the avenue, Cliff found a drug store with telephone booths. He entered and put in a call to Burbank. He heard the quiet, even tones of The Shadow's contact man. Cliff reported.

Slowly, steadily, word for word, Cliff repeated all that Luff Cadley had told him. Recollection of the dying man's statement had remained clear in Cliff's mind. His task done, Cliff departed.

Tonight, The Shadow would know of the existence of The Condor, strange supercrook who had waited for years to assemble men of crime. Michael Walpin – the Blue Pearl – the town of Paulington – a place called Mountview Lodge; all these were items of a finished whole.

The future offered challenge to The Shadow. Challenge from The Condor, whose scheme of crime must be frustrated. How? To Cliff, the question was the problem. To The Shadow, it would be the making of a new campaign.

CHAPTER IV. THE SHADOW PREPARES

THREE days had passed since the battle in Luff Cadley's hide-out. The death of the ex-convict was an episode already forgotten. Police had known of the feud between Luff and Murk Feeny. Their theory was that the two enemies had battled to a finish. Some of Murk's dead henchmen were presumed to be pals of Luff's.

This third day found The Shadow in his sanctum. Surrounded by blackened walls, he occupied himself at a polished table in the corner, where the glare of a bluish light focused its rays upon hands that moved beneath.

The Shadow was opening a large manila envelope that he had received that day. From it, he extracted a batch of photographs. They were aerial views, taken from high altitude. The Shadow arranged these prints upon the table and studied the panorama that they formed.

The photographic map represented the terrain about the town of Paulington. Differing shades indicated that the ground was hilly. Patches of woodland contrasted with open stretches of farmland.

A winding line indicated the railroad that passed through Paulington. There were twisting roads besides; most of these hubbed to a cluster of buildings that were the town of Paulington. Tracing from that point, The Shadow moved his finger toward a thickly wooded hillside.

A good road led in that direction. A few miles from town, it split; the more traveled portion curved through wooded area, then cut straight across toward a town a dozen miles away. The point that interested The Shadow, however, was a clearing on the hillside near the good road. This lay a few miles beyond the fork.

A building stood in the center of the clearing. Though tiny in the picture, it bore the appearance of an estate. A thin-lined rectangle surrounding the place showed that the property was fenced off. Its area could be estimated approximately a dozen acres.

This secluded place was doubtless Mountview Lodge. On the hillside, it stood back from the traveled road and could be reached only by a narrow private road of its own. The distance from the traveled road measured about half a mile.

Tracing again from Paulington, The Shadow moved his finger to the fork; then studied the less traveled road, which branched to the left. This skirted the base of a hill; then split and rejoined.

THE CONDOR

The split indicated that there had once been a choice of a lower road and an upper. A stream ran along the lower road; probably, in flood time, horses and wagons had preferred the upper road. The aerial view, however, showed the upper stretch as no more than a wide path; this indicated that the road had been abandoned.

At one place on the abandoned road was the beginning of a tiny path that showed among trees. It led to a cabin, nearly a mile from the road. The view showed wreckage beside the cabin; also tiny splotches in the roof.

Using a microscope, The Shadow studied the building. His enlarged view showed it to be no more than a tumble-down shack. The junk beside the cabin was the remains of a porch. The splotches were breaks in the cabin roof.

Further up the hillside was a flat whiteness among the trees. This appeared to be a rocky ledge.

HIS examination finished, The Shadow laid the photographs aside; then produced topographical maps of the same district.

These were government surveys, not recently revised. They showed the contours of the broad, wooded hill and indicated the roads that The Shadow had studied. Buildings were marked in the locality of Mountview Lodge. The cabin on the other side of the hill was also shown.

The flat ledge high up on the hill bore the legend "Table Rock." The contour lines showed that the slope was steep from the abandoned road, up past the old cabin, to Table Rock itself.

The map showed isolated buildings away from the hill. These were farmhouses that corresponded with those on the aerial photographs. Very little new construction had taken place in the vicinity, although it was plain that property about Mountview Lodge had been improved.

Another set of maps were produced by The Shadow's hands. These were local charts, older and less accurate than the government surveys. They were useful, however, because they listed the various properties of the vicinity.

Where The Shadow had located Mountview Lodge, this map showed a much larger outline of property that bore the name "R. Silson;" then, in parenthesis, the word "Mountview;" but no mention of the title "Lodge."

The old cabin was not marked; but its location was on the fringe of the extensive Silson property. R. Silson, apparently, had once owned most of the hillside.

Along the road that skirted the left of the broad hill, following the stream, The Shadow found various farm properties. J. Barton, T. Lucas, M. Smith and others were listed as the owners.

Mountview at the east of the hill; Table Rock almost center; the cabin a bit to the west – these were the important points. Nevertheless, The Shadow listed the other names also. To the names of farm owners he added a name that he noted off beyond the north of the hill. This name was H. Zegler; after it, in parenthesis, appeared the word "Mill."

Naturally enough, the Zegler property was on a stream that came in from the northern edge of the map, traveled westward, crossed the road and joined another branch stream. This branch was the one that followed the road; it cut west past Paulington and was joined by other branches that came in from various sectors of the countryside.

THE CONDOR

In fact, the whole district hereabouts was well-cut by tiny rills and brooks. Paulington was in a watershed area, and this feature was one to be expected.

Contour maps and aerial photographs were in duplicate. The Shadow took the extra set, put his notations with the maps and placed them in an envelope which he addressed to Rutledge Mann, Badger Building, New York City. That done, he clicked off the bluish lamp and departed from the sanctum.

IT was late afternoon outside. Traffic was heavy outside the old Albion Hotel when a taxicab wedged in front of the building. The passenger who stepped out was a tall, calm-faced individual who carried a large briefcase.

Entering the hotel lobby, the arrival inquired for Mr. Clark Copley. The clerk made a call, then inquired:

"Are you Mr. Henry Arnaud?"

The arrival nodded. The clerk passed the information over the telephone, then instructed:

"Go up to Room 406. Mr. Copley is expecting you."

A few minutes later the tall personage stepped into Room 406, to shake hands with a smiling, red-faced man whose manner was brisk and pleasant. Clark Copley pointed his visitor to a chair beside a large table. Room 406 was a small display room.

"Mighty glad to meet you, Mr. Arnaud," assured Copley, mopping his brow with a handkerchief. "It's not often I run in from Cincinnati, just on the chance of making a sale. Particularly when I've never seen the customer before.

"But that telephone call of yours sounded like business. That's why I came on East. I figured that if you were going to buy, like you said you were over the phone, I'd be the man to sell you.

"Why? Because I've got the one line that can't be beat. Wait until you see these beauties. Just look at this layout" – Copley was opening boxes as he placed them on the table – "and tell me if you've ever spied the like of them."

Keen eyes sparkled from the visage of Henry Arnaud as the visitor viewed lines of pearls. These were of all sizes and shapes; their lustre was apparent despite the poor lighting of the room.

Those eyes of Henry Arnaud were the eyes of The Shadow. In temporary guise, The Shadow had come to view the wares that Clark Copley offered. The pearl seller, however, did not observe the sparkle that showed momentarily as The Shadow viewed the display. Copley was opening new boxes.

"To use the old vernacular, Mr. Arnaud" – Copley leaned back and removed a half-smoked cigar from the corner of his mouth – "we'd say that these pearls of mine would pass as the real McCoy. Great stuff, aren't they?"

The Shadow nodded. He was examining pearls between his long finger tips.

"Some of them are real," went on Copley. "That is, they're fresh-water pearls. River pearls, from mussels instead of oysters. Then there's some Japanese culture pearls. Smart fellows, those Japs. They've been catching oysters for years, putting sand in them and making them raise pearls. Right in captivity. That means real pearls cheaper."

THE CONDOR

The Shadow was picking out pearly spheres and placing them aside with a choice that caused Copley to nod approvingly. After a short while, The Shadow paused, looked quietly at the pearl salesman and questioned:

"What about the replicas? I understood that they were your specialty."

"Saved them for last," chuckled Copley, producing a box and opening it. "Glass bubbles, filled with liquid ammonia and coloring matter, mostly from fish scales. But I'm leaving it to you to give an opinion."

IN the box that Copley thrust forward was a most remarkable display of imitation pearls. Even to close inspection, they surpassed the actual river pearls and culture pearls that the man from Cincinnati had first shown.

Varied shades: touches of crimson glow, bluish hues and even tinges of glimmering blackness – these were the features that gave lustre to the almost perfect imitations. These were more than ordinary specimens of clever workmanship; they were replicas of famous pearls.

"Copied from originals," explained Copley. "You'd have to lay them alongside the real ones to know the difference. The most valuable of real pearls are globular; that gives us a break when it comes to reproducing them.

"If you're putting on a display for the public, Mr. Arnaud, you can label these and make them the center exhibit. There's the black pearl owned by the Sultan of Surakarta; this one is the famous Siamese teardrop.

"Name any famous pearl. Chances are I've got its copy right here in this batch. It's a business with me, Mr. Arnaud."

"This one?" questioned The Shadow, quietly. He had already laid aside four or five.

"That's the Nile Pearl," replied Copley. "Copy of an Egyptian specimen. You'll want that one; look at the delicate green tinge."

"I shall take it; and this one?"

"The famous Blue Pearl. Bought anonymously from a French duke about fifteen years ago. They say an American took it and paid plenty. It was copied before the duke sold it. That's one item there's not much call for. Maybe it's not famous enough – Still, it's a dandy –"

"I shall take it. Also this one, which I recognize as an excellent imitation of an original that came from Bombay. Add them to the others that I first selected. Then give me the total."

Copley produced pencil and paper; he figured the amount at six hundred dollars. As he presented the bill, he offered an explanation:

"They're actually cheap at that price, Mr. Arnaud. You've picked the beauties; some of those mussels look as good as oyster pearls. Don't forget that those replicas are sweet ones. If you showed that lot to an expert and told him they were real, he'd have to make a close inspection before –"

The Shadow had arisen. From his pocket he was drawing a roll of currency that made Copley pause and gape. Peeling off six bills of one hundred dollar denomination, The Shadow added a fifty and passed the money to Copley.

THE CONDOR

"I am also paying the expenses of your trip," he stated quietly. "Probably you included it in the price; but it took you from other duties. Place my purchases in one box."

Copley pocketed the money and began to pack the pearls eagerly. He remarked that he would be able to catch an early train to Cincinnati, a fact that he appreciated.

A slight smile appeared upon the lips of Henry Arnaud.

DEPARTING from the hotel, The Shadow returned to the sanctum. There he opened the box beneath the bluish light. The imitation pearls showed with added lustre. From them, The Shadow removed the replicas that he had purchased with the Blue Pearl. He had bought those merely to cover the fact that he wanted one in particular.

The pearls that remained in the box numbered a full two dozen, with the false Blue Pearl conspicuous. The others, however, formed an excellent variety. Odd-shaped river pearls and culture pearls contrasted with sheer imitations. Yet these latter looked resplendent. Clark Copley had been right when he had admired The Shadow's choice.

Going to another portion of the sanctum, The Shadow sat before a mirror and began a change of physiognomy. Aided with articles of make-up, he changed the contours of his visage. A masklike, thin-lipped countenance replaced the face of Henry Arnaud. Only a hawkish trace remained as a reminder of the former features.

AGAIN, The Shadow left the sanctum. Evening had settled; street lamps were aglow when a tall figure strolled leisurely into the lobby of the exclusive Cobalt Club. The doorman bowed as he delivered a message.

"Good evening, Mr. Cranston," said the attendant. "Commissioner Barth called to state that he would meet you at Mr. Walpin's at nine o'clock."

"Thank you," acknowledged The Shadow, in a quiet tone.

Passing through the lobby, The Shadow observed a large clock that registered half past seven. He went into a telephone booth and made a call. A quiet voice answered:

"Burbank speaking."

"Instructions to Marsland," said The Shadow quietly. "Time set. Nine-thirty to nine-forty. Buffalo Mail."

"Instructions received."

The Shadow strolled from the telephone booth. Divesting his overcoat, he revealed evening clothes beneath. He gave the cloak to the attendant at the check room, along with his hat.

"There is a package in the overcoat pocket," he remarked. "Be careful of it."

"Yes, Mr. Cranston."

The Shadow smiled as he strolled toward the grillroom. Here at the Cobalt Club he was recognized as Lamont Cranston, a globe-trotting millionaire, friend of Acting Police Commissioner Wainwright Barth.

What a revelation it would be should club members learn that the real Lamont Cranston was absent from New York; that this being who wore the millionaire's languid guise was none other than The Shadow!

CHAPTER V. THE SHADOW'S HOUR

AT precisely quarter past eight, The Shadow strolled from the lobby of the Cobalt Club. His gait was more leisurely than ever; the doorman took it as a sign that Lamont Cranston had dined well.

A limousine curved over from across the street as the figure of Lamont Cranston appeared upon the sidewalk. A chauffeur stepped forth and bowed as he opened the door.

"Good evening, Mr. Cranston."

This was Stanley, Lamont Cranston's chauffeur. Like others, he thought The Shadow was his real master. Even Stanley did not know of the league between The Shadow and the actual Lamont Cranston that helped The Shadow to masquerade during the millionaire's absence.

The Shadow entered the limousine. Stanley took the wheel and drove slowly away, expecting orders through the speaking tube. They came. The Shadow, in the quiet tone of Cranston, ordered the chauffeur to take him to an address near Riverside Drive.

It was just half past eight when the limousine arrived at its destination. Stanley sat stolid at the wheel, a habit to which he had been trained. He did not hear the door open; nor did he see the figure that emerged.

During the ride, The Shadow had opened a locked bag that he kept in the limousine. From it he had taken garments of black. He had doffed—silk hat and overcoat; in their place he was wearing his cloak and slouch hat.

Stealthily, invisible in darkness, The Shadow moved along a secluded stretch of sidewalk. He glided through a passage behind a low, old-fashioned apartment building. He reached a wall; from there, his course led upward.

A window, a projection, finally a grilled balcony. The Shadow came outside a second-story window that marked a darkened room. He wedged a flat length of steel between the portions of the sash. The window yielded noiselessly. The Shadow entered.

This was the rear room of a corner apartment. It had two windows at the back; one at the side. The Shadow's blotched shape formed a silhouette as he entered; then he was totally within the darkness of the room.

Only a thin streak of light showed between heavy somber curtains at the front of the room. Blinking a flashlight, The Shadow kept its rays against the wall. He found a picture frame, set like a panel. He pressed it with gloved fingers.

At first, the frame refused to budge. Then The Shadow found the combination. Down; up; down again; then to the left. A hidden hinge delivered a click. The frame swung wide. The flashlight showed the combination of a wall safe.

BLINKING ended. In total darkness, with muffled silence, The Shadow handled the knob, listening for every betraying sound. Minutes lingered slowly while he worked. Then the combination yielded. The safe door, small but thick, swung open at The Shadow's bidding.

THE CONDOR

The flashlight blinked upon the surface of a silver casket. The Shadow raised the lid; pearls shimmered from velvet setting. With one hand, The Shadow plucked the globules. His final touch was the removal of one that had stood out from the rest.

The genuine Blue Pearl. The Shadow was in Michael Walpin's living room. He had found the collector's safe, worked its combination; now Walpin's pearls were in his possession. A slight click sounded as The Shadow let the pearls trickle into a small chamois bag.

Gloved fingers opened a box that The Shadow drew from his cloak. This was the package that he had mentioned at the Cobalt Club. From it, The Shadow, produced the imitation Blue Pearl; also the others that he had selected from Clark Copley's first display.

Carefully, The Shadow put these replacements in the velvet setting. The false Blue Pearl stood out as finely as had the original. The others, however, differed somewhat from Walpin's valued prizes. But as The Shadow drew away and blinked the flashlight, he noted that the effect was similar.

Any eye – no matter whose – would have recognized the Blue Pearl and with it forgotten the remainder of the lot. The Shadow laughed softly as he put the chamois bag in the box. He closed the safe, then the paneled picture.

The substitution of false for genuine had taken longer perhaps than necessary; for The Shadow had shown no haste. But it was close to nine o'clock, and as The Shadow stepped across the room, he heard the ring of a doorbell; then footsteps beyond the curtained entry.

Moving with swift glide, The Shadow gained the window; he moved out to the balcony and closed the sash behind him. Again the thin strip of metal worked to close the catch.

Just as The Shadow completed his task, the light came on in the room that he had left.

Staring from the edge of the balcony, The Shadow saw two men enter. One was Michael Walpin, a squatly, dark-haired individual. The other was a tall, bald-headed man who wore a pair of pince-nez spectacles. This was Acting Commissioner Wainwright Barth.

Lost in the outside darkness, The Shadow dropped from the balcony. Once below, he surveyed the rear of Walpin's apartment. The view was to his liking, as indicated by a softly whispered laugh.

Walpin preferred well-shaded lights. The glow from the room was soft; it did not offer outsiders an opportunity to notice happenings within. Moreover, the rear of the apartment was isolated; the projecting balcony helped to obscure the rear windows.

The Shadow reached the parked limousine. He entered silently. His cloak swished as he removed it. Packing it in the bag, he added his slouch hat; then included the box that contained Walpin's pearls. He locked the bag and donned overcoat and silk hat.

"Stanley!" Lamont Cranston spoke quietly but emphatically through the tube. "Come, Stanley. Open the door."

The chauffeur alighted; he looked puzzled as he reached the curb and opened the rear door of the limousine. This was unusual; Lamont Cranston seldom gave the order.

THE CONDOR

"I was dozing, Stanley," remarked The Shadow, quietly, as he stepped to the sidewalk. "I did not realize that we had reached our destination. You can go back to New Jersey, Stanley."

"You are not coming home tonight, sir?"

"I shall bring the coupe. By the way, Stanley" – The Shadow pointed through the opened door – "give this bag to Richards, as soon as you arrive home. Have him place it in my room."

"Yes, sir."

"And keep it on the seat beside you when you drive. I do not wish to run the risk of having it stolen."

WHILE Stanley was obeying, The Shadow strolled away. He rounded a corner, came to the front of the apartment building and rang a bell that bore Michael Walpin's name. The doorknob clicked. The Shadow entered.

Michael Walpin was waiting at the door of his apartment when The Shadow arrived. With the host was Wainwright Barth. Both gave greeting as they saw the face of Lamont Cranston. Walpin led the way to the rear room.

"You know, commissioner," he said to Barth, with a genial chuckle, "I was highly pleased when my friend Cranston called me this afternoon and suggested a get-together. We have met at rare intervals in the past; his call today was a most propitious one."

"Walpin seemed quite anxious for me to come tonight," explained The Shadow, also to Barth. "When I told him that I expected friends to meet me at the club, he suggested that I bring them along. But I limited the invitation to you, commissioner."

"You see, commissioner," explained Walpin, "I have long known that Cranston was a connoisseur; his judgment of rare objects is notable. As chance had it" – the collector paused to chuckle – "tonight offered me the opportunity to learn his estimate of some valuable pearls that have long been in my possession."

"Pearls?" quizzed The Shadow, his quiet tone well-feigned. "I did not know that they were your specialty, Walpin."

"Few persons do," smiled Walpin. "When I purchased my pearls, some years ago, I kept the matter secret. It was known abroad that I was the new owner of the collection that had belonged to the Duke of Chambrelle; but the news had never been told in this country."

"Yesterday, commissioner" – Walpin turned to Barth – "I received a telephone call from the secretary of Lord Blossington, who is at present in New York. I learned that Lord Blossington was one of the few who knew that I owned the famous Blue Pearl that once belong to the Duke of Chambrelle."

"The secretary arranged for Lord Blossington to come here tonight. Since the visit was to be incognito, he urged, specifically, that I dispense with the presence of servants; though he added – quite oddly, I thought – that there would be no objection to my having friends whom his lordship might enjoy meeting."

"Quite an order," remarked Barth, polishing his spectacles as he spoke.

"True," agreed Walpin, "and on that account I invited no one, until Cranston chanced to call me so opportunely. When he asked about his friends –"

"I mentioned your name, commissioner," interposed The Shadow, "and Walpin was most anxious that you should be present."

"Jove!" exclaimed Barth. "This is indeed a pleasure! But tell me, Mr. Walpin, about these pearls of yours. They are valuable?"

"Estimated at one hundred thousand dollars, commissioner."

"Yet you keep them here? Unguarded?"

"In my wall safe. Hidden behind that painting. The one in the third panel."

"You deem a wall safe sufficiently strong?"

"Yes, considering the fact that practically no one knows that I own such a valuable collection. That fact, in itself, means security. Hm—m—m. It is approaching half past nine. I wonder what is keeping his lordship."

"When was he due to arrive?"

"Shortly after nine. The secretary was quite precise about the hour. Perhaps it would be wise for me to call his hotel."

THE SHADOW watched Walpin go to the telephone. A thin smile was present on the lips of Lamont Cranston; Wainwright Barth, however, did not notice it. The commissioner was still busy polishing his pince-nez.

"Hello... Hello... What is that?" Walpin had gained connection with the hotel that he was calling. "Yes, I am inquiring for Lord Blossington... Really, there must be some mistake... No, no, I am positive."

"I spoke to his secretary only yesterday... But he assured me that Lord Blossington was there... Positively... My name is Michael Walpin... Yes, and I would be pleased to have you learn what you can about this hoax..."

"A hoax?" The question came from Wainwright Barth, as Walpin hung up the receiver in dejected fashion. "Did I hear you rightly, Mr. Walpin?"

Barth had put on his spectacles; he was glaring through the lenses, his eyes gleaming with eagerness. Barth's great delight lay in tracking down persons who perpetrated hoaxes.

"Yes," nodded Walpin, seriously. "Lord Blossington is not at the Hotel Marlingstone. Apparently he has not been there at all. I have been duped, commissioner!"

"Outrageous!" exclaimed Barth. "Particularly since the matter concerns your pearls. We shall trace this imposition, Mr. Walpin. We shall discover the scoundrel who has hoodwinked you. I promise that —"

Barth broke off. A clock was delivering the stroke of half past nine; but it was not that sound that startled the commissioner. Barth was staring toward the curtained doorway at the front of the room. He had heard stealthy footsteps.

A curtain was brushed aside. On the threshold stood a masked man, stalwart of build, his features fully covered by the bandanna handkerchief that he had used to hide them. The intruder's eyes showed through holes in the cloth; his right hand was raised, holding a leveled revolver.

THE SHADOW'S arms went up. The gesture brought prompt duplication. Barth and Walpin both copied the example. The man on the threshold delivered a jeering growl.

"Back up there," he ordered. "Keep them dukes high! I'm taking a look for these pearls I've been hearing about!"

The Shadow's eyes were directly on the painting that covered the secret panel. The masked man saw the direction of the gaze. With a gruff laugh, he advanced and placed his hand against the painting.

Walpin gasped aloud. Barth stared, glowering as he fumed. Only The Shadow, calm in the guise of Cranston, remained unperturbed. His lips were straight; his eyes steady. To The Shadow, this masked arrival was not an unexpected one.

A well-timed hour had ended. The Shadow had started action at half past eight; he had awaited the climax due half past nine. For the masked robber had come here at his bidding; secretly, The Shadow planned to aid him in his rifling of Michael Walpin's wall safe.

CHAPTER VI. COMPLETED THEFT

DOWN – up – down – then to the left.

Such was the motion of The Shadow's eyes, those steady orbs that peered from the countenance of Lamont Cranston. Directly focused toward the masked man at the wall safe, The Shadow's signal was spied by the intruder alone.

Barth and Walpin could not observe their companion's eyes, for they stood beside him. Moreover, their alarmed gaze was centered upon the painting that the masked burglar was manipulating.

With right hand gripping gun, the intruder used his left to operate the panel. His manipulations were accurate; he did not even look away from the trio whom he held at bay. The panel swung open. Walpin blurted an indignant cry.

"No noise there," snarled the robber. "Keep them dukes high, like I told you!"

Hands moved upward, almost instinctively. The Shadow acted as did Barth and Walpin. But with it, he performed another action, unobserved by those two who were watching the robber.

The Shadow's left hand showed three fingers. His right opened slowly to five. Then the left spread slowly to show five; at the same time the right showed two: seven fingers. Finally, one lone finger extended from the right.

Three – five – seven – one.

The masked man had caught the surreptitious signals. His left hand operated the knob of the safe door. Three to the left; five to the right; seven to the left; one to the right. The safe swung open.

A groan from Walpin as the robber removed the casket. A warning growl from the masked man. Walpin silenced. The robber tilted the casket with his left hand; its cover came open to reveal the array of velvet-backed pearls.

THE CONDOR

Striking in the whole display was the famed Blue Pearl. Michael Walpin's eyes stared fixedly. His whole gaze was upon that single prize.

To The Shadow, the showing was satisfactory. Walpin had accepted the imitations as being his collection. The Shadow's head inclined. The robber clicked the casket shut.

Tucking the box under his right arm, he deliberately produced a bandanna from his pocket and wiped the front of the wall safe as he shut it. He closed the panel and performed a similar action. Backing across the room, he shifted the casket from beneath his right arm. With a slight toss of his left hand, he caught it under his left elbow.

Bandanna over his left hand, the burglar prepared to press out the light switch. Then he paused and gave a new command, its gruffness different from before.

"In front of a window," he ordered. "Each of you. Let your dukes come down; but not all the way."

Gingerly, each person followed orders. Barth and Walpin backed to windows at the rear. The Shadow stood five paces away from the window, at the side. The burglar seemed satisfied. He pressed the light switch.

"I'm sticking here," came a growl in the darkness. "Sticking close to watch you. There ain't no hurry. Keep the way you are."

BARTH and Walpin heard those gruff tones from the front of the room. They would have sworn that the burglar was speaking. They were wrong. It was The Shadow who now spoke; his words came from the unmoving lips of Lamont Cranston.

Dim figures against the slight light of windows. Such were all three who had raised their hands at the masked man's entry. The Shadow, like Barth and Walpin, still held his arms half raised while he spoke.

The others could not see his lips; even if they had, they would not have believed that the growled orders were from those motionless lips. A pause; once more The Shadow spoke in roughened tones.

"I'm going to watch you," came his growl. "Any funny business with them dukes means curtains! Get me?"

A figure was creeping cautiously through to the passage that led to the front of the apartment. It was that of the masked man. He could not be seen in the darkness. The Shadow's faked growl covered the slight noise of the intruder's exit.

Lights were out in the front. The masked man had attended to them. He had entered through unlatched doors, below and above. The Shadow had prepared them when he entered as Cranston.

It was a perfect get-away, timed to nine-forty. The Shadow could see the exact minute by the luminous dial of his wrist watch, which shone from his upraised arm. He let two minutes glide; then growled again:

"Don't fool yourselves, you mugs! I've told you there ain't no hurry. You won't be guessing it when I move out."

More slow minutes. Weary arms had sagged, and were resting, almost lowered. Then came a gruff challenge. The Shadow thrust his arms upward in response to his own pretense. Barth and Walpin acted with immediate haste.

THE CONDOR

"All right, mugs." The Shadow's growl carried a laugh. "Let 'em rest. Down low. I can spot 'em; and I'm telling you that the first guy to act funny will get rubbed out."

Arms came down, but figures remained rigid. The growled threat had been a strong one. More minutes ticked by; The Shadow's watch showed eight minutes of ten. He voiced another harsh-toned warning.

One more minute. The Shadow delivered a harsh laugh, another semblance of the masked robber's presence. The watch showed six minutes to the hour. The Shadow spoke quietly, in the tone of Lamont Cranston.

"He has gone, commissioner," he stated. "I heard the curtains swish. Have you a revolver?"

"Yes," responded Barth, in a husky whisper.

"Then draw it," suggested The Shadow, "while I turn on the light."

Striding through the darkness, The Shadow clicked the light switch. Barth pounced forward from the window, a stubby revolver in his fist. He was bound on a chase. The Shadow stopped him.

"Too late, commissioner," he stated quietly. "The rogue gained too good a start. Why not call headquarters?"

"Jove, Cranston!" returned Barth. "That is the very thing to do."

He sprang to the telephone. Thirty seconds later he had his connection; with gleaming eyes, Barth was ordering the law to action. Walpin sat in a large chair, dejected and unhearing; but The Shadow was close beside the commissioner.

"Call all cars!" Barth was barking. "Cover every bridge; the Holland Tunnel; every ferry! Watch all outgoing trains. Grand Central; Pennsylvania; Jersey Tubes."

"Do not forget One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street, commissioner," prompted The Shadow, quietly. "It is not quite as close as the Grand Central; but the robber could be on his way there."

"One Hundred and Twenty-fifth!" bawled Barth. "Patrol cars to that station at once! Then get me Acting Inspector Cardona. Have him come here immediately!"

The Shadow's watch showed 9:55. Fifteen minutes had passed since the masked robber had slipped out with the false pearls that Walpin had believed were his own. But Barth, in his call to headquarters, had announced that the robber had fled but a few minutes ago. Those intermittent growls had completely deceived the acting commissioner.

WORD to headquarters was given at 9:55, quickly relayed to radio patrol cars. At 9:57, a siren whined not far from the One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street station. A taxi driver, about to pull away, drew his car to the curb and watched.

The patrol car rolled up; a policeman leaped to the curb. An officer came dashing over from across the street. The taxi driver heard their conversation.

"Robbery just reported," explained the cop from the patrol car. "Guy cleared out with a bunch of pearls – only made his get-away a couple of minutes ago."

"Heading this way?" queried the cop from the beat.

THE CONDOR

"Don't know," was the laconic reply. "But if he is, we'll be waiting for him. All railroads are being covered. The guy hasn't had time to get to a station yet. We'll be waiting for him if he comes here."

The taxi pulled away; its driver grinned shrewdly. The name of that driver was Moe Shrevnitz; he was working as an agent of The Shadow. He had delivered a passenger at One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street, four minutes ahead of the alarm.

A train was already pulling out of the station; it was the Buffalo Mail. Moe's passenger was aboard. The taxi run from Walpin's to this station had been made with two minutes to spare.

IN a compartment aboard a Pullman, a lone passenger was smiling as he looked from the window and studied the glow of streets below. That rider was Cliff Marsland; he was the man who had come here with Moe Shrevnitz.

The Buffalo Mail had left Grand Central at 9:45; its schedule called for departure from One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street at 9:56. Cliff had been waiting on the platform, thanks to Moe's quick driving.

The train had been delayed for about one minute; Cliff's watch now showed ten o'clock. He was completely in the clear – as fully as if he had left New York hours before. No one would believe it possible that the safe robber could have made the Buffalo Mail at One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street.

All following trains would be watched; but not even a message would come to this one. The Shadow's stall, coupled with the train schedule, had given Cliff absolute security. The Shadow's agent, confident in his position, proceeded to open a suitcase that he had brought aboard.

He pushed bandanna handkerchiefs out of sight. Those could be disposed of later. Removing the silver casket, he opened it and admired the display within. These pearls of The Shadow looked like real swag. Particularly the blue one.

Cliff removed the Blue Pearl; he placed it carefully in his vest pocket. He closed the casket, put it back in the suitcase and closed the bag. Settling back in his seat, he began to speculate on the future.

Tomorrow, he would travel, choosing various roads to make a crafty trail. Another night aboard a sleeper; then his course would bring him to the town of Paulington. This was Monday night; Wednesday evening would be the time to reach the destination.

For Cliff, by The Shadow's orders, was carrying swag to Mountview Lodge, in hope of contracting The Condor. In his pocket Cliff held a perfect replica of the Blue Pearl, a passport that would make him welcome in a realm where crime prevailed.

CHAPTER VII. THE MAN AHEAD

TUESDAY morning's newspapers were blatant in their front-page yarn of crime. The robbery at Michael Walpin's had excited large headlines and long stories. Wainwright Barth's presence at the scene had given zest to the reporters.

For the acting commissioner was none too popular with the gentlemen of the press. One man in particular – Clyde Burke, of the Classic – had long awaited an opportunity to hand Barth a jolt.

Clyde, as chance had it, was with Joe Cardona at the time when Barth had summoned the acting inspector. The reporter had followed along to get a story. The coincidence of Clyde's arrival had made Barth fume; but

it had brought a smile from Lamont Cranston.

The reason was that Clyde Burke was, secretly, an agent of The Shadow. Long a friend of Detective Joe Cardona, it had been natural for Clyde to be with the sleuth who was at present acting as inspector. It fitted well with The Shadow's plans. He wanted publicity to follow this robbery at Walpin's.

AMONG the interested readers of the day's news was a young man who had chosen to travel away from New York on Tuesday. This chap had picked up evening newspapers in addition to the morning journals. He was reading the accounts as he rode aboard a jostling local that was rolling toward the town of Paulington.

This young man was Harry Vincent agent of The Shadow. In the morning, he had received maps and instructions from an investment broker named Rutledge Mann. Well provided with information, Harry had started out in behalf of The Shadow.

"Paulington next stop —"

The conductor's bawl ended Harry's reading. He had just reached the end of a statement that Michael Walpin had made for the press. Walpin had sworn that no one outside himself could have known the combination of his panel or his wall safe. That had deepened the mystery which concerned the burglar's simple mode of operation.

"Paulington next —"

Harry looked from the window. Afternoon had waned; heavy clouds had increased, gathering dusk. The premature approach of darkness was to Harry's liking. For The Shadow's agent had no desire to be noticed in the town.

The Shadow had picked out a logical headquarters. That was the tumble-down cabin on the hillside. From that spot, Harry would be able to pay trips to the vicinity of Mountview Lodge. Moreover, he could be reached by Cliff Marsland when the latter arrived.

Harry's policy would be to lay low; if he did not hear from Cliff, he could make cautious efforts at contact. He would have full opportunity to work as a free agent. No reports would be necessary until he held important news. Harry Vincent was the man ahead.

The train was grinding to a stop. From the window Harry saw the end of a station platform. He made his way from the car and stepped off as soon as the train ceased motion.

Several persons were on the platform; but none paid any attention to Harry as he alighted with his bag. There was still sufficient daylight to discern faces plainly; on that account, Harry skirted the station.

Looking across a street, he observed a sign that read "Paulington House." The hotel was antiquated; but it appeared comfortable. Better than a shack on the hillside, thought Harry; but duty commanded that he choose the battered cabin for the night.

Gazing in another direction, Harry saw a garage. That was the place he wanted. Picking up his bag, he made in the direction of the garage, while the local, its bell clanging, was puffing from the station.

ODDLY, Harry Vincent had accomplished the very thing that he had set out not to do. His whole purpose was to avoid notice in Paulington. His action of gazing at the hotel, then at the garage, had made him more conspicuous than he realized.

THE CONDOR

Among the persons on the station platform was a bulky, dark-faced man who had glanced casually at arriving passengers. This fellow had passed Harry by; but as he walked from the platform, he had spied The Shadow's agent for the second time. It was then that he had noticed Harry's hesitancy.

Standing by the little station, the dark-faced man delivered a fanglike smile. He waited until Harry had almost reached the garage; then, with brisk stride, this watcher took up the trail.

The garage was gloomy inside, except for a corner where one bright light showed the motor of a car. A man in overalls was doing repair work when Harry Vincent approached. The man looked up as he heard the footsteps. Harry stayed just out of the light.

"Good evening," he stated, in a pleasant tone. "I've just come into town and I'm looking for some information. Maybe you could supply it."

"Glad to," returned the garage man, returning to his work. "What do you want to know about, friend?"

"First of all, a good place to stay."

"There's the Paulington House, where most visitors stop."

"I mean somewhere outside of town. I heard there was a lodge near here."

"There is: Mountview Lodge. But it's no hotel. Owned by a wealthy duck named Griscom Treft. Only his friends stay there. Used to be sort of a summer resort, years ago. They called it Mountview, then, and it belonged to old Roger Silson. Treft bought it from the estate and built his lodge there."

Harry smiled to himself. He was getting the type of information that he wanted.

"That sounds interesting," remarked The Shadow's agent. "I should think there would be some cottages or cabins hereabouts. Places that could be rented."

"Nope," said the garage man. "Nary a one. Unless you count that old shack up on the hill. Some artist built it for a cabin; then let it go to pieces."

"No one lives there now?"

"No one. The artist didn't even own the property. He'd known old Silson and the old man let him settle there like a squatter. But the artist abandoned the place before old Silson died.

"Tell you, though. You might have some luck at one of the farmhouses. I can't say just where. You'd have to ride around some and make inquiries."

HARRY caught a sound as the garage man was speaking. It sounded like a scraping footstep in the gloom. He looked about, but saw no one. The yawning door of the garage showed daylight beyond it; but all was dark along the inner walls. Harry decided that he had imagined the sound.

"You'd need a car," the garage man was saying. "I've got an old flivver here that's not so bad. Just a junky roadster, but if you want to rent the thing —"

"Where is it?" put in Harry, promptly.

THE CONDOR

"Over there in the corner," replied the garage man. "I'd sell it for fifty bucks. The rubber's not so good; but the boat runs, and that's what counts most."

Harry walked over and examined the car. With a smile, he tossed his bag in beside the driver's seat. He pulled cash from his pocket, walked back and thrust fifty dollars before the eyes of the garage man.

"Suppose you let me have it," said Harry. "I have a driver's license; I can use your old tags for a while. We can say that I'm renting the car until then."

"I guess that would be a go," decided the garage man, as he counted the money and poked it into a pocket of his overalls. "When are you going to take it out? Tonight?"

"Yes. It's about half past six right now. I'll get something to eat and be back here at seven."

"But this is too late to go looking for farmhouses. Especially if you don't know the territory."

"I have a different idea. I'm going out to the cabin you spoke about. If nobody owns it, I can stay there overnight if I like the place. Then I can look around tomorrow."

"You won't like it, friend. I'll bet you'll wind up at the Paulington House tonight."

"Possibly. Say, though – just whereabouts is the cabin?"

The garage man wiped his grimy hands; standing in the light, he talked to Harry in the gloom.

"Go out to the fork," he directed. "Take the road to the left. You come to another road forking off to the right. An old rocky road that nobody uses any more. Take it until you come to a couple of big birch trees. On the right."

"That's where the path begins. It's about a mile up to the cabin, I reckon. Maybe more, because the path's rough and it winds. If you leave here at seven, you ought to get to the path in twenty minutes, and up the hill in twenty more. Half to three quarters of an hour."

"It's not far; but with the way the road cuts away, you're not getting closer after you pass the fork. If it was daylight, you could walk it, making shortcuts; but not knowing the ground, you'd better use the regular path."

HARRY nodded his understanding. The garage man went back to his work. Harry strolled from the garage, leaving his bag in the rickety roadster.

A few minutes after he had gone, a man arose from beside a sedan in a corner of the garage.

Quietly, this listener stole out through the door without the garage man noticing him. The spy's features became plain in the last glimmer of daylight. He was the dark-faced fellow with the ugly grin.

There was a little restaurant down the street. The dark-faced man sneaked toward its lighted window; peering in, he saw Harry Vincent at the counter, ordering dinner. The dark-faced man uttered a nasty grunt.

Sidling from the window, he set off at a brisk pace, his fists clenched, his lips snarling. It was plain that he held a malice toward this stranger who had shown too much interest in the cabin on the hill.

As the man ahead, Harry Vincent had walked into danger without knowing it. Something was already known concerning his plans. The dark-faced spy suspected even more from what little he had learned.

Danger would mark Harry Vincent's coming to the cabin on the hill. The presence of that dark-faced man was a menace that presaged a coming doom.

CHAPTER VIII. TIMED DEATH

IT was after seven o'clock when Harry Vincent returned to the garage. The proprietor had gone out; a light was burning, however, and a note on the seat of the old roadster served as a receipt for Harry's fifty dollars.

The owner's license was attached to the note; it listed the name of the proprietor as Jerry Cassidy. The key was ready in the ignition switch. Harry seated himself at the wheel and drove from the garage.

Murky darkness had settled during the dinner hour. Street lamps had been lighted; their intervals were too great, however, to provide more than intermittent illumination. Harry turned on the headlights of the flivver. They furnished a fairly strong glare as he drove toward the outskirts of the town.

Harry did not overtax the chugging motor. He wanted to note the roads as he went along; and consideration of that fact caused him to open the bag beside him as he neared the fork outside of town. From the bag Harry produced a flashlight. He knew that he would need it when he reached the path; it would be wise to have it in the meantime.

Swinging left at the fork, Harry took the road that skirted the west side of the slope. Heavy silence lay over the countryside. Except for the chug of the motor, Harry could hear nothing. The road was a dirt one, but in good condition. Harry kept along at moderate speed until the lights showed a new fork ahead.

Harry stopped as he reached that point. He let the motor idle; above its wheeze he could hear the rush of water from a stream to the left of the traveled road. His thoughts, however, were centered on that old road that forked to the right.

No wonder it had been abandoned. A short cut, perhaps, but it was steep. Rains had washed away clay surface, leaving cross ledges and jagged rocks. Harry understood why the garage man had estimated twenty minutes for the trip to the beginning of the path. No speed could be made along this bad stretch of road.

Harry started the car again. He shifted to second; the old roadster jounced and quivered as it fought its way up the rocky grade. Ahead, Harry could see more level road; but a flash of the lights indicated more rocks to be avoided. He decided that the old rattletrap would not stand many trips over this punishing relic of a highway.

Shrouding trees swallowed the jolting roadster. Thick hush lay above the entire slope. Not even the whisper of a breeze was present to offset the stillness. Harry Vincent had driven into a forest of gloom.

Blackened treetops made a somber mass upward from that ghostlike road. In all the darkened slope, there was but one spot that formed a contrast to the sea of boughs. That was the ledge called Table Rock.

MOONLIGHT would have brought a silver glimmer from the broad surface of Table Rock. There was no moon tonight, yet the rock was dully visible at close range. Beside this spot that commanded the slope, crouching men were clustered. Their voices formed harsh whispers beneath the fringe of trees.

"No lights now," cautioned one. "Keep to the path. We can get there ahead of him if we move."

THE CONDOR

"Sure thing," was a panted response. "We passed the upgrade cutting over to the big rock. It's a cinch from now on. All down hill to the shack."

"Thuler's there anyway," added a third. "He's had plenty of time to be on the job. He can take care of things, if the guy gets there ahead of us."

"Yeah?" The first speaker seemed annoyed as he started the course down through the trees. "Well, Thuler won't stage anything on his own. This is going to be a job that will keep people guessing. That's why we're lugging the stuff. Careful with those bundles, Jengley."

"I'm watching myself," was Jengley's retort. "Worry about Delland here. He's more likely to stumble than I am."

"Both of you be careful," growled the leader. "It's easy walking, maybe, but remember, we've got no light. Better to let the guy get in ahead of us than to run chances."

Pushing their way through underbrush that covered a darkened path, the trio reached a clearing. The blackness here was as great as in the woods; yet the openness was recognized by the clearer atmosphere.

Cautiously, the leader of the trio groped to the center of the clearing. With the others close behind him, he stopped and whispered:

"Thuler!"

A slight sound came from the darkness; then a responding voice:

"That you, Jake?"

"Yeah," returned the leader. "Jengley and Delland are with me. He hasn't shown up yet, huh?"

"Not yet, Jake," informed Thuler. "I've got the fuses planted. Under the cabin floor. No risk using a light inside. You've got time to shove in the charges."

"Go to it, fellows." Jake's order was to Jengley and Delland. "Blink your lights when you come out. We'll signal back; if we don't, it means scram."

DELLAND and Jengley crept forward. Flashlights glowed upon the battered door of the ramshackle cabin. The two men entered; Jake crouched in the darkness with Thuler. The latter was plucking something from the ground. He passed it to Jake; it was a long, cordlike object.

"Keep following, Jake," suggested Thuler. "It leads us up into the woods. Fifty yards. Say – I made good time getting here."

"No wonder you did," snorted Jake. "You weren't lugging dynamite. I was jittery coming over from the lodge. I'd rather have carried the stuff myself. But it was best for me to pick the path and let Jengley and Delland do the hauling."

"The chief worked quick enough," chuckled Thuler, as they passed the edge of the clearing. "As soon as he got the tip that the wise guy was heading here, he got busy. Say, though – do you think the mug knows anything?"

THE CONDOR

"No telling, Thuler. He wouldn't be up here if he wasn't wise to something. That's the chief's business. Our only worry is if the guy changes his mind and went back to town instead of coming here."

They had stopped at the end of the fuse. Looking about, the two men stared through the darkness toward the cabin. A flashlight blinked; then another. Thuler signaled with a torch of his own.

Two minutes later, Delland and Jengley stumbled up to join them. Each reported the placement of a dynamite charge at the end of a fuse.

"They lead off from splices," said Thuler to Jake. "One click, and they'll both go. What time have you got, Jake?"

"Ten minutes of eight."

"The guy's due —"

Thuler stopped short as Jake gripped his arm. A distant blink had shown through the trees below. It was coming closer, its bearer picking out the upward path. Watchers remained silent.

Appalling gloom hung over the little cabin at the lower edge of the clearing. Nothing betrayed the presence of the men who watched that shack that had become Harry Vincent's objective. The intermittent glare of the flashlight was nearly to the cabin.

"If he sees the fuse," whispered Jake, "maybe he'll wise."

"He won't," returned Thuler. "I buried it under the grass. Those old steps help cover it, too."

The flashlight was blinking at the cabin door. It went out for a dozen seconds; then blinked again and moved inward. Blackness; then paneless windows showed the light come on inside the shack.

"Let it ride," growled Jake.

A CLICK as Thuler pressed the switch. An instant followed; one that seemed an interminable wait to those gloating men who crouched in darkness. Then came a mighty shudder of the darkness; a terrific cataclysm burst from across the clearing.

An upheaving roar sent blazing streaks in all directions. Like a display of pyrotechnics, huge flashes splashed with mighty force. Amid that instantaneous holocaust ripped chunks of logs and timbers, tossed like wisps of grass amid the man-made tempest.

Torn asunder, the bulk of the cabin broke into sections that crashed against the trees below. Tearing a path down the slope, the scattered ruins echoed to a standstill, while falling boards and bits of woodwork dropped everywhere about the clearing.

A spreading shroud of whiteness became visible in the dark that followed. Smoke, rising from the ruins, formed ghostly shapes that lingered, as if gloating, about the spot where death had been delivered.

Jake growled harshly. His tone expressed satisfaction in the fact that a human being had been blown to atoms. His harsh voice was a signal to the others. Rising, they advanced across the clearing, blinking their lights to avoid slivers of shattered timber.

THE CONDOR

"The whole works went," chuckled Jake. "Like it was supposed to. That'll wake the dead heads down in Paulington. They'll be coming up here; but not until we've had chance to look around and then scram."

"Why look around, Jake?" inquired Thuler. "You won't even find pieces of that guy."

"Chief's orders. He might have had something with him that would serve as identification. Come on – spread out and look."

FLASHLIGHTS glimmered on scarred tree trunks below the clearing. The explosion had crashed some dead trees; pieces of the cabin had ripped the bark from others. But traces of the murdered man were vanished.

When the four prowlers joined at the path below, their only souvenirs were fragments of cloth, a strip of leather that might have come from a wallet, and a twisted chunk of thin metal that Jake identified as a portion of the victim's flashlight.

"Down the path," ordered Jake. "He may have left a car down on the road. We'll take a look for it."

The murderers made swift progress with their flashlights showing the way. Jake's gleam caught a patch of birch trees. Past the white trunks, the glimmer showed Harry Vincent's flivver parked at the side of the old road.

Jake made an inspection of the car. It was empty; the key was gone from the ignition lock. His examination ended, the leader turned to the others.

"All right," he ordered gruffly, "back to the path. We're heading up the hill. Across past Table Rock."

"You're leaving the buggy here?" questioned Thuler, his harsh tone puzzled. "So they'll know the guy was in the cabin?"

"So they won't know anything," snorted Jake. "Listen, Thuler – you did your job, getting here in plenty of time to plant the fuse. The rest of the orders are mine. You know that."

"Sure thing," agreed Thuler. "I'm not objecting, Jake. I was just wondering."

"All right, then. Look at it this way. The chief knows how to figure it. There's going to be a lot of speculation about who blasted that shack and why. That's plain, isn't it?"

"Sure. But this car the guy left here –"

"Will give them more to guess about. It will look like the guy might have come here to blow the shack himself. Everybody will recognize the flivver as the one Cassidy had at his garage."

"Which means they will inquire at Cassidy's –"

"And learn nothing."

"You're right, Jake. Cassidy is not likely to know anything about the fellow's business."

Jake and Thuler had passed the turn in the path; they were blinking their flashlights while Delland and Jengley followed. They were skirting the remains of the cabin, going around the clearing to gain the obscure path to Table Rock.

Blinks faded; hushed darkness reigned supreme. Shrouding trees had gained the stillness of a tomb, hiding the fragments of the blasted shack, bending above the deserted car that Harry Vincent had left on the road below.

Fiendish killers had come across the slope to deliver spectacular death. Evidence of their victim gone, they were returning to their habitat. Scornful, sure that their crime would not be traced, this band of murderers had eliminated the first man who had come to pry into their schemes of evil.

CHAPTER IX. THE SECOND AGENT

AT six o'clock the next afternoon, another passenger alighted from the outbound local and looked curiously about the platform of the Paulington station. This arrival was Cliff Marsland.

Like Harry Vincent on the day before, Cliff was carrying a bag and presented a businesslike appearance. But his actions were more definite than Harry's had been. Cliff was making no effort to cover his arrival.

One reason was because the day was cloudless and there was no darkening gloom obscuring the station platform. The other reason was the fact that Cliff had a definite objective. He was going openly to Mountview Lodge.

Across the street, beside the old hotel, Cliff saw the projecting front of an old motor bus. He noticed a driver coming from the hotel. Picking up his bag, he went to make inquiry.

As he left the station, Cliff had a feeling that someone was watching him. He shot a glance back over his shoulder; the only person that he saw was a man who stepped from view beyond the station building.

Glimpsing no more than the man's back, Cliff paused to see if the fellow would reappear. After a few seconds of vain waiting, Cliff decided that it would be poor policy to stand gawking from the center of the street. Turning, he continued on to the parked bus.

"I'm going to a place called Mountview," informed Cliff, speaking to the driver. "How do I get there?"

"Hop in," was the reply. "We go past there. It's a half mile walk you'll have, unless somebody is going to meet you where the road turns off to the lodge."

Cliff climbed aboard. The bus started, and rolled out of Paulington.

Cliff studied the terrain from the window. As they neared the fork, he noted a ledge high up on the darkening hillside. His view was but momentary; apparently Table Rock could be seen from only a few spots.

Cliff's information about the terrain was confined to a few important mental notes. Mountview Lodge, Table Rock, the cabin on the western slope – these facts were all that he required. His job was to stick close to the lodge; to visit the cabin only if unusual opportunity offered.

Maps would have been a dangerous thing for him to carry. Cliff was traveling into the enemy's camp. It was well for him to come openly, with nothing to cover. Cliff thought of that fact as he fingered the false Blue Pearl, secure in the pocket of his vest.

Two nights ago, Cliff had openly committed crime, abetted by The Shadow. That crime, however, was one that had been faked in behalf of justice. The Shadow had learned of a crook called The Condor. To reach that foe, The Shadow had required Michael Walpin's collection of pearls, particularly the Blue Pearl.

THE CONDOR

Yet The Shadow had not chosen to risk these prizes after gaining them. That was why he had purchased imitations, with a replica of the Blue Pearl. Cliff was carrying false treasures; even if they should be lost, Walpin would not suffer. The Shadow held the collector's pearls secure.

The robbery at Walpin's had created a sensation, thanks to The Shadow's crafty plan of bringing in Clyde Burke. The Classic reporter had done much to place the episode in the public eye. That was a factor that would smooth Cliff's path. Cliff was chuckling over it as the bus swayed along the paved road that continued right from the fork.

Then came a snatch of conversation that brought Cliff to attention. A local passenger was perched beside the bus driver. The two were shouting their discussion above the roar and rumble of the obsolete conveyance.

"IT mighta been some grudge," the passenger was asserting. "But I can't understand it nohow. Who'd want to get rid of that old cabin? It wasn't harming nobody. Empty, warn't it?"

The driver's reply was drowned.

"Yeah," resumed the passenger, "it was a city chap bought that car off'n Jerry Cassidy. But Jerry hasn't been able to tell nobody what he looks like."

Another statement from the driver. Cliff could not catch it; but he heard the passenger's final comment.

"Well, Howie Brock's looking into it," the fellow stated, "and he's a right smart sheriff, Howie is. Best we've had in this county in a long spell."

The bus had skirted the hill. The passenger settled back in his seat. But Cliff had heard enough to trouble him. He knew that something had happened in the cabin on the slope.

Early dusk was present, for the sunset was obscured now that the bus had reached the east side of the hill. Cliff stared from the window; the gloom of passing trees formed a blackening mass. Then the bus swung to the right and came to a stop; Cliff saw a winding road that went off to the left. This was the stopping place for Mountview Lodge.

One minute later, Cliff was standing in the road, surveying the path that he had to follow. The bus was gone; no car was in sight.

Cliff started up the road to the left. Paving clicked beneath his feet. The road was a good one, as private highways went.

Cliff had walked less than a hundred yards when he heard the approach of a car behind him. A coupe drew up; a uniformed chauffeur peered from the window. Cliff could glimpse the fellow's face in the dusk. He noted a shrewd, ratlike expression.

"Are you going to the lodge?" questioned the chauffeur, smoothly. "To see Mr. Treft?"

"I'm going to the lodge," replied Cliff.

The chauffeur studied Cliff half suspiciously, then opened the door.

"Climb in," he offered. "Bring your bag along; there's room for it. No use opening the rumble seat."

THE CONDOR

The coupe rolled forward. The road continued through thickening trees. Then came a patch of light ahead. The car pulled up in front of a massive gate. Through the iron grille, Cliff viewed the low-walled structure of Mountview Lodge.

From each side of the gateposts ran a high picket fence. This barrier surrounded the grounds of Mountview Lodge. Moreover, it was equipped with thick barbed wire along the picket tops.

The gate was wired also; to open it, the chauffeur was forced to alight and unlock. That done, he returned to the coupe, drove through, stepped out and went back to lock up. Taking the wheel again, he drove to the front of the lodge.

The freshness of the gray stone walls indicated that the building was not an old one. A broad front veranda, with white posts, looked pleasant and inviting. One ominous aspect alone governed Mountview Lodge. Every window was fronted by a crisscross metal grating.

A liveried servant was standing on the porch. While Cliff remained in the coupe, he saw the servant peering curiously in his direction. The chauffeur alighted; Cliff heard their conversation.

"Who is it, Corey?" questioned the servant.

"That's for you to find out, Trossler," replied the chauffeur. "Someone coming to the lodge; that's all I know."

Cliff stepped from the coupe as Trossler came down from the porch. The servant saw the bag and took it; then inquired:

"You have come to see Mr. Treft?"

"He owns the lodge?" inquired Cliff.

"Certainly," replied Trossler.

"Then," decided Cliff, "Mr. Treft is the man I should like to see."

"Very well, sir."

Trossler carried the bag into the house. Cliff followed, to find himself in a luxuriously furnished hallway. Trossler pointed to a heavy-cushioned chair; Cliff sat down and watched the servant pass through a doorway.

A FEW minutes later, Trossler returned. He picked up the bag again and ushered Cliff into a lavishly furnished study. Thick rugs occupied the entire floor; the walls were tapestried; the furniture was of rich mahogany.

A keen-eyed man was standing behind a desk. He was of medium height, stoop-shouldered but of wiry build. His gray-haired head was tilted forward; his eyes peered upward from beneath bushy brows. Cliff saw straight lips, topped by a gray mustache with pointed tips.

There was a sharpness in the man's scrutiny that made Cliff feel uneasy. He knew that he was face to face with a person of powerful mentality. Dignity, poise and friendliness seemed present in the man's expression; but the fixation of those eyes told Cliff that surface indications were nothing more than presence.

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"Good evening." The gray-haired man spoke pleasantly, but his voice, like his expression, was deceptive. "My name is Griscom Treft. May I inquire yours?"

"Cliff Marsland," replied The Shadow's agent.

Treft motioned to a chair; as Cliff took it, the gray-haired man sat down and leaned both elbows on the desk.

"What is the purpose of your visit?" he asked.

Until he put the question, Treft's body had obscured the center of the wall behind him. Now, with Cliff properly seated, with Treft bent forward, that space was in plain view. Cliff stared.

Upon a dull red background, he viewed a silver figure woven in the tapestry. The shape was that of a large bird, its neck high; its beak the pointed bill of a vulture. Long talons glittered beneath the silver body. The figure was that of a condor.

"Your purpose here?"

As Treft's smooth query was repeated, Cliff reached into his vest pocket. He felt a rounded surface between fingers and thumb. He produced the false Blue Pearl and extended his hand beneath the light that glowed from a desk lamp.

"I brought this," stated Cliff.

"A pearl," expressed Treft, mildly. "Quite a rare one, I should judge."

"It is the Blue Pearl."

"The Blue Pearl?"

Treft's query was well-feigned; but his eyes were shrewd as they peered upward. They offset Treft's tone; they made the inquiry pointed.

"Yes," replied Cliff, steadily. "A man Gruzen hoped to bring it here. He died, however, in the penitentiary. He passed the word to a fellow named Luff Cadley.

"I knew Luffs." Cliff was meeting Treft's eyes as he continued. "We were in the Big House together. Luff wanted to snatch the Blue Pearl; then I was to bring it here. Before he had a chance, he was rubbed out.

"So I did the job on my own. I've got the others with me, in the suitcase. A nice lot, all of them. Michael Walpin knows pearls, right enough –"

"Stop!" Treft was on his feet; his face severe, his tone indignant. "Are you referring to the New York robbery of two days ago? Do you mean that you are the rogue who stole that prized collection of rare pearls?"

Cliff nodded.

"And why, sir" – Treft paused with outraged expression – "why, sir, have you dared to come to me? What did you expect to find here?"

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The man's fists were clenched. His eyes were fierce; his whole attitude was one of indignation. Cliff retained his steady stare.

"I came to find The Condor," he replied. "I have seen his symbol on the wall behind you."

TREFT'S fists unclenched. The gray-haired man smiled broadly as he settled back in his chair. A chuckle escaped his lips.

"We have been expecting you," acknowledged Treft. "You did a fine job, Marsland. I have read the newspaper accounts. You are sure your trail is completely covered?"

"Absolutely," returned Cliff. "I made a quicker get-away than they thought. I caught the Buffalo Mail at One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street. I was away before they watched the stations."

"And you have been traveling since?"

"Yes. I'm in the clear. No gang connections. Not a thing they can trail me by."

"Except your ability at opening safes."

Cliff shook his head.

"That was the sweet part of it," he explained. He arose, picked up his bag and placed it on the desk, while Treft looked on keenly. "Luff had been up to Walpin's. He had cracked the safe while Walpin was away; but the pearls must have been in a safe-deposit vault at that time.

"Luff was waiting for Walpin to get back, so he could attempt the safe again. Knew the combination – ready for a cinch job. Then he was bumped; but not until after he'd told me all he knew. That's why I did it right in front of Walpin. To make it look like I knew safes."

Cliff knew that this fabrication was convincing. It was the story that he had been instructed to tell, by The Shadow. But Cliff had wanted to avoid Treft's gaze while giving the false account. He had used a pretext for that purpose. He was opening the suitcase all the while he spoke.

Bringing out the casket, Cliff revealed the array within. He saw Treft's eyes gleam. He knew that the man was taking the imitations for genuine.

Picking up the Blue Pearl, Treft inserted it with the others. He chuckled as he arose. He extended his hand to Cliff.

The Shadow's agent received the clasp. As his hand pressed Treft's, Cliff gained his second startlement. Never before had he clasped such a long, thin-boned hand. Nor had he experienced the pressure of hard-gripping finger tips.

Griscom Treft's hand was a veritable claw; one that possessed a tearing force. Staring open-eyed, Cliff viewed the silver bird emblazoned on the wall. He realized that Treft's clasp could rival that of a condor's talon.

The chuckle that Treft gave was not needed. Cliff Marsland understood; he met the eyes that gleamed like the beady optics of a bird of prey. Another completing touch that was not required. Griscom Treft was not the intermediary that Cliff had suspected he might be. The gray-haired master of Mountview Lodge was The

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Condor!

TREFT'S fierce clasp loosened, leaving blood-red blotches on Cliff's hand – marks that faded slowly. In a sharp voice, The Condor called for Trossler. The servant appeared, his face solemnly smug.

"Take Marsland's bag to his room," ordered Treft. "He will remain with us, Trossler."

There was a harshness in the tone, now that Treft had no need to disguise his voice. Almost the vicious shriek of a preying bird, that tone – one that well-fitted The Condor.

"Remain here" – The Condor spoke these words to Cliff – "so I can speak to you of certain matters. You have become one of a select circle, Marsland."

Cliff nodded his understanding.

"Come." Cliff felt the dig of claws as The Condor clasped a hand to his shoulder. "Out to the veranda, where we shall find it more pleasant. Shortly, you will meet the others."

They strolled out through the hall; they reached the broad veranda and there they paced together, The Condor's clutch still on Cliff's shoulder. That grip, perhaps, was one of friendship; but it also expressed a mastery.

Cliff, like the pearls that he had brought, had become a prized possession of The Condor. He was a new member of the band that this supercrook had been gathering. Men of crime, governed by a single master. This peaceful lodge, its very splendor aiding it to escape the law's attention, was the headquarters for evil aids who served a vicious, calculating chief.

"You have met Corey, who serves as chauffeur," Cliff heard The Condor say. "He is one of us. So is Trossler, whose present capacity is that of house man. Those are blinds; every man has his pretended purpose here.

"Some are caretakers; others are guests. Two are hidden; they need no presence, since they are never seen. You will have a place, Marsland, for the short while that you will be here. Until the thirteenth; after that, our new plans begin."

THE CONDOR paused. Darkness had settled completely; Cliff felt a fierce antagonism toward this harsh-voiced creature who stood beside him. He could still feel the clutch of Treft's claw upon his shoulder.

"By the way." The Condor's tone was lowered. "Did you hear any talk in town – or while coming on the bus?"

"About what?" inquired Cliff.

"An explosion," replied The Condor, "that occurred last night. I sent men to destroy a cabin on the other side of the hill. A suspicious prowler intended to use it as headquarters, perhaps to spy upon us. We eliminated him along with his new residence."

Harsh sarcasm formed the tone of The Condor's utterance. Cliff restrained himself with difficulty; then replied, his voice a bit thoughtful:

"I heard nothing mentioned about the matter."

"Logical enough," agreed The Condor. "Well, Corey may have something to tell. Come, let us go in the house."

A distant purr sounded far off above the trees. The Condor paused to stare at tiny lights that were passing slowly above the horizon.

"Another airplane," he said, harshly. "I don't like them about; but it can't be helped. There was one that passed over here twice, one day last week.

"These hills must make it difficult for them to find the airport at Southbridge, five miles northwest of Paulington. Well" – he chuckled as the twinkling lights veered westward – "that pest has gone back to his proper course."

They entered the house; The Condor's clasp had lifted. Trossler was there; the master told the servant–crook to show the new guest to his room.

Cliff followed Trossler up the steps to the second floor, while Treft strolled back into the study.

RESTRAINED emotions shook Cliff Marsland when he stood alone. The meeting with The Condor had been grueling; but Cliff had managed it without difficulty, until he had heard those harsh utterances relating to the destruction of the cabin.

Harry Vincent – dead!

The terrible reality throbbed through Cliff Marsland's brain. The discussion on the bus had troubled him; The Condor's statement had changed his worry into absolute anguish. At that time when they were pacing back into the house, Cliff was ready to throw off all pretence. He had wanted to seize Griscom Treft and throttle the fiend to death. He had wanted vengeance upon this murderer who had coldly ordered the destruction of the lonely cabin and its occupant.

Then had come the flash that had brought Cliff back to sanity. Those lights upon the horizon. Slow–moving glimmers of green and red. Treft had spoken of the passing ship as an airplane. Cliff, judging its speed, had known that it must be an autogyro.

The Shadow's chosen craft! The Shadow had learned of doom. He had come here to take up the work. It would be The Shadow's privilege – not Cliff's – to avenge the death of Harry Vincent.

Such was the thought that steadied Cliff as he heard the clang of a summoning bell. Ready to continue his part, Cliff Marsland strode from his room to join those below.

CHAPTER X. ON THE SLOPE

ONE hour after Cliff Marsland had observed those passing lights on the horizon, an antique taxi rolled up in front of the Paulington House. A tall passenger alighted, paid the driver and entered the hotel.

A languid clerk was perched behind the desk. Hooking one thumb under a suspender strap, he pushed the register across the desk so that the guest could sign. The name that the tall personage inscribed was Henry Arnaud.

As the lone bell boy carried the new guest's suitcase upstairs, the clerk caught his first glimpse of the stranger's face. He noticed a firm–set countenance, almost hawklike in its profile. Then he perched behind the

desk again.

Not long afterward, the new guest came down the stairs. The clerk was half asleep and did not see him stroll across the lobby. The tall figure settled in a chair and remained there, almost obscured from view.

The Shadow had reverted to his guise of Henry Arnaud for this trip to Paulington. There had been no comeback from Clark Copley after the Walpin robbery. Evidently the Cincinnati pearl salesman had noticed no connection between Henry Arnaud's purchases and the subsequent theft of the Blue Pearl.

Few persons were passing in the quiet street that constituted Paulington's main thoroughfare. The Shadow, nevertheless, was watchful. At last his vigilance was rewarded by the arrival of an old touring car in front of the hotel. A bulky, beef-faced man alighted and strode into the lobby.

"Hi there, Bill!" he greeted, waving to the clerk. "Burgess Dowden been here looking for me?"

"Yeah," returned the clerk, rising from his chair in sleepy fashion. "He was around 'bout an hour ago, asking if I'd seen you, sheriff."

"Where'd the burgess go from here?"

"Over to his office. Take a look out the door and you'll see the light a-burning. Waiting for you, I reckon. Said he would be."

The sheriff heeled about and strode to the street. The clerk watched him; then dropped back into his chair and resumed his doze. The bell hop was nowhere about; so no one saw The Shadow arise and walk out to the street.

THERE was only one visible light that could have signified the office of Burgess Dowden. That was on the second story of a three-floor edifice that was Paulington's lone attempt at an office building.

Even in the guise of Arnaud, The Shadow was scarcely discernible as he took up the sheriff's trail. Reaching the building, he found the door unlocked. He ascended a pair of dingy stairs; then came to a hallway on the second floor. The lighted office was at the front. The Shadow found the door of the one next to it, opened the simple lock with a pick – a clever tool of The Shadow's – and entered.

As he had considered probable, The Shadow found a connecting door. He went to this barrier, inserted the pick and worked with ease and care. There was a key in the lock, planted from the other side; discovering that fact, The Shadow introduced a tweezerlike instrument that proved its value.

He clipped the end of the key between the sharp-gripping points. Twisting slowly, he unlocked the door. The one risk was that someone might observe the key turning in the other room; but The Shadow's actions were timed to precise slowness. His work passed unobserved.

Softly, The Shadow turned the knob and opened the door a scant half inch. Looking in, he saw the beefy-faced sheriff staring across a desk toward a white-haired worthy who was evidently Burgess Dowden. The two were engrossed in conversation; neither suspected the presence of a listener.

"I'll agree it don't concern the town, burgess," Sheriff Brock was saying. "That cabin was located outside the limits. It's a county case, right enough, but seeing how the car was taken out of Cassidy's garage, it looks like the town was in it anyhow."

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"The car is a separate matter, sheriff," returned Dowden. "I am ready to lend you cooperation in this problem. Before I do so, however, we must settle upon the points at issue."

"That listens reasonable, burgess. Go on with it."

"VERY well. Last night, there was a mysterious explosion upon the hillside. In your territory, sheriff. A useless cabin was destroyed. Someone must have been responsible for the work. That admitted, what is the man's crime?"

"Trespassing for one thing. Destroying property for another."

"Trespassing on unposted property? Destroying a building that no one claims to own? Those are not crimes, Brock. They are not even cause for a civil damage suit."

"Humph! Well, burgess, you're an attorney. You know the law. Looks like I ought to let the whole thing ride. I would, maybe, if it hadn't been for finding that car."

"Ah, yes. The car. Purchased from Jerry Cassidy, on what he terms a lease; but paid for in full. About the only objection that can be raised concerning the automobile would be a protest on the part of the new owner because you towed it back to town and parked it in Cassidy's garage."

"It was abandoned on a public highway."

"No, no. The road was abandoned, not the car. The county has dropped that stretch of road, Brock."

The sheriff snorted as he thumped the desk. His drumming fingers told that he was at loss. The white-haired burgess chuckled. That annoyed Brock further.

"People can't go setting off dynamite in this county!" he challenged. "Not without me finding out who did it! Some smart alec was in that flivver, burgess. I want to find him; I want to know what he was up to."

The burgess nodded wisely.

"An excellent plan, Brock," he stated, "and there is one course through which you might accomplish it. Think of more than the cabin. Think of the man himself."

"I am thinking of him. That's why I want to find him."

"You are on the wrong tack. Go on the assumption that you cannot find him; that no one could find him."

"Then what's the use —"

Brock stopped short. His beefy face showed a gape. Burgess Dowden was wearing a solemn smile. His head was slowly wagging from side to side. Brock leaned across the desk.

"Say" — the sheriff's voice was hoarse — "you don't — you don't mean that the man could have been in that cabin?"

Dowden's head shake became a nod.

"Then it's murder!" exclaimed the sheriff. "A cabin goes up in smoke. A man is missing. It's murder!"

"Murder or suicide. Possibly manslaughter." Dowden paused to consider. "At least, sheriff, you have cause for thorough investigation. Inasmuch as the dead man was here in Paulington that same evening, I am willing to make it a matter for the local as well as the county authorities. But only on the basis of possible homicide."

"I get it, burgess." Brock leaned back in his chair and laughed. "That story they wired into New York about a mystery explosion on the hillside didn't mean much, did it? Some of the newspapers even had the name of the town spelled wrong."

"But they will spell it correctly when I make my statement," assured Dowden. "As burgess of Paulington, I am ready to deliver an announcement as startling as that explosion last night."

"It's not notoriety that I want, Brock. Far from it. But I do believe that when something of consequence happens on your very doorstep, you should inform the world of it."

"You're right, burgess. I'll play ball with you. Call up Boone right now. He's sort of a local correspondent. Let him wire your statement to New York."

"And after that?"

"We work together. Out of here. Course I'll have to check in at Southbridge; it's the county seat. But Paulington will be my headquarters. Any newspaper men coming out will have to check in here."

THE door closed softly as the burgess, with the sheriff looking on, began to prepare a statement. The Shadow moved from the adjoining room. He glided down the stairs and from the building.

He had learned all the preliminary details that he required.

He knew that Harry Vincent had driven to the foot of the path up the slope and had left a purchased car at that point. These were facts that had not been mentioned in the brief newspaper items that New York journals had printed.

Mere news of a dynamited cabin had been sufficient to bring The Shadow to Paulington. Here, he had heard two men discuss additional facts. They had struck upon an agreement that a man had died in the blast.

But they had not learned the name of The Shadow's agent. They had simply determined that Harry Vincent – to them an unknown person – would have been a victim rather than a perpetrator of the outrage.

Facts indicated it. A dynamiter would not have abandoned his car so near the point of action. The Shadow, here to learn full details of his agent's fate, had learned enough to form a trail.

As Henry Arnaud, The Shadow returned to the Paulington House. He looked into the lobby; had the clerk been awake, he would have chosen an outside course to reach his room. But the clerk was dozing behind the desk; the bell hop was still absent. The Shadow strolled into the hotel and went up to the third floor.

That was the topmost story of the Paulington House. There was a fire escape at the end of The Shadow's corridor. Donning black coat and slouch hat, The Shadow left his room and used the fire escape for exit. He became a silent, gliding shape along the streets of the little town.

JERRY CASSIDY was working late tonight. As he finished cleaning the spark plugs of an automobile, he chatted with a friend who had dropped in to see him. Cassidy gestured with one thumb, over his shoulder.

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"Can't figure about that flivver," he remarked. "The fellow who bought it wanted it right enough. But he left it on the old road. The sheriff found it and brought it home to roost."

"Running all right, is it?" questioned the friend.

"Seems so," replied Cassidy. "I had a duplicate ignition key, so I started the motor and ran the car over there in the corner. But I haven't checked on anything else. Sheriff said keep it here; that's what I'm doing."

"Couldn't get rid of the old load of iron, even after you'd sold it, eh, Jerry?"

"That car's no junk. It's plenty out of date, but it runs. The rubber is old, but good for a few thousand miles, maybe. I told the fellow that when he bought it. What I didn't tell him was that he was getting a new battery. A new jack, too; one I took right out of stock and put in back with the tools.

"You always give a guy a good return for his money, Jerry."

Cassidy finished up and turned out the light. He and his friend started from the garage. In the darkness, Cassidy made comment:

"You know," he said, "that fellow who bought the flivver pulled out of here a little after seven. He'd have just about had time to drive up to the old road and follow the path to the cabin and get there ahead of the explosion."

"The cabin was blasted just before eight," commented the friend. "He'd have had time to do that job, Jerry."

"Between five and ten minutes leeway," agreed the garage man. "He had a bag when he came here. I guess the dynamite was in it."

The two left the garage; Cassidy padlocked the swinging doors. A few minutes passed, then a tiny flashlight glimmered. The Shadow had entered unnoticed. He had heard the talk.

The flashlight shone on the roadster. Inspecting, The Shadow finished with the front and went to the rear. He placed a gloved hand upon the spare tire as he leaned forward to open the back compartment. The rubber surface yielded under pressure. The Shadow noted that the spare was flat.

Opening the compartment, The Shadow probed the interior. His gloved hands clattered tools about, then emerged. The light, in The Shadow's right, glimmered upon the glove that covered his left hand. Bits of clayish mud showed on the fingers of The Shadow's glove.

The light went out. The Shadow moved through darkness. He had no trouble reaching through the space between the rickety doors. He picked Cassidy's lock, emerged to the street and padlocked the doors behind him.

LATER, The Shadow's flashlight glimmered in a secluded portion of the countryside. He had left Paulington. He had chosen the left fork outside of town. He had reached the stretch of abandoned road. He was following that rocky course.

There were muddy spots between jagged stones; these were remnants of the surface that had been washed away. The Shadow's light showed flattened marks in the mud; indications of smoothed automobile tires. Traces of Harry's trip.

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Some distance along the abandoned road, The Shadow saw where the car had veered to the right. A mud patch showed irregular marks of tires. There were footprints beside them. The Shadow resumed his course.

Fifteen minutes brought him to the path beside the birch trees. One splotch of mud showed a tire track. The rest of the ground was rocky, giving no other traces. The Shadow followed the path up the hill.

He reached the wreckage of the cabin. There he discovered nothing of consequence. In the clearing, however, he noted leaning underbrush. Soil was dry; footprints absent; yet people had come into this open patch and left their traces.

The Shadow found the faint path toward Table Rock. Flattened underbrush proved that passers had traveled this course, probably in darkness. At one point, traces veered away and ran parallel, then swung back again.

Starlight revealed a cleared space. The Shadow had reached Table Rock. His torch blinked no longer. The grayish glitter of the rock alone showed beneath the stars. The ground about the ledge was easily visible.

Old paths led from this point. Each one that The Shadow examined gave slight traces of recent use; but these clues were scarcely more than indications. These were too minor to be of value.

Climbing the ledge, The Shadow reached Table Rock itself. His black form became a weird, inky shape as it moved about. Keen eyes were studying the glistening stone. The upper side of the rock marked the end of The Shadow's inspection.

There the rock extended into the hillside. There was no path leading upward; yet there were traces of loose dirt and dislodged stones that indicated prowlers taking to the higher slope. The Shadow moved back to the front of the rock.

Blackness below. Tree tops showed no reflection of the starlight. Forest all around; no sign of habitation on this portion of the slope. Mountview Lodge The Shadow knew, was around the curve to the east.

The only lights that he could see were the faint glimmers from Paulington street lamps, far beyond the trees. Motionless, The Shadow looked toward those distant dots of yellow.

Then his figure lowered. Downward from the ledge of Table Rock, The Shadow moved into the massed blackness of the woods. Table Rock glittered, its surface no longer splotched with moving, spectral darkness. The Shadow had merged with night.

CHAPTER XI. CLIFF REPORTS

WHILE The Shadow was engaged in his inspection of the sloping hillside, Cliff Marsland was comfortably ensconced in the great room of Mountview Lodge. He was one of a group who lounged before an open fireplace. These were the brood of The Condor.

Cliff had dined with men of crime. He had met them as a fellow member in a company of evil. He had learned their names – their right ones – and they had welcomed him as one who had a right to be here.

The Condor was master of this throng. Griscom Treft sat in the center of the semicircle; Cliff at the edge, could see his profile. Viewed from this perspective, Treft's nose showed a pronounced hook. It was the ugly, savage-looking beak of a vulture. Another good reason for The Condor's choice of title.

THE CONDOR

"The thirteenth has nearly arrived," Treft was announcing to his listeners. "After that date, our plans will involve action. We shall be ready for great undertakings. Our field will be the world."

Treft chuckled harshly. His bird-like eyes turned toward Cliff; The Shadow's agent caught The Condor's stare. He knew that these statements were for his benefit. The others had already listened to The Condor's promises.

"Each of you has shown his ability." The Condor made this pronouncement as he arose. "You, Jengley" – he clapped his hand upon the shoulder of a long-faced rogue who sat beside him – "came here before all others. The swag that you brought was cash."

"Fifty grand," acknowledged Jengley, with a reminiscent chuckle. "I ran wild, chief, when I forged those checks on the account of Isaac Blodgett. It was kind of nice the old boy died soon after. His estate never wised to the swindle."

"And your token of identity," chuckled The Condor, "was Blodgett's signature, the one you knew so well. Remember how you came into my study? You saw the silver bird; you produced a sheet of paper and wrote Blodgett's name as if it had been your own."

"I remember you comparing it," laughed Jengley. "Well, chief, when the works gets going, I'll be on hand to sign any monickers you pick for me."

The Condor nodded, satisfied. He stared toward a husky, hard-faced man who was seated opposite Cliff.

"You were second, Jake," recalled The Condor. "Yes, I remember that pleasant evening when Jake Lussig entered my study and presented the Florentine medallion as proof that he had robbed the Memorial Museum. You brought heavy swag, Jake."

"Three trunk loads, chief," laughed Jake, gruffly. "The gold in that bunch of coins and medals ought to be worth plenty nowadays."

"It is," agreed The Condor. "But I shall arrange to dispose of those curios without melting them. When we begin new operations, we shall have contacts in many lands."

TREFT was standing while he spoke. His gleaming eyes looked about from man to man. His chuckle resumed.

"Corey and Trossler," he recalled. "Servants of different masters whom they robbed. Their trails have been covered. Like yours, Delland."

Strolling over, The Condor clamped his claw upon the shoulder of a pale-faced individual who was staring at the embers of the fire. Delland showed a twisted smile on his pallid lips.

"Confidential secretary of Simon Featherstone," proclaimed The Condor. "You departed from Featherstone's employ with securities worth one hundred and twenty-thousand dollars. Most of them are negotiable."

"Not the one I brought here as a means of identification," rejoined Delland. "It wasn't worth a nickel, that Southwestern Copper stock. It was a dud; old Featherstone himself had only faint hope that it would stage a comeback."

THE CONDOR

"But it served as your identification Delland," reminded The Condor. "By the way, Thuler" – this was to a dark-faced, black-haired man who was near the fireplace – "when you arrived six months ago, we had a chat about certain stocks. Do you recall it?"

Thuler nodded. Treft was about to speak again when Delland interrupted. The pale-faced man pointed to the door. Corey was standing there; apparently the chauffeur wanted to speak to his chief.

Treft arose and walked out into the hall. Delland followed; he served as The Condor's secretary. The three crossed the hall and went into the study.

Men began to chat. Cliff Marsland listened. He was considering facts that he had learned. The Condor's brood numbered seven, not counting himself. Jengley and Thuler played the part of guests at the lodge, along with Lussig, the hard-faced fellow whom all called Jake.

Delland was The Condor's secretary; Corey his chauffeur; Trossler acted as house servant, to give the place a front. There was one other: a Chinaman who served as cook and also waited on the table. The Condor had addressed him as Goon Loy.

Cliff knew that Goon Loy was also crooked. Otherwise, he would not have been admitted to the company. The Condor had provided this habitat for men of crime alone.

Jengley's voice ended Cliff's reverie. The long-faced forger was saying something to the new member; Cliff had been too deep in thought to catch the words. He looked quizzically toward Jengley; but before the man could speak again, Delland entered.

"The chief wants to see you, Marsland," he stated. "In the study."

CLIFF left the great room. He went to The Condor's study. The door was open; Cliff entered to find Treft at his desk. Corey was standing near, ready to leave.

"That is all," said Treft to the chauffeur. "Forget the matter, Corey."

"You're sending word to Zegler?" inquired Corey, anxiously.

"Yes," replied Treft, "tonight. I shall arrange a time of contact. You will see him then."

"All right, chief. I was just worried on account of Clint Spadling. When I talked with Clint downtown, I told him that his best bet was to slide out –"

"I know, Corey. And Spadling is gone. If any one comes to find him, no difficulty will result. Spadling never came here to the lodge. He was even cautious about being seen in Paulington."

"That's true, chief. But Spadling and I were pals once. I go down to town every day –"

"Enough, Corey. No one will connect you with Spadling. You and he had not worked together for years. When you and he talked together in town, your meetings were secret. No one could have observed them.

"You will still act as chauffeur, Corey. To make a change would be a mistake. That is the type of move that would attract attention to affairs here at the lodge."

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Corey nodded; then went out. Cliff remained. He met Treft's beady gaze. Cliff acted as if disinterested in the discussion that he had heard.

"Marsland," stated The Condor, "tonight I shall add your swag to my other trophies. Walpin's pearls will be safe within my strong room. Within the next few days, I shall show you my treasure vault.

"You will be pleased with it. I can assure you that it lacks no protection. It lies beneath this building and it is a natural stronghold. At the same time, I hope you have already realized that the lodge itself is well protected."

"I noticed wires along the picket fence," returned Cliff. "What are they – an alarm system?"

"Yes; no one could enter these grounds without discovery. The lock on the gate is a device of my own invention. Any attempt to pick it would register an alarm as effectively as if someone cut one of the fence wires.

"The windows of this building are all barred. We do not fear surprise attacks here, Marsland. Nevertheless, those are all emergency precautions.

"Our real protection lies in the fact that we are clear of suspicion. Six years ago, I retired from business with a sizable fortune. Much of it had been gained by methods that were shrewd – not criminal; but I had always admired crime as a means of gain. That was why I chose this residence."

Treft paused to chuckle harshly. To Cliff, The Condor's gloat had the semblance of a cry from a vulture's throat.

"I HAD one excellent contact," resumed Treft. "That was through Ace Lafitte, a criminal in his own right, but one who had kept his rackets covered. To Lafitte I confided my scheme. It was he who selected candidates for The Condor.

"Men like Gruzen; others; each with a quest. Each to deliver on his own, or pass the word to someone who could accomplish the task. Six years, Marsland, was the limit. I expected some to fall by the wayside. Last week, three were unheard from. The thirteenth of this month marked the finish line."

"Then I showed up," laughed Cliff. "Well, I guess you expected Gruzen, didn't you, chief?"

"No," returned The Condor, "I did not. Oddly, Marsland, only a few of my band are original workers to whom Lafitte passed the word. Some gave the news to others at the very start. Others, like Gruzen, confided in pals when they knew that they could not continue.

"Lafitte, himself, is dead. He was to arrive here after I was established. Unfortunately, he had enemies who were members of a gambling ring. They murdered him in San Francisco, only a few months after he and I had made our deal."

Cliff nodded new understanding. He realized why Treft had counted so heavily upon identifying tokens such as the Blue Pearl.

"Gold – gems – treasures" – The Condor was chuckling as he itemized his hidden store – "wealth that can bring us a cool million, Marsland! But that is trifling. The swag that you and others have delivered was called for as a test of your ability.

THE CONDOR

"I have a million dollars of my own. I shall be finished with Mountview Lodge. Our stolen goods will be shipped to Europe, to South America, to the Orient. We shall find a new headquarters, our assets transformed into solid money.

"Then our day begins." The Condor's eyes gleamed wickedly. "We shall launch crime without parallel! Arson, robbery, blackmail, forgery, murder – all the calendar of crime will unroll before us.

"I, The Condor, shall be master. Working with me, you and others, all specialists in crime – men of proven worth. Already, merely as a preliminary test, I have sponsored crimes that an ordinary chieftain would consider a final goal. Yet, to me, the beginning still lies ahead."

The Condor's harsh voice continued. Listening, Cliff could feel the insidious spell that this crime master had woven about the men who acknowledged him as chief. Yet, to Cliff, these promises of coming gain were thoughts that made him find difficulty in restraining his pent-up fury.

Again, he wanted to leap forward and grip Treft's throat to throttle life from this monster who was plotting misfortune, torture and death for scores of innocent persons.

When The Condor's gloating monologue had ended, Cliff sat dazed with horror. He barely managed to restrain a shudder when Treft arose to clamp a talon on his new underling's shoulder.

They walked out into the hallway. The others had retired; only Trossler was about, puffing out lights. The Condor's grip relaxed. An evil smile upon lips, the chief bade his latest henchman good night.

WHEN he reached his own room, Cliff sat down by the window. His head was whirling; his forehead feverish as he touched it. Regularly, in The Shadow's service, Cliff dealt with crooks on their own ground. He was used to steeling himself against the vile influence of evil men.

But The Condor, calculating, cold, outmatched any fiend whom Cliff had ever encountered. The strength of Treft's position pointed to the power of his future. True, the law would strike against Mountview Lodge, once it suspected that criminals had found harbor here. But would the law uncover that fact?

Cliff decided no. Trails had been covered. Swag was protected in some mysterious stronghold. As Griscom Treft, The Condor passed suspicion. One point, however, was evident. The time to strike was the present – while Mountview Lodge still held its close-knit band of rogues.

Facts concerning past crime would not help. Incomplete data concerning the lodge would not be useful until later, when Cliff might have learned more about the place. The names of those within these walls were not an important factor in planning some way to reach The Condor.

Thinking of names, Cliff remembered two. Zegler – Spadling. Those were not names of persons located here. They were outside parties, those two whom Corey had mentioned. A grim smile formed on Cliff's lips. It faded as he stared at the barred window.

To use those names, Cliff needed contact. Instructions had been for him to leave the lodge if possible and meet Harry Vincent at the cabin on the other slope. Should Cliff not put in an appearance, Harry's duty would have been to come here and try to contact Cliff.

Not this first night, but later. All that, however, was ended. Feverishly, Cliff's brain began to drum. Harry Vincent was dead – that definite fact swept all other thoughts from mind. Cliff could picture exactly what had happened.

THE CONDOR

Harry coming to the cabin. Lurkers – fiends whom Cliff had met tonight, men with whom he had feigned friendship – those villains had released their blast. A shattered cabin, its sections tossed about the hillside. The only comfort was that death must have been swift to the helpless man trapped within the doomed shack.

Rising, Cliff extinguished the light. He came back to the opened window and stared into the blackened night. One hope had come to his tormented brain. He was sure that The Shadow had come to Paulington. It was possible that The Shadow would take up Harry's task. Contact with Cliff!

As he stared from the window, Cliff became suddenly alert. Yards away, beyond the fence, something had blinked from among the trees. It came again: quick, instantaneous flickers of a flashlight.

The Shadow's code! Calling for an answer!

FINDING his opened bag, Cliff dug deep and produced a flashlight. He blinked an answering symbol. Contact was made. Tensely, Cliff decided to send the vital information.

Blinking his light at the window, he signaled two names in the code used by The Shadow and his agents. Zegler was the first name; Spadling the second. Then Cliff added a brief sentence stating that those men were somewhere at large and must be found.

Blinks from beyond the fence. The Shadow's symbol for concluded transmission. Cliff signed off in return. A profound ease settled through his throbbing brain. One step had been made against The Condor.

From small beginnings, The Shadow could produce great deeds. Hope held Cliff Marsland as he thought of the future. The Shadow knew the fate of Harry Vincent; of that, Cliff was positive.

Inspired by vengeance, The Shadow would never relent until he had dealt destruction to those who deserved it. Though The Condor might think himself secure, Cliff knew that the supercrook would be forced to cope with a foe whose craft had conquered others who dealt in crime.

Brief though the time might be, Cliff Marsland felt the positive belief that before crooks left Mountview Lodge, The Condor would meet The Shadow face to face.

CHAPTER XII. THE SHADOW'S JOURNEY

IT was four o'clock the next afternoon. Half a dozen men were seated upon Table Rock, chatting while they smoked their pipes. Their conversation dealt with developments in Paulington.

"Like as not, the fellow was blowed up in that cabin," remarked a big, unshaven chap whose voice carried a rustic twang. "Figuring that, I can't see no reason for us tramping all along the slope."

"Tain't the dead man we're looking for, Hank," observed a comrade. "The sheriff wants to find out who set off them fireworks."

"Hadn't he figured that the city chap could ha' done it for himself?"

"What's become of him then?"

"Maybe he was blowed up with it. Say – when's the sheriff due here?"

"He's coming now, Hank."

THE CONDOR

As the words were spoken, Sheriff Brock appeared from the cabin path. With him were three strangers. One of the men on the rock whispered to a pal:

"Reporters – up from New York."

"Any luck, men?" queried the sheriff.

"Nothing much, Howie," responded Hank, as spokesman. "Luther, here, found what looked like a campfire further up the hill; but it didn't strike me as meaning nothing."

"Built recently, was it?"

"Didn't look that way. I'd have said them logs have been lying there well nigh on to a month."

"No use looking at it then."

The sheriff waved for searchers to come down from the rock. They had been searching the terrain individually; Table Rock was their meeting place. Obviously, Brock was going back to town, and the members of his party were glad to do the same.

TEN minutes after the searchers had left the ledge, a figure appeared silently from a lower path. It was The Shadow, in the guise of Henry Arnaud. Up here on the slope, he had found little difficulty in avoiding the spreadout searchers.

Skirting the ledge, The Shadow cut in to the spot that he had examined on the night before, where loose stones had marked progress up the slope. Tracing through scrub, he reached a tiny clearing. There, under the shelter of a dwarfed pine tree, he found the fire that Luther had reported.

Blackened logs were all that remained above gray ashes. But The Shadow, pressing logs aside, found something that brought a soft laugh from his lips. It was the stump of a hand-fashioned cigarette.

To The Shadow's observation, this fire was of fairly recent building. Chunks from the small logs indicated that someone had been careful to thoroughly extinguish it. That was why Hank had decided the fire was a month old. The Shadow's estimate limited its age to a week or less.

This tiny clearing was well hidden. A fire, burning here, could not have been seen from the ledge below. It seemed likely that the person who had built the fire had come up from Table Rock. The Shadow's task was to find any other direction that the unknown man might have taken.

There was no path from the clearing. Hence there were two indications, among pressed bushes, that showed the camper's course. One was down to Table Rock. The other, toward the rise of the hill.

Choosing this course, The Shadow began a trail. A dozen yards along, he made a discovery: another cigarette stump trampled on the ground. Like the first, it was handmade. It had been carefully extinguished.

The trail continued. It bore west, skirting the slope. At one spot, broken branches of trees showed a course through blocking boughs. Another wisp of cigarette paper furnished an additional clue.

These traces were not obvious. Only The Shadow, looking for them, could have discovered the path that a prowler had taken. With the skill of a woodsman, he kept to his task, picking new indications that the sheriff's blunderers had utterly failed to notice.

THE CONDOR

An hour's journey brought him beyond the hill. There the trail veered; then was lost at an opening among the trees. The Shadow, however, noted a tiny knoll that might have been an objective. He made in that direction. From the eminence, he gained a view to the north.

A stream curved past the borders of the slope. A farmhouse stood beyond it; but on the stream itself, half a mile west of the farm, was a dark brown building that looked like an old mill.

A poor road showed among trees still further west. It offered means of travel between the mill and the good dirt road that skirted the west side of the slope. The Shadow chose that road as his next point.

DESCENDING the slope, The Shadow suddenly came upon new traces of the same trail that he had taken from the clearing above Table Rock. Evidently the stroller on the hillside had cut down to the road in the same fashion as had The Shadow.

A cigarette butt was the clue that proved this fact. Reaching the road, The Shadow discovered footprints in thick dust. A toe pointed right, that was toward the mill.

The Shadow followed the trail no further. Keeping to the side of the road, he headed left. A westward walk of more than a mile brought him to the good dirt highway. He followed it until he came to the upper end of the old abandoned road on which Harry Vincent had left the flivver. The Shadow took to the abandoned road.

A coupe was parked beside the birch trees when The Shadow arrived at that spot. A man was standing beside it, looking up the path. The Shadow approached and scuffed a stone as he advanced. The man spun about to show a face that was keen and alert.

He was Clyde Burke, reporter from the New York Classic. Wiry built, active of manner, Clyde started tensely as he awaited the arrival of the walker. He said nothing as he studied the immobile features of Henry Arnaud.

The Shadow raised his left hand. On the third finger, Clyde spied a gem that glittered despite the shade of the trees above. The stone was a fire opal, a glimmering, living coal of varied hue; The Shadow's girasol.

"They've all gone back to town," stated Clyde, solemnly. "I told the sheriff I wanted to poke around here a while. The other reporters went into Paulington. I'm to meet them at the office of Burgess Dowden."

A slow nod was The Shadow's response. In the steady manner of Henry Arnaud, he entered the car and took the wheel. Clyde joined him.

"Remain at the Paulington House," ordered The Shadow, in Arnaud's steady tone. "Await instructions; and have reports available. I shall require this car."

"All right," agreed Clyde. "The sheriff found nothing up on the slope. It looks like there'd been people around there, all right, but none of them left enough traces to count."

"Did he discover anything at the cabin?"

"Nothing. But he says – and it sounds likely, too – that whoever blew the place up could have gone around and picked up any traces of – of –"

"Of the man who died there."

THE CONDOR

Clyde had hesitated, choked as he sought to utter the name of Harry Vincent. The Shadow's response, in level, solemn voice, had completed the sentence for him.

Clyde nodded. He appreciated the fact that The Shadow had spoken without mentioning Harry's name. To Clyde, the tragedy was as great as it had been to Cliff Marsland.

The Shadow was driving toward the fork and Clyde studied his masklike countenance as they jounced from the bad road. In the features of Henry Arnaud, he saw an inflexible, unyielding expression.

Grim fervor seized Clyde Burke. Like Cliff, he had vowed vengeance upon murderers. In The Shadow's firm countenance, despite the fact that it was but a temporary guise, Clyde saw a determination that he knew must concern the future.

Clyde recalled the vengeance that The Shadow had wreaked upon slayers who had killed an agent long ago. He knew that this just being would always exact toll from men of evil. But the past could not vanish from Clyde's memory.

Harry Vincent was dead. That tragic thought gripped Clyde as it had held Cliff. With effort, Clyde managed to regain his calmness. The Shadow's example had told him that he must face the future.

NO comment came from the lips of Henry Arnaud as the car rolled toward Paulington. It was not until they had reached the very outskirts of the village that The Shadow stopped.

It was Clyde's signal to leave. The agent clambered from the coupe. The Shadow drove off along a side street while Clyde started afoot toward Dowden's office.

The Shadow did not travel far, however. He skirted the town, came in by a side road and parked the coupe in back of the Paulington House. It was time for the evening train. The Shadow strolled leisurely toward the station platform.

The local chugged into view; three passengers stepped from it. Standing away, The Shadow surveyed them; suddenly his eyes became fixed upon a passenger of husky build whose keen eyes stared from a swarthy countenance.

The Shadow knew that stranger, with his firm jaw and short-clipped mustache. But The Shadow had not expected to see him in Paulington. The arrival was Vic Marquette, operative for the United States secret service.

Vic was looking about, anxious to make some query. He saw the station agent and approached the man. The Shadow, strolling close, heard Marquette inquire the way to Burgess Dowden's office. The station agent pointed to the building down the street.

The Shadow watched Marquette walk away. He waited; the operative entered the office building. Ten minutes passed; then three reporters – Burke included – came strolling out to the sidewalk. The Shadow laughed softly.

Marquette had evidently introduced himself to sheriff and burgess. The result was a private conference. The Shadow, however, was in no haste to learn the details. He strolled over to the Paulington House.

The clerk was reading a newspaper that had just arrived. Paulington was in the news. Last night's flash over the press wires had added grim importance to the mystery explosion on the hillside.

THE CONDOR

That was why reporters had come here today; it was also why the clerk stared suspiciously at the features of Henry Arnaud as The Shadow strolled upstairs. Strangers who failed to state their business were being watched in Paulington. The clerk had already told the burgess that Henry Arnaud had checked in at the Paulington House after the hill explosion.

Clouded sky; gloomy dusk. Blackness was thickening outside The Shadow's window. Half an hour had passed since Marquette had entered the office building. The Shadow was seated at a table, about to seal an envelope. Suddenly he became alert.

His keen ears had caught the sound of footsteps. People were coming up the stairs to the third floor of the hotel. Voices, though muffled, were carrying along the corridor of the old hotel; they could be heard through The Shadow's open transom.

Instantly, The Shadow extinguished the table lamp. Something swished; he was plucking cloak and hat from an opened suitcase. The black garments donned, he produced a coil of rope from the bag; then clicked the suitcase shut.

Men had arrived outside The Shadow's door. Someone was pounding; the gruff tones of Sheriff Brock were calling for Mr. Arnaud.

SILENTLY, The Shadow placed the bag on the window sill. He attached the end of the rope to the bag handle; then swung himself out into darkness.

Stretching upward, The Shadow gained the edge of the hotel roof. His shape was a mass of swinging blackness as it ascended. From the roof, The Shadow tugged at the cord. The suitcase swung like a pendulum; then it was drawn up to where The Shadow crouched.

A muffled crash from the room below. The sheriff had jolted the door with his shoulder; the lock had broken. A light blinked on below. Crouched on the roof's edge, The Shadow listened. He could hear voices engaged in discussion.

Two figures appeared by the open window. The Shadow could discern them as he leaned from the blackened roof. One man was Sheriff Brock; the other Vic Marquette.

"Chase the reporters," suggested Vic in a tone that The Shadow could hear. "Tell them to go downstairs with the clerk."

Brock barked an order. The Shadow heard departing footsteps; the muffled sound of a closing door. Brock and Marquette remained by the window; The Shadow heard the sheriff state:

"This fellow Arnaud beat it, all right. That makes him look suspicious to me. The clerk says for sure that he came up here."

"Maybe he is phony," returned Marquette. "But as soon as we got over here to the hotel and heard the clerk's description of him, I knew that it couldn't be Clint Spadling."

"Then what did you come up for?" inquired the sheriff.

"On account of the reporters," explained Marquette. "They were at our heels. They figured we were looking for somebody. Listen, sheriff: we'll let those newshawks think we were after Arnaud. Not a word to them about Spadling. Understand?"

"I'm with you on it. But are you sure that Arnaud couldn't be Spadling? Might be disguised, you know."

"Not a chance. The clerk says Arnaud is tall; with clear complexion and a solemn face. Spadling is bulky like; he couldn't hide that. What's more, he's dark; and his mug is a mean one. He couldn't keep those bulging teeth of his out of sight."

"We'll look for him."

"Right; and when we locate Spadling, we'll have a line on any phony business that's been going on around here. The man's a bad egg. Always has been."

The speaker moved back into the room. A door slam told of their departure. The Shadow crept along the roof; he dropped his bag to the fire escape; then descended. He reached the coupe in back of the hotel. He started the car and drove slowly away along a secluded street.

CLYDE BURKE was eating an egg sandwich at the local lunch counter when a man entered and looked at Clyde and other reporters. The fellow inquired:

"Who's Mr. Burke?"

Clyde acknowledged the name. The man handed him an envelope.

"Friend of yours sent this," he stated. "Some gent in a coupe. Asked me to bring it in here."

Clyde opened the message. He held it so he alone could see the writing. Coded words in bluish ink – orders from The Shadow. The writing faded to blankness; a way with all messages between The Shadow and his agents. Clyde smiled as he thrust the blank sheet in his pocket. He tossed a quarter dollar to the messenger, who grinned his thanks and strolled out.

Outside of Paulington, a coupe was approaching the fork. It swung left at the junction point; from the darkness behind the wheel came a whispered laugh. The Shadow, his part of Arnaud ended, was faring forth on a new and important mission.

CHAPTER XIII. THE MAN AT THE MILL

THICK darkness lay beneath overhanging trees. Silence of night was disturbed only by the ripple of a little stream. Then, barely audible in the gloom, came the closing of a door, followed by a momentary swish.

The Shadow had found the side road to the old mill. He had followed it until he discovered an open space beside the road. There he had parked the coupe, between the road and the stream close by. His car was well obscured by the surrounding trees.

Moving stealthily along the bank of the stream, The Shadow chose a sure course toward the old mill. Despite the sloshing mud that brinked the water, he progressed so silently that all sound of his advance was covered by the babbling of the stream.

At the end of one hundred yards, The Shadow encountered a structure of wood. It was the trough of an old millrace, a crude flume that came from a dark building bulking up ahead.

The Shadow followed this new line. He reached the wooden wall of the mill; moved to the right across a shaky timber; then skirted the side of the building to find the dim light of a window.

THE CONDOR

Here The Shadow edged head and shoulder to the lower corner of a grimy pane. The glass was absent from the upper sash. As The Shadow looked into the building, he could hear the sound of muffled voices.

Two men were seated in an oddly furnished room. It had once been combination office and storeroom; now it had been fashioned into a crude living room. In one corner, The Shadow saw a battered counter; in another, shelves that were sturdy in construction. There was a roll-top desk beyond the counter; a stove in the center of the room.

Added to these relics of the mill's forgotten glory were stuffed chairs and heavy tables that had come from an old-fashioned parlor. The illumination was provided by two kerosene lamps; the light was sufficient to show the faces of the occupants.

One was a brawny, long-limbed man whose face was hatchetlike. Hard-eyed, smooth-shaven, this individual was dressed in clothes that were new, but poor in fit. It was plain that he must be the proprietor of the old mill.

The other was a gawky, dull-faced rustic, whose chinless lower jaw was engaged in gum chewing. Seated on the edge of a chair, his elbows slouched upon a table, this youth was drawling in a high-pitched voice.

"You know, Uncle Hiram," he was saying, "folks was a-tellin' me that this here old mill oughta be opened up again. Hain't many places hereabouts where they kin get the kinda flour they like."

"No?" queried the hatchet-faced man gruffly. "Well, if the folks you talk about would mind their own business, it would be more to my liking."

"They say you've got enough money to start it goin' again, uncle," put in the youth. "They allow that you was right smart buyin' an' sellin' property. They say there ain't no need for a man to be retirin', when he's no older than you be."

"You tell them that Hiram Zegler knows what he's doing. Agree with them that your uncle is a right smart man. Let it go at that, Elisha."

The gawky youth nodded. He arose from his chair and slouched about the room. He watched Hiram Zegler pluck his hat from a peg on the wall.

"We're going to town, Elisha," informed the retired miller. "Get your cap. I'll let you drive the car."

"Hadn't you agoin' to draw up the net?" Elisha nudged toward a door at the far side of the room. "Mebbe you'd find some likely pickerel, like there was last night."

"I'm waiting a few days for a good catch," returned Zegler. "By the way, Elisha, remember that you're to keep quiet about the way I do my fishing. I don't want any trouble."

"Hadn't nobody agoin' to make trouble for you. They go polin' hereabouts an' the warden, he don't kick."

"No? Well, he would if he knew about it. And that's not all, Elisha. There's farmers all along here who would put out nets of their own if they knew I was doing it. So keep quiet like you say you've been doing. Come along; let's start."

Elisha slouched over and took a cap from a peg. Hiram Zegler extinguished the lights. The two went out from the room. When next they appeared, they had made their exit from a small door at the rear of the mill.

THE CONDOR

THE building was in a large clearing. Black against the side wall, The Shadow watched Zegler and his nephew as they stalked to a tumble-down structure that served as their garage. Lights flashed; a sedan swung out into a rutted drive. Then the car rolled to the road and jounced off in the direction of the Paulington road.

The Shadow pressed the window upward. The sash was unlocked. He made a silent entry in the darkness. His flashlight blinked, guarded by the folds of his cloak. He approached the desk and raised its roll top.

Papers lay in disarray. None of them were important; they were chiefly bills from Paulington merchants, all stamped "Paid." The Shadow opened small compartments. In one he found an old .32 revolver, unloaded. In another, he discovered a few silver coins.

A bank book promised information; but the stubs bore no reference to the amount of Hiram Zegler's funds. A tin box contained an assortment of fishhooks.

In the back of the desk, The Shadow uncovered two metal tubes, each about six inches in length and two in diameter. These had tight-fitting screw covers. The Shadow opened each in turn. One held more fishhooks; the other was empty.

Odd bottles of pills were the only other items on view. Apparently Zegler kept nothing of value in the desk. That was not surprising, because the ease of entry to the mill would have made theft simple during Zegler's absence.

The Shadow's flashlight glimmered on a stairway that led upward. This indicated sleeping quarters above. More important to The Shadow was the door that Elisha had indicated. This barrier must lead below the mill. The door was a strong one, fitted with a good lock.

The tiny light glimmered on the lock, while a gloved hand worked with probing pick. A click sounded. The Shadow opened the door and flashed his light upon a rickety stairway that curved as it descended.

The Shadow closed the door behind him. He followed the curved stairway; as he did, he heard the surge of water. He came to the bottom and found a crude cellar. The center of the floor was open; through it poured the entire bulk of the swift stream that had once provided power to the mill.

There were no openings in these lower walls. The only mode of entrance was from the room above, unless one had chosen to swim under water and come in by the stream itself. As The Shadow moved toward the rear of the mill, he shone his light into the water and discovered the net of which Elisha had spoken.

A thick, curved mesh that blocked the entire stream, the net offered an excellent trap for fish. The strength of the current would tend to bring fish through the channel beneath the mill. Once in the net, they would be apt to stay there.

Moving further back, The Shadow encountered a solid wall that stopped just above the surface of the water. He could feel the rumble of surging current underneath the planks on which he stood. This indicated that the main inlet was but one feeder through which water came.

In fact, there was something placid about the flow of the central channel. The water seemed to increase in power and volume as it reached the net. As The Shadow studied this fact, he caught a sound from above. It sounded like the closing of a door.

Placing his hand against the low ceiling, The Shadow sensed a creaking. Moving forward, he followed it. for half a dozen paces. His light was no longer blinking. Someone had entered the mill from the door which

Zegler and Elisha had used as exit.

PICKING his way through darkness, The Shadow gained the stairway. He ascended and stopped when he arrived at the closed door. Carefully, he turned the latch. He opened the door a fraction of an inch.

Light gleamed through the opening. The Shadow saw a man moving away from a table upon which stood a lighted lamp.

The newcomer was going toward the desk. He was neither Zegler nor Elisha; The Shadow could tell that, despite the fact that the man had moved into gloom. The intruder reached the desk; there he blinked a flashlight and began to rummage through the papers.

The fellow's face was away from The Shadow's view. Slowly, The Shadow opened the door and crept from the stairway. He closed the door noiselessly behind him. Spectral beyond the fringe of light, he looked like a figure from another world.

The Shadow could easily have gained the window by which he had entered. Or, as second choice, he could have glided along the wall to make sure progress to the outer door. Strangely, he took neither course.

Instead, he moved softly to the center of the room. His gloved hands weaponless in front of his black cloak, he took a position a dozen feet behind the man who was inspecting Zegler's desk.

At no point did he block the lamplight. So careful was his advance that the intruder caught no indication of it. Motionless, The Shadow waited until he saw the intruder pocket the flashlight.

Then The Shadow delivered a hissed laugh. Like a ghost mysteriously materialized in the very center of the room, he spoke his sibilant mirth. Toned to a weird whisper, the laugh shivered its echoes from the walls of this old room.

Then man at the desk wheeled about. As he swung, he shot his right hand to his hip and snapped it upward, to display a gun. Automatically, his quick aim was directed straight toward the figure of The Shadow.

A strained, hunted face showed pale in the gloom. Lips gasped; the right hand dropped weakly. Mechanically, the intruder stepped forward; then halted. He had reached a spot where his face was within the lamplight's range.

The Shadow's laugh had ended. Burning eyes from beneath the slouch hat were fixed upon the countenance before them. No longer did the startled intruder show anxiety; instead, his expression was one of vast relief.

Small wonder. The Shadow had recognized this intruder. That was why he had revealed himself. The man who had turned about from the desk was Harry Vincent.

CHAPTER XIV. THE TRUE STORY

THE SHADOW'S right hand was pointing toward a chair beside the table. Harry Vincent nodded. He walked to the chair and seated himself. Then he gazed toward The Shadow.

In following The Shadow's order, Harry had blocked the lamplight. No longer did The Shadow's shape stand in clear outline. It had become a spectral form, shrouded by the darkness that closed in from the walls. Still, Harry could see the flash of burning eyes.

THE CONDOR

"You came to Paulington," stated The Shadow, his voice an intonation. "You purchased a car and left the garage shortly after seven o'clock. You should have reached the cabin before eight."

Harry nodded.

"You were delayed," resumed The Shadow. "A tire went flat on the abandoned road. You stopped to change it. You were late when you started up the path."

Another nod from Harry. He did not have to tell the story. The Shadow had traced events himself. Listening, Harry could guess the clues. He knew that The Shadow must have viewed the car.

The flat spare tire; mud on the base of a brand new jack. These were indications of importance. Then Harry thought of the old road and remembered the muddy spot where he had shifted tires. The Shadow must have viewed that telltale location.

"You heard the explosion," declared The Shadow, his tone solemn and level. "You saw men there afterward. Your duty was to remain on the slope. You kept out of sight in the darkness. Later, you chose Table Rock as your base."

"The ledge was too conspicuous a location. You went further up the hill and camped. You thought it best to keep way from Paulington and other towns until the explosion was forgotten."

The Shadow paused. Harry was about to speak, when his chief raised a silencing hand. The Shadow delivered a question; but his tone was a command rather than a query.

"A man went into that cabin," intoned The Shadow. "State if you were close enough to know that he had entered."

Harry nodded. The Shadow waited for a reply. Harry spoke huskily.

"YES," he said. "I heard someone coming into the path. Up ahead of me. It sounded like he was going to the cabin. I wasn't sure about it, though, until I saw a flashlight blink. I hadn't been using my own light on the path, so I figured he didn't know I was around."

"He was moving quick, though, and I had a hunch it might be somebody who had spotted me in town and footed it out from Paulington. Either to be ahead of me or walk in on me. So I waited down the path; then the whole side of the hill seemed to go up in a flash."

"I stayed where I was until I heard prowlers coming my direction. Then I cut off through the woods and watched their lights blink. Finally they went up toward Table Rock. I followed; I found a path and lost it; then found it again and came out at the ledge. The others were gone."

Harry paused. He managed a smile as he rubbed his face. His cheeks and chin were scrubby. He had not shaved since the night of his disappearance.

"I cached my bag," resumed Harry. "Up on the hill, away from the rock. Where I made camp. I was short on cigarettes; but I had papers and pipe tobacco, and I rolled my own. I guess the stumps left something of a trail."

Harry stopped, realizing that he had more important word to give. Facts concerning Cliff Marsland.

THE CONDOR

"I made a trip to Mountview Lodge," he stated. "On the second night, because of Cliff. I knew he wouldn't be able to come to the cabin, since it had been blasted.

"I found contact. Flashlight signals. Cliff sent me two names; both important. Persons outside of the lodge, who apparently have something to do with it. One name was Spadling. I'd never heard it; but I know the other: Zegler.

"The old map showed the name of Zegler with this mill property. This morning I lugged my bag along with me to the knoll on the north slope. I sighted the mill and saw the road that led to it. I came down the hill and went in hiding.

"Zegler and another fellow drove out tonight. I was watching from down the road. When their car had gone by, I came in here to see what I could find. There's nothing of importance in the desk."

Harry sat silent, his story completed. It was he, not The Shadow, who had gained the news from Cliff. Now that The Shadow had finally received the information, the name of Spadling had significance as well as that of Zegler.

"ALL the indications," informed The Shadow, his eyes fixed upon Harry, "show that the murderers came from Mountview Lodge. They visited the cabin to slay a man whom they suspected to be an enemy.

"That man was Spadling. Sought by the law, he was a menace to those in Mountview Lodge. His name is known there; he was concerned with the affairs of someone in the criminal band.

"More must be learned of Spadling. Your task will be to gain that information. You shall go to Paulington, to meet the man who is on Spadling's trail."

Harry stared blankly. He could not understand The Shadow's plan. To Harry, a return to the town meant that explanations would be necessary.

"In Paulington," stated The Shadow, "you will find Vic Marquette."

Understanding dawned on Harry's face. The Shadow's agent knew the secret service operative. They had worked together in the past. Vic Marquette was one who recognized the power of The Shadow.

Moreover, Vic knew that Harry took orders from the cloaked chief. On that account, Marquette would accept whatever Harry told him. The Shadow was taking good advantage of the operative's presence in Paulington.

"Instructions –"

The Shadow's voice had lowered to a sinister hiss. His words came steadily to Harry's ears. Rising, the agent extinguished the light; he followed the blinks of The Shadow's flashlight toward the rear door of the mill.

All the while, The Shadow's words continued; brief, whispered phrases. Each intonation drilled itself into Harry's brain. After each pause came an added statement. The light blinked toward the road; close by The Shadow, Harry kept on walking until he neared the spot where he had hidden his bag in the woods.

There Harry stopped. He heard The Shadow's final whisper. In a low tone, Harry answered:

"Instructions received."

The flashlight no longer blinked. Harry heard a swish in darkness. He caught a whispered laugh that faded in the night. The Shadow had struck off through the trees; his course was toward the slope.

Groping in the darkness, Harry found his bag and lifted it. He carried it along the road, using his own flashlight at intervals until he found a clear space on the right. Following The Shadow's instructions, Harry entered the parked coupe.

He started the motor and drove out into the road. Heading for Paulington, he speculated on events to come. He knew that his arrival in the town would produce a sensational surprise. His course, however, would not be difficult, once he had talked with Vic Marquette.

Harry Vincent was coming back from the dead. With Clyde Burke, he would be ready when The Shadow needed him. Harry was taking The Shadow's place in Paulington. The Shadow had become the watcher on the hill.

CHAPTER XV. MARQUETTE LISTENS

VIC MARQUETTE was glowering across the desk in Burgess Dowden's office. Dowden, himself, looked uneasy. Sheriff Brock, also present, shared the concern that the burgess felt.

"I'll grant you one point," declared Marquette. "If it hadn't been for those newspaper accounts, I wouldn't have come here. I would be looking over around Southbridge, where Spadling mailed his letter.

"But now that I am here, I'm in a jam. These reporters know I'm somebody. I can't move without them being on my neck. If I let them know I'm looking for Clint Spadling; if the word gets out that I'm a Federal man, the whole job will be queered. If —"

Marquette paused. Someone was pounding at the office door. Vic nodded to the sheriff; Brock bellowed to come in.

Hank, one of the countrymen who had helped the sheriff after the cabin blast, entered. He was wearing a deputy's badge. Puffed with self-importance, he made an announcement to the sheriff.

"Jest picked up a suspicious character," informed Hank. "Leastwise, some of the boys did. Looks like the fellow we've been a-hunting for. Hain't shaved; clothes all covered with burrs. Ketched him a-walking down toward the railway depot —"

"What's his name?" demanded the sheriff.

"Hadn't found out," returned Hank. "Says he hadn't a-talking to nobody except you. They're bringing him up here. A-coming in now."

There were footsteps on the stairs. Brock went to the door. He saw two deputies marching an unshaven man with them. Brock beckoned. The deputies brought their charge into the room.

Brock waved reporters back; then told the deputies to follow. He closed the door to survey the prisoner.

Before Brock could say a word, Marquette was on his feet. The operative had been waiting for the door to close. Now he sprang forward, his hand extended.

"Vincent!"

THE CONDOR

HARRY grinned as he heard Vic's welcome. He shook hands with Marquette while Dowden and Brock stared in astonishment. Then Marquette introduced the prisoner.

"An old friend of mine," he explained. "Harry Vincent, from New York. He's been a valuable aid in certain government cases. If he knows anything about this cabin business, you'll hear it. Go ahead, Vincent."

"Mighty odd, meeting you here, Vic," laughed Harry. "It's a break for me, I suppose. It seems as though coincidence has struck me ever since I came to this town."

"Were you up at that cabin?" queried Brock.

"Let me tell my story," returned Harry. "After all, there's not much to it; but it's been something of an ordeal. I came up here for a vacation. It turned into a camping trip."

"You're the fellow who bought the car –"

Brock was blurting another interruption. Marquette stopped him and motioned for Harry to continue. Harry began with a direct answer to the sheriff's unfinished query.

"I arrived in Paulington two nights ago," declared The Shadow's agent. "I saw the hotel and thought of stopping there. But I happened to make inquiry at the garage and I learned that there was an unoccupied cabin on the hillside.

"I thought that I should see the place; then find out who owned it and rent it for a few weeks, if it proved suitable. I leased a flivver from the garage man and followed his directions. A tire went flat when I reached the abandoned road.

"After fixing the tire, I went on to find the cabin. Halfway up the path, I stopped. I saw a light blinking somewhere near the spot where I thought the cabin must be. Then came an explosion. It seemed as though the whole side of the hill was a mass of fire.

"I was half stunned. By the time I was recovered from the shock, I saw lights coming my direction. I took to the woods, my bag with me. My return to the road was cut off. I didn't know what would happen next."

"Logical enough," observed Marquette, as Harry paused. "That would have seemed like a tough spot to any one, sheriff."

Brock nodded his agreement. So did Dowden.

"My bag was pretty heavy," resumed Harry, "but I didn't notice it. Not until I was a mile up the slope. I wanted to get away and stay under cover. When I stopped to think things over, I felt sure that the dynamiters must have found my flivver.

"I couldn't go back to the car. I wandered around to get my bearings and finally I struck a broad, stony ledge that seemed like a good landmark."

"Table Rock," put in the sheriff. "Go on with the story."

"I CAMPED up above the ledge," stated Harry. "The weather had turned nice and I liked the woods. So I decided to camp another night and come into town today.

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"But this morning, I heard new prowlers along the slope. I hid my bag and cut over to the north of the hill, waiting for darkness. Then I came back, picked up my bag and headed for town. I didn't look for the flivver.

"I'd like to know what that bunch is doing on the hill. I don't know how many were there two nights ago; but it sounded like a dozen today. I figured they were outlaws –"

"They were my men, today," interposed the sheriff. "We thought you'd been blowed up in that shack, young fellow. But that pack two nights ago – well, it beats me figuring who they were. There's no outlaws in these parts. I reckon we'll have to do some heavy scouring."

"Let's hold it off, sheriff," suggested Marquette, seriously. "The best thing we can do right now is get rid of those reporters. Let them stay away until we have a real story for them."

"How will you manage that?" queried the burgess. "I refer to the matter of sending the reporters back to New York."

"Easily," returned Marquette. "Here we have Vincent, the man that was supposed to be dead. An explosion without a victim is no newspaper yarn."

"That's right," agreed the sheriff. "And after they've gone, we can start looking –"

The burgess stopped Brock with a headshake. Marquette saw it and smiled.

"Vincent is all right," declared Vic. "In fact, it would be a good idea to have him stay here. He might as well know why I am on the ground.

"You see, Vincent" – Vic swung to Harry – "I'm looking for a scoundrel named Geoffrey Spadling. Known as Clint Spadling, to his pals. A smart crook, Spadling. Something of a promoter in his way.

"He has contacts with smugglers, counterfeiter's and what not. When he gets a good proposition, he brings in others to help him. Well, a few days ago, we raided a print shop out in Cleveland. It was a blind for a counterfeiter's outfit.

"We picked up some plates and a batch of queer money. Along with the fake mazuma was a note to one of the gang. It was signed by Clint Spadling, telling the fellow to meet him in Southbridge.

"I figured the appointment wouldn't be kept. I intended to come to Southbridge myself. Then I read about the explosion near here. It just hit me that Spadling might be hooked up with it. I've got an idea right now as to what it's all about."

Brock and Dowden surveyed Marquette with interest. The operative smiled.

"SUPPOSE Spadling was here with an outfit," suggested Marquette, "with a money machine working. He's pretty foxy. He'd have read about that raid in Cleveland. It got into the newspapers. He'd know that we might be on his trail."

"You mean he could have been using the shack?" questioned the burgess. "As headquarters for his band?"

"That's the idea, burgess," broke in the sheriff. "Marquette means that the gang may have blown up the place to get rid of any evidence against them."

"Not quite," asserted Marquette. "Spadling is too smart a bird for that, sheriff. He would have a more elaborate headquarters than an abandoned cabin. The purpose of the explosion would be to make us think that he had used the cabin as his base."

"The cabin could have been a blind," nodded the burgess. "The real headquarters located somewhere else."

"That's it," acknowledged Marquette. "That's why I'm staying in town. And Vincent, too, in case he may be useful. We're going to look for places where the crew might be located. I'm just beginning to get the drift of what Spadling's game might be."

Brock swung to Dowden.

"Say, burgess," blurted the sheriff, pounding the desk as he spoke, "you know that swell lodge around the other side of the slope? What a place that'd be for a smart gang!"

"Mountview Lodge?" Dowden smiled as he shook his head. "Hardly, Brock. Griscom Treft, the man who owns it, is a millionaire. He has lived there for six years."

"You're right, burgess. Just the same, nobody knows much about Treft. I wouldn't have suspicioned anything, mind you – in fact, I don't say that I'm suspicioning yet. But the slope can't swallow people. They've got to be somewhere."

"Mountview Lodge," mused Marquette. "Is it the only place nearby that has a good front?"

"The only one," admitted the burgess. "The farms hereabout are of little account. It might be worth your while, Marquette, to go over to the lodge."

"Let him try it," clucked the sheriff. "Say – did you ever see anybody who'd been inside that fence of Treft's? I've been over there myself; and it's my opinion those wires on the fence are hooked up with an alarm."

"The lock on that gate is something nobody could bust. And who ever comes out of the place? Nobody except the chauffeur; that sneaky-looking fellow with a face like a rat. Drives down town in his coupe to buy grub. Goes over to Southbridge off and on, too. I've seen him there."

"There are guests at the lodge," recalled the burgess. "Sometimes one of them is seen with the chauffeur. Do you know, I am commencing to suspect a bit myself."

"Apparently," said Marquette, sourly, "it would be impossible for me to enter Mountview Lodge, no matter who might be in there."

"What's that?" The sheriff thrust forth his beefy jaw. "You say no matter who's in there? Listen, Marquette – if you think the dynamite guys are at Mountview Lodge, I'll take you in there."

"We don't stand for too much ceremony in this county. When we want search warrants, we get them. Quick, too. If we make mistakes, we apologize and nobody feels sore. If a man's got nothing to hide, he won't care if the law looks in on him."

"You say the word and we'll walk into Mountview Lodge. And we'll do it some way that will work the way we want. Without anybody knowing we're coming, until we're there."

IT was plain that Brock meant what he said. Marquette looked pleased. He glanced at a calendar, then remarked:

"Today is the tenth, sheriff. How soon can you have that warrant ready?"

"I'll catch Judge Foxcroft tomorrow," returned Brock. "I'll have the warrant dated for the twelfth. Does that suit?"

"It does," agreed Marquette. "Maybe we will use it; maybe we won't. I'll think it over, sheriff. Right now" – Vic was rising – "I'm going out to scare away the reporters."

"You're coming with me, Vincent. You can stay at the hotel. After you've shaved, we'll go out and get a real meal. You ought to be hungry by now."

"I was lucky enough to have a pound bar of chocolate in my bag," stated Harry. "I grabbed some ham and eggs along with coffee when I reached town tonight."

"It won't hurt to eat again," decided Marquette. "Come along. I'll send the reporters in, Burgess, after I've talked with them. You and the sheriff can do the rest."

Dowden and Brock nodded. Vic and Harry went out of the office. Downstairs they encountered the reporters. Vic introduced Harry, who duplicated the statement that he had made in Dowden's office.

Vic Marquette started for the hotel, while two reporters went into the office building. Clyde Burke lingered long enough to grip Harry Vincent's hand. The warmth of the clasp told the joy that Clyde had experienced over his fellow agent's return.

"I'll slip you a report," confided Harry in a low tone. "At the lunch wagon. Your car's just outside of town. You'll find a note in it, where to go for contact."

Harry followed Marquette. He registered at the hotel. Alone in his room, he took time before shaving to inscribe a report to The Shadow. This told of Vic Marquette's decision to investigate Mountview Lodge.

Vic had listened to Harry's story. It had registered. But the brief tale had produced a cross-development. The Shadow had ordered Harry to make no statement regarding the death of Clint Spadling, the actual victim of the cabin explosion.

The Shadow's purpose had been to minimize the importance of the blast. For once, The Shadow's plans had met with a reverse twist. Chance discourse in the office of Burgess Dowden had brought suspicion upon Mountview Lodge.

Vic Marquette believed that crooks might be there. Dangerous men, headed by Clint Spadling. Crooks were there indeed; but of a stripe more menacing than any Marquette had ever encountered.

A battle was impending between the law and The Condor. The odds would lie against the law. Yet Harry had a hunch that The Shadow would not prevent it. For The Shadow, himself, would be close at hand to weigh the balance in the favor of justice.

CHAPTER XVI. THE STRONG ROOM

TWENTY-FOUR hours had elapsed since Harry Vincent's return to Paulington. Reporters, satisfied that there was no further story, had made their departure. One, however, had not gone to New York.

Clyde Burke was the exception. He had contacted with The Shadow, near the path on the abandoned road. After that, Clyde had driven to the little city of Southbridge, some five miles distant. He had called Harry from there; through Clyde, Harry could communicate with The Shadow.

There had been no need for contact, however. Nothing had happened in Paulington on this first day of Harry's return. Sheriff Brock had gone to the county seat and had not returned. Vic Marquette, strolling about with Harry, had made no comment whatever upon his coming plans. He had not even mentioned the search warrant that the sheriff was to have obtained.

Clouded evening had brought a somberness to the entire countryside. The pall of quiet that lay over Paulington was existent also at Mountview Lodge. Cliff Marsland, strolling on the veranda, felt a sense of melancholy.

He was still brooding because he believed Harry Vincent dead. He was troubled, also, because he had learned nothing new from Griscom Treft. The Condor had promised to show Cliff the strong room beneath the lodge; then had neglected to mention the subject again.

Corey had gone out in the coupe this evening. Cliff had seen the chauffeur leave, half an hour ago. Jengley had been present at the time; he had gone in shortly afterward. At present, Thuler was on the piazza, at the end away from Cliff.

The opening of the front door awoke Cliff from reverie. Delland came out; the secretary beckoned. Cliff approached him; Delland stated that the chief wanted to see him in the study. Cliff entered the house.

Scarcely had Cliff gone in before lights showed at the lower end of the drive. Corey was back, unlocking the massive gates. Delland and Jengley watched the car pull forward and stop while Corey locked up again. Then the coupe rolled up and stopped outside of a garage at the rear of the lodge.

Corey alighted in darkness. He saw the light in The Condor's study, a gleam that showed hazily through frosted window and grilled framework. Corey's footsteps crunched the gravel as the chauffeur walked hastily toward the front door.

Immediately, the top of the rumble seat moved up at the back of the coupe. Keen eyes peered from the interior. Corey had brought along a rider whose presence he did not suspect. A figure emerged in darkness. The Shadow stepped noiselessly to the drive.

The Shadow had found a way of entering the Mountview Lodge grounds without giving an alarm. But he had no intention of invading the lodge itself. Instead, he took to the grass beside the drive and merged with darkness on the blackened lawn.

CLIFF was seated in The Condor's study, listening to Treft as the master crook developed a forgotten theme. The Condor had recalled his promise to show Cliff the strong room. He was chuckling over the surprise that his new henchman soon would gain.

"I spoke of a natural stronghold," Treft was saying. "It is all that, Marsland. All that and more. But words can not picture the sight that you will see. Come. Let us go —"

THE CONDOR

Treft broke off as the door of the study opened. Corey stalked in, his face sour. He approached the desk and handed Treft an envelope.

"From Zegler," stated the chauffeur. "He started to talk to me, when I met him at the fork. I asked him if everything was in the note. He said yes, so I –"

"Never mind, Corey," interposed Treft, harshly. "We shall discuss the matter after I read the note. Sit down; curb your impatience."

The Condor perused the message. Cliff watched his expression; Treft registered no concern. Finished with his perusal, he laid the note aside.

"A trifling complication," was The Condor's verdict. "Zegler was in town last night and this evening. He has learned facts that are interesting, but not important."

"He seemed worried, chief," protested Corey. "Of course, I know what Zegler's like. Just a countryman that owns a mill, even though he is smart, considering what he is."

"Zegler is useful," declared The Condor, wisely. "He belongs to me completely. He is bought and paid for; and he excites no suspicion about Paulington. No one would dream that he had connection here."

"He is troubled chiefly because some stranger is in town. The man's name is Marquette; Zegler thinks that he is a secret service operative, attempting to trace Clint Spadling. I believe that Zegler is right."

"I knew of a Fed named Marquette," stated Corey. "I never saw him, though. But what about this other fellow on the hill? Zegler started to tell me about him, chief."

"His name is Harry Vincent." Cliff started as he heard The Condor speak; fortunately, Treft was eyeing Corey and did not note Cliff's face. "It was he, not Spadling, who hired the car in Paulington."

"He came up to the hill?" inquired Corey.

"Yes," replied The Condor. "Zegler states that Vincent heard the explosion and took to the woods. Last night he came out of hiding and appeared in town. His story ended the mystery. It is now conceded that no one could have been in the shack when it was dynamited."

"Say" – Corey managed a grin – "that fixes it all right, chief. Why was Zegler worried?"

"Marquette is still in town," explained Treft. "He is keeping Vincent with him. Probably he expects to find Spadling. Well" – The Condor chuckled evilly – "let him wait. He will give it up eventually."

Rising, The Condor waved his hand in dismissal. Corey went from the room. The Condor laughed indulgently; then chuckled as he spoke to Cliff.

"Spadling was a pal of Corey's once," explained Treft. "Somehow, he traced Corey here. They saw each other in town. Corey informed me; I told him to meet Spadling and be friendly. To advise him that it would be best to leave."

"Spadling failed to accept the hint. Instead of leaving, he roamed the hillside. Zegler, our outside man, learned that he was using the deserted cabin as his base."

THE CONDOR

"Our explosion was for Spadling's benefit. He was in the shack when we blew it from its moorings. A wise deed on our part, now that we know Spadling was being sought by Federal agents."

THE CONDOR led the way through a side door of the study. Cliff followed, his elation high. He recognized the truth. Spadling, spying on Mountview Lodge, must have seen Harry come to town, and learned that Harry was on his way to the cabin.

The coincidence had been fortunate. The Condor's crew had planted dynamite during Spadling's temporary absence. Had Harry arrived first, he would have been the victim. Spadling had beaten Harry there; a crook had been murdered by crooks.

The Condor was leading the way down an inner stairway. A lighted cellar was reached; there he stalked to the rear and stopped before an iron door set in the rock. The Condor lifted a bar of metal and clanged against the door.

An interval followed. Scraping came from beyond the door. Released, the barrier swung outward. Cliff saw a steep passage hewn through rock. Standing within the door was a brawny, dark-skinned giant who had the appearance of a Hindu. The man was robed and turbaned in native fashion.

The Condor spoke in a babbling tongue. The huge man bowed and stood aside. Treft and Cliff entered. The giant barred the massive door behind them. Treft chuckled.

"The man is Salyuk," he stated. "Up ahead is Toklar, awaiting us" – Cliff saw another huge man at the end of the underground corridor, as Treft pointed – "and this is where they live."

The Condor paused while Salyuk passed to join Toklar. Like mammoth slaves, the two unbarred another door at the inner end of the lighted passage.

"Both Salyuk and Toklar," explained Treft, "are Singhalese. They spent their lives in the ruby mines of Ceylon. I brought them to America as servants. I wanted two faithful serfs who could dwell underground."

The second door was swinging outward. Lights glimmered from within. Treft motioned Cliff forward. The Singhalese servants stood aside. Cliff stopped short, his eyes wide with astonishment at sight of The Condor's strong room.

BEYOND the corridor was a spreading limestone cavern. Long stalactites hung from its vaulted ceiling, like shapely icicles. Beneath them were stumpy stalagmites, upon which drops of water fell.

Hidden lights illuminated the walls. Flowstone formations produced a marvelous display. The cave was an Ali Baba's cavern, rendered majestic by the lights. Cliff felt The Condor's claw upon his shoulder as his companion drew him forward.

"This cave was known," stated Treft, his harsh voice echoing from the tinted walls. "But it was scarcely noticed; never explored, until I had built the lodge. Our store of dynamite in the cellar was used, in part, to blast the corridor. A careful task, all noise avoided."

They were turning a corner in the cavern. The Condor paused to point out a formation in the limestone of the ceiling. A light glowed full upon the shape – a beaked bird, black upon white background.

"Curious," chortled The Condor, "that I should have a profile here so much like my own. However, as I was saying, we had dynamite left over; and some of it proved useful when we disposed of Spadling, a few nights

THE CONDOR

ago."

The cavern opened into a niche at the left. The Condor pointed. Cliff saw a pyramid of stacked boxes. All were cubical in shape; each two feet square. They formed a pile six feet in height.

"Teakwood boxes," informed The Condor. "Filled with our treasure. Your pearls, Marsland, have been added to the hoard. My Singhalese guards are the sole custodians of our wealth.

"Before we depart, day after tomorrow, we shall hold a meeting in this grotto. We shall survey our wealth; take inventory, before we carry it away."

To the right of the niche, Cliff observed a stack of curious objects. They reminded him of torpedoes, save for the fact that the ends were somewhat blunt. A large array of metal cylinders, they tapered in size.

The lowermost was more than six feet in length and three feet in diameter. The others were smaller: some three feet long and one foot through; others half that size. Atop the stack were tiny cylinders, fully two dozen.

"Special containers," explained The Condor. "To be used instead of the boxes, in case we find difficulty in removing the treasure. These could be packed and carried separately by individuals.

"The first ones were made too large. They will be useless to us. I had the smaller containers constructed afterward. One of those small ones, Marsland, would carry Walpin's pearls quite nicely."

The Condor's tone carried a strange warning note that Cliff had heard before. It was harsh; it brooded no answer. It was Treft's manner of ending talk on any particular subject.

"Come here." The Condor clamped his clawlike hand on Cliff's shoulder. "View this remarkable sight at the end of the last corridor. A subterranean lake, its water pure as crystal."

TREFT led Cliff to a spot where the roof sloped to the ground. A light reflected the surface of a limpid pool. No glass could have matched the smoothness of that water.

"Ten feet in depth," stated Treft. "Yet the eye would estimate inches only. The lake is fed by hidden springs. Its level is constant."

"Where is the outlet?" questioned Cliff.

"Listen." The Condor drew Cliff toward the low end of the passage. A sighing roar sounded from the floor of the cavern. "Listen and look yonder."

Treft pressed a button against the limestone wall. A floodlight showed a low passage curving from the end of the pool. Cliff saw a stream of water pouring down into the ground. Its echoes roared back, muffled by the earth.

"A natural dam of smooth limestone," stated The Condor. "Over it, like a waterfall, pours the surplus water from the pool. Few caverns can match this marvel, Marsland."

Cliff nodded. The beauty of the natural waterflow impressed him. Momentarily, his mind was freed from the strain of his past surroundings. Then came The Condor's fierce clamp. Cliff was jarred into reality.

THE CONDOR

Treft switched off the single light. They moved back past the pool, away from the treasure niche, down through the corridor to the door where the Singhalese stood.

Salyuk and Toklar closed the inner barrier after they had passed. They continued to the outer door, Salyuk hastening ahead to open it.

Then they reached the cellar. The massive portal was closed and barred behind them. Cliff had seen the strong room; a spot of matchless beauty, hidden beneath a lair of evil. The surroundings of the lodge seemed hideous as Cliff and Treft arrived upstairs.

It was late. The others had retired – with the exception of Corey and Trossler, who were putting the place in order for the night. The Condor bade his harsh good night. Cliff went upstairs to his room.

He stood by the window, speculating on the facts that he had learned. The good news concerning Harry Vincent had restored Cliff's courage. His visit to the strong room had given him valuable material for a report.

Cliff realized that it would take formidable force to smash through to The Condor's underground grotto. He wondered, though, just how Treft would handle matters if the place were besieged. Despite the massive doors and the huge Singhalese guards, the cavern had objections.

Prompt removal of the swag, for instance, would be difficult if invaders managed to enter the lodge. Cliff speculated on that fact as he extinguished the light. As on a previous night, he stared out into darkness.

Again, Cliff Marsland became suddenly alert. Something was blinking from the night. Not from beyond the fence, but from a spot close by, inside the grounds.

It was The Shadow's signal. Cliff's real chief had passed the wired fence. Cliff realized now that on the other night, Harry Vincent could have been the man to whom he had flashed the names of Zegler and Spadling.

This time it was The Shadow. He alone could have contrived secret entrance past the barring gate.

Quickly, Cliff found his flashlight, to blink his response to The Shadow's call.

CHAPTER XVII. THE SHADOW DEPARTS

BLINK – BLINK – BLINK

New flashes from the night. Cliff spelled brief, coded words. He understood their meaning. The Shadow was calling for a written report.

Cliff turned on the light and sat down at a little table. Producing a fountain pen, he began to write in code; swiftly, but in comprehensive fashion. Brief as he told of the report from Zegler through Corey, he became more fluent when he described The Condor's strong room.

Cliff penned every detail of the grotto. The iron doors – the Singhalese servants – the teakwood boxes – the metal carrying tubes – the underground lake – the dam that formed the outlet to the pool – on all points Cliff was explicit.

These were facts that The Shadow might require later. Cliff spared no details. His description finished, he folded the message and placed it in an envelope. Turning out the light, he blinked that he was ready.

THE CONDOR

A short reply ordered him to let the envelope drop from the window. Hard upon that message, The Shadow blinked the sign-off signal. Cliff thrust the envelope between two bars and let it flutter to the ground below.

He blinked that the message was on its way. In response came the same signal as before. To sign off. Thinking that The Shadow had failed to get his final statement, Cliff repeated it. There was no answer.

Puzzled, Cliff blinked a query. Still no response. The Shadow had ended contact. Cliff was about to send another call, when he realized his stupidity. He knew that he should have stopped at once, when he saw that first signoff signal.

Cliff was to learn the fruits of his mistake. A bright light suddenly glared from beyond the opened window. It was from the front of the garage. Cliff saw Corey at the door of the building, the coupe on the foreground.

Coming to his senses, Cliff sprang over and turned on the room light. His act was a wise one. A moment afterward, someone began to rap upon his door. Cliff turned the knob and opened the unlocked door. Trossler was there, still clad in livery. Beside him, The Condor, fully dressed.

"COME, Marsland," rasped the gray-haired man. "Come to the study. Trossler, join Corey. The others will follow."

Fiercely, Treft pointed to the stairs. Cliff said nothing. He took the course that Treft ordered. There was commotion in the hallway as they passed. Members of The Condor's band had been aroused. They were starting out, half clad, to search the grounds.

Delland was in the study. The pale-faced secretary was wearing a dressing gown. The handle of a revolver projected from his pocket. Treft motioned toward the door. He ordered Delland to summon Corey while the others took up the search.

Cliff sat in the chair opposite Treft. He met The Condor's gaze squarely. Unflinchingly, he said nothing; he did not intend to speak until Treft so commanded. The Condor, in turn, maintained a vicious silence. He was awaiting Corey.

Three minutes later, the chauffeur entered. The Condor motioned him to a chair, then ordered Corey to speak. The chauffeur nodded.

"I was going out to the garage," he stated, "when I thought I saw something blink from Marsland's room. Right after that I saw a flash on the ground near the house, as if somebody was signaling with a torch.

"Then there were blinks from Marsland's window. I knew he was using a flashlight. I waited until he was finished. Then I started back to the house. Trossler was on the porch. He came in to give the alarm. I went to the garage."

"Did you see any one on the premises?" demanded The Condor, savagely.

"Nobody," returned the chauffeur. "But I'd say for sure the lights were inside the fence."

"So would I," inserted Cliff, steadily.

Corey gaped. The Condor stared.

THE CONDOR

"The fellow wasn't close to the house to begin with," asserted Cliff. "I saw his flashlight off across the lawn. He was signaling, all right. My room was dark; I had just opened the window for the night.

"The idea hit me that some prowler was trying to stir up trouble. As luck had it, my flashlight was on the bureau. I picked it up and blinked back. The fellow answered. What was more, he came closer."

"What did you signal to him?" rasped The Condor, sharply.

"Nothing," returned Cliff, promptly. "Just intermittent flashes. When I saw he was approaching, I drew him on. Then the other light quit. I was coming from my room to spread the news, when you arrived with Trossler."

"And that is all?"

"That's all, chief."

THE CONDOR'S eyes were cold; yet Cliff did not flinch. After a few moments, Treft turned to Corey.

"You know Morse code," he said to the chauffeur. "Tell me – could you read Marsland's flashes?"

"No, I couldn't," admitted Corey. "What's more, chief, they didn't blink like code. I couldn't even make Morse letters out of half of them."

Cliff curbed an expression of satisfaction. The Shadow's code was an intricate one; Cliff had always wondered why it required letters with an abundance of dots and dashes, with double dashes in some letters. The Shadow's purpose in complicating the code was now apparent. Eyeing The Condor, Cliff saw the master crook's glare relax.

"Very well, Marsland," decided Treft. "Our suspicion was natural, since you were the last person to arrive here. However, we shall learn all we require when we have captured that fool who is inside the grounds."

"It might be some pal of Spadling's," suggested Corey, in a troubled tone. "Clint was a wise bird, chief. If he'd tipped somebody he was coming here, maybe"

"Enough, Corey," inserted Treft. "I have already considered that possibility. Marsland, you are a valuable man. You brought your swag and showed the proper token. I shall give you the benefit of the doubt.

"But until that stupid prowler is captured, I shall keep you under surveillance. There is a room on the ground floor which has no window. Its only opening is a transom to the hall.

"That will be your new quarters. The door will be locked while you are inside. In a sense, you will be a prisoner; actually, your status will be that of probation. You will be allowed to associate with your companions at certain intervals."

The Condor paused to watch Cliff's reaction. The Shadow's agent remained stolid.

"This is not punishment," declared Treft. "It will be accepted as a voluntary submission on your part – for the good of our company. Do you raise objection?"

"None at all," responded Cliff. "I realize now that I would have done better to inform you at the beginning. When I make a mistake, I am willing to accept the consequences."

THE CONDOR

"Good!" The Condor seemed pleased as he stood up and clamped Cliff's shoulder. "You have given a proper answer, Marsland. Go with Corey. He will place you in your new quarters."

HALF an hour after Cliff's interview with The Condor, the last of the searchers entered the lodge. They had scoured the grounds from fence to fence. Results had proven nil.

Soon after all were inside, Corey came out with Thuler. The two entered the coupe and drove to the gate. Thuler stood on guard by the headlights while Corey unlocked the barrier. Thuler waited while the chauffeur rolled the coupe through; then stood by with a glowing flashlight while Corey locked the gate.

The coupe started along the road to town. Thuler handled a spotlight by the windshield while Corey drove at a slow pace. They were scouring the sides of the road.

The top of the rumble seat came up. A shadowy, unseen figure emerged. Keen eyes peered through the half-opened window at the rear of the coupe's seat. The Shadow was again traveling as supercargo. Listening, he heard the two men talk.

"It beats me," insisted Thuler. "You know, I'm beginning to think that the fellow was further away than you thought. He might have been clear outside the grounds, Corey."

"Marsland said he was inside," returned Corey. "I was sure of it anyway. He must have gotten over the fence by one of those tree branches. That's what the chief thinks."

"That's likely. They ought to be sawed off."

"They will be – tomorrow morning. Jake has the job."

Momentary silence; then Thuler remarked:

"It looks like Marsland's on the level, Corey."

"Chances are he is," replied the chauffeur. "The chief's going to keep him in that first-floor storeroom, though, just to be on the safe side. I locked him in there for the night."

"How did Marsland take it?"

"All right. It made a hit with the chief."

"How long will he be kept there?"

"Until we pull out, so the chief told me. That is, if we don't snag the boob who was around the place tonight."

"The fellow outside the house was no boob. I'd say he was smart, the way he ducked us."

The men became silent. The coupe's speed increased. It skirted the hill until it reached the converging forks outside of Paulington. There Corey stopped.

"No use in going further," he decided. "We'll look things over on the way back."

"Was this where you met Zegler?" queried Thuler.

THE CONDOR

"Yeah," replied Corey. "After I'd been in town. Had to wait ten minutes for the guy."

THE SHADOW was emerging from the rumble seat. As Corey forged forward to the ditch, a shape of blackness dropped to the road. The Shadow sidled away before Corey backed. His figure, revealed vaguely by the rear light, faded suddenly as The Shadow blended with complete darkness.

The coupe started back to the lodge. The Shadow whispered a laugh as the tail-light twinkled in the distance. He had learned enough to know that Cliff Marsland was not in serious danger. Had he heard otherwise, he would have traveled along to the lodge, there to attempt a rescue.

The Shadow had spied the coupe earlier tonight. Here at the fork, during Corey's wait. He had entered the rumble seat while the chauffeur was out of the car talking to Zegler. That explained his arrival at Mountview Lodge.

A flashlight blinked. Here on the darkened road, The Shadow read Cliff's message. Again his laugh whispered in sinister tone. From fading writing, The Shadow had learned facts that he had sought.

Strangely, he had gained more from Cliff's report that even Cliff would have suspected. There were loose threads in that message; facts that fitted with others that The Shadow had already noted. The Shadow had gained deep insight into The Condor's modes of strategy.

The flashlight darkened. The Shadow moved toward the solid blackness of the hill. His would be another night of vigil. The morrow promised swift developments.

IN his new room at Mountview Lodge, Cliff Marsland lay awake upon a narrow bunk. Cliff was satisfied that he had bluffed The Condor. In so doing, he had counted on The Shadow's ability at the art of sheer evanishment.

Cliff's statement that someone was close to the house had coincided with Corey's. It was the stroke that had curbed The Condor's suspicions. In protecting himself, Cliff had not jeopardized The Shadow.

He had guessed that the grounds would be thoroughly searched; and he knew, from past experiences, that The Shadow would have no trouble in evading The Condor's searchers.

The fact that he had not been summoned from this temporary prison was proof to Cliff that The Shadow had accomplished a safe departure. To Cliff, the future promised danger, but not disaster.

The Shadow had managed one visit to Mountview Lodge. He would arrive again, should Cliff require aid.

CHAPTER XVIII. MARQUETTE PREPARES

FIVE o'clock the next afternoon. Harry Vincent was lounging in the lobby of the Paulington House, staring out toward the dull asphalt of the town's main street. He watched men stroll idly by on the opposite sidewalk.

Something was brewing. Harry had known that since noon, when Sheriff Brock had arrived to talk with Vic Marquette. Today was the twelfth, the date on which Brock had promised a search warrant. Harry believed that it had been delivered.

Moreover, those men opposite were not idlers. They were deputies, on tap, should they be needed. Apparently, Brock had summoned them after a conference with Marquette. Yet Harry, so far, had gleaned no definite facts.

"Call for you, Mr. Vincent –"

The clerk was drawling from behind the desk. Harry swung in that direction, expecting that Clyde Burke would be on the wire. He saw the clerk hanging up the receiver.

"No need to answer it," the fellow informed. "It's from Burgess Dowden's office. They want you to come over there. That's all."

Harry felt keen elation as he strode from the old hotel. He made quick time to Dowden's office, knowing that at last facts were to be told. Arriving, he found the burgess and the sheriff in conference with Vic Marquette. The Federal man motioned Harry to a chair.

"Apologies, Vincent," said Vic, with a smile. "Guess you've been wondering where you rated, with all this secrecy afoot. Well, I've just been waiting until our plans were set, before I let you in on the deal."

Harry nodded. Vic resumed.

"We're raiding Mountview Lodge tonight," explained the operative. "Sheriff Brock is taking a posse of thirty men. You and I will be with them, as deputies. It's going to be a county proposition."

"Thirty men?" quizzed Harry in surprise. "Won't they make a lot of commotion?"

"Not the way I've planned it," chuckled Marquette. Brock and Dowden grinned with him. "Vincent, we're going to go past that gate as smooth as plush. We'd be able to move in an army, if we wanted."

Harry looked puzzled. Marquette's chuckle continued.

"Griscom Treft has a chauffeur," explained the operative, "who drives down to town nearly every evening. What did you say the fellow's name was, sheriff?"

"Corey," returned Brock.

"Well," stated Marquette, "when Mr. Corey shows up tonight, he will be arrested. We'll take his keys and unlock that gate for ourselves. A car will go through; but it won't be Corey's. It'll be us, with the search warrant. We'll walk right in the house and start to look around."

"With half the posse inside to help us," added Brock. "To back us up in case some cuss tries to make trouble."

"You stay with me from now on, Vincent," stated Marquette. "You're going to be in on some excitement. Incidentally, I have given you these details partly to gain your opinion. What do you think of the plan?"

"EXCELLENT," replied Harry. "That is, it will be, after you start out. But there's a chance that you will ruin it before you are ready."

"How's that?" demanded Brock, before Marquette could put a query.

"You have too many deputies in the open," stated Harry to the sheriff. "I've been watching them half the afternoon. Suppose this chauffeur spots them when he comes into town. If things really are bad out at Mountview Lodge, he'll be watching when he reaches Paulington."

"An excellent point," agreed the burgess, with a sage nod. "Well taken, Vincent."

"It's getting along toward dusk," observed Marquette, glancing through the window to note the thickly clouded sky. "Those fellows will be more conspicuous when it becomes darker. Vincent is right – a flash from Corey's headlights on the lounging deputies, would tell him something. Those deputies won't pass as loungers, sheriff."

"Some of them will," insisted Brock. "We'll need half a dozen anyway, to grab Corey. I want to keep the rest of them close together. I'll tell you where I'll send them" – he nodded emphatically – "right down to the depot."

"What about the evening train?" queried Marquette.

"It's going to be kind of dark when it comes in," assured Brock, "and anyway, we ought to be watching the depot. If there's any strangers around there tonight, we'll have them brought over here."

"We oughta been looking for strangers anyhow. There's no use taking chances. And after the local pulls up the line, there won't be nobody around the depot. Leastwise, nobody that's got a right to be there."

"I'll go out and pass the word to Hank. He'll take enough of the men down there. You won't see them parading like they have been, Vincent."

Brock arose; Marquette followed suit. He suggested that Harry accompany him to the hotel. They left the sheriff when they reached the street.

At the hotel, Harry fumbled in his pockets and recalled that he had left his pipe in his room. He left Marquette and went upstairs.

No call yet from Clyde. Harry knew that this might mean a personal arrival of the reporter. He wrote out a report concerning Marquette's plans. Sealing it in an envelope, he went down to the lobby. He was lighting his pipe when he arrived to find Brock with Marquette.

"Just take a look out that window, Vincent," suggested Brock. "You won't be seeing deputies any longer. Hank's taken most of them down to the depot. The ones that are still around are –" Brock broke off and stared; then exclaimed: "Say, lookit! There's the reporter fellow, Burke! What's he doing here?"

A COUPE had stopped in front of the hotel. Clyde Burke was alighting; he saw Brock and waved a greeting. The sheriff started out to meet him, Vic and Harry following.

"Hello, sheriff," said Clyde, cheerily. "Well, well, here's Marquette – and Vincent. Still in town, eh? What's keeping you here? The climate?"

"Technicalities," returned Marquette, promptly. "We scared up so much hubbub that the sheriff has to make a report to the county authorities. He wanted us to stay there for a few days. We're going over to Southbridge tomorrow, just as a matter of routine."

"Come over there then," suggested Brock, taking Vic's cue. "I'll have a story for you, mebbe. Only I guess most of the juice is out of it."

Harry had strolled over to lean against the coupe. His left side was away from view. As he puffed his pipe and removed it from his mouth with his right hand, he used his left to bring out the envelope. He let that object drop through the opened window of the coupe.

"Sorry," Clyde Burke was stating. "I won't be around tomorrow. Not tonight, even. I'm going up country to cover a forest-fire story. Just thought I'd stop and say hello."

Harry had strolled back to join Marquette. Clyde knew that a message had been delivered. With a friendly wave, the reporter returned to his car. He drove away from the hotel. Brock clapped Harry on the shoulder.

"Good boy, Vincent," commended the sheriff. "Getting those deputies off the street was a mighty cute idea. Darn these reporters! You can't tell when any of them will come snooping around."

Brock started toward Dowden's office. Marquette decided to go along and beckoned to Harry, who followed. On the way, The Shadow's agent smiled with satisfaction.

He knew that The Shadow must have already made plans regarding Mountview Lodge. All that the chief had needed was information regarding the law's exact moves. Harry had passed such word along. Clyde would form contact on the slope. The Shadow would be able to arrange his own moves as he chose.

Burgess Dowden had gone home to dinner, but the office was open. Sheriff Brock took the chair behind the desk. Darkness was thickening outside as Brock stroked his chin and made comment.

"One funny thing about that Mountview Lodge," observed the sheriff. "There's never been a telephone put in the place. It would ha' cost a piece of money to run a line in there, I'll grant."

"But Griscom Treft has got money. No sparing of expense on other things. It looks mighty consarn funny, by heck. Like he was scared that there might be trouble if he had a line. There's no private telephones hereabouts. People do lots of listening in."

"Hm-m-m," grunted Marquette. "It does sound odd, sheriff; but maybe it's because Griscom doesn't trust the people with him. How about that angle?"

"A right good one," responded the sheriff. "Yes, sir, that's another way to look at it. Yes, sir" – he broke off to listen; the evening train was chugging into the depot – "yes, sir! Suspicious kinda grow on you, when you begin to get them."

THE clangor of the departing locomotive sounded through the window. The local chugged from the station; its noise faded; then a whistle blared in the distance as the train approached a crossing beyond the town.

Brock was about to speak when voices sounded from below. Footsteps followed on the stairs.

Brock sprang to his feet and opened the door. Hank and another deputy appeared; with them was a tall, well-dressed man, who carried a fair-sized suitcase. The stranger's face was sharp-featured. His lips showed a wise smile; his eyes were quick as they roved from man to man.

"Fellow come in on the local," explained Hank. "We up and asked him his business. Kind of lippy like, he wants to know ours. We tells him we're deputies. He says that's great."

"You are the sheriff?" questioned the sharp-faced man, addressing Brock in a smooth tone.

The sheriff nodded. The arrival dropped his bag upon a chair. He surveyed Vic and Harry approvingly; then looked contemptuously at Hank and the second deputy.

"My name is Lieth," declared the man. "Carl Lieth, in from Chicago. I'd like to talk with you privately" – he paused; then gestured his approval of Brock's original companions – "or let us say semi–privately."

"Without the deputies, eh?" questioned Brock. "All right, Hank. You two can go back to the depot."

The deputies stalked out. It was Lieth, still smiling wisely, who closed the door behind them. Then the stranger turned to face the sheriff.

Vic and Harry eyed him. Both knew instinctively that the unexpected arrival of Carl Lieth was a matter of some import. Eagerly, they awaited word that might have to do with Mountview Lodge.

CHAPTER XIX. THE NEW ALLY

"MY credentials," stated Carl Lieth suavely, presenting a cardcase to Sheriff Brock. "And these gentlemen?"

"Mr. Marquette and Mr. Vincent," introduced the sheriff. He studied the credentials while Lieth was shaking hands with Vic and Harry. "Say! You're a private detective, eh? Take a look at these, Marquette."

"Marquette" – Lieth was stroking his chin as Vic examined the cards – "I know the name. Say – are you Vic Marquette of the secret service?"

Marquette had completed his examination of the cards. They attested Lieth to be the representative of a private detective bureau in the Middle West. Satisfied by the credentials, Vic nodded in response to Lieth's question.

"Good," decided Lieth. "Maybe you're after the same man I am. Burton Covell is his name. Did you ever hear of him?"

Marquette shook his head.

"A second–rate crook," stated Lieth, "but he pulled a good one when he swiped some uncut diamonds from a big Chicago firm. There's some talk that maybe Covell was bumped; but I met a jane he used to know and she told me the names of different towns he'd talked about.

"I've started on the rounds. One of the towns was Paulington, and I'd read about a mysterious explosion here. That's why I came here as soon as I could. Well, what's up? It looks like you're after somebody, even if it isn't Covell."

"We're looking for a man named Spadling," explained Marquette. "He's handled queer money; worked the green–goods racket; tried blackmail in his time. Any connection between Burton Covell and Clint Spadling?"

"None that I ever heard of," returned Lieth. "But they sound like they'd be a team. Have you located Spadling?"

"We don't know. Tonight, we're raiding a place called Mountview Lodge. I wouldn't say 'raid' was the word – we're going in quietly, with a search warrant; but we may have to be tough, if any one makes trouble."

"Is Mountview Lodge near here?"

"Over on the other side of the slope. It's a swanky place, owned by a man named Griscom Treft. That name mean anything?"

A headshake from Lieth; then the private dick stared curiously.

"What grounds have you for the raid?" he questioned. "You'll be out of luck, won't you, if Spadling isn't there?"

"No," put in Sheriff Brock. "We're searching for the dynamiters who blew up that cabin. But if we find Spadling there and recognize him, we'll make a grab."

"And suppose Spadling is hiding?"

"He's not likely to be," chuckled the sheriff. "We're making a surprise entry. We'll line everybody up. If Spadling is in the bunch, Marquette will pick him out."

"Not bad," approved Lieth. "Then Marquette is going in with you?"

"Yes," replied Brock. "He'll be one of those close to the house. Maybe he'll just get a glimpse of Spadling. If he does, it will be enough."

LIETH tugged a cigarette from his pocket, thrust it between his lips, snapped a lighter and puffed in rapid fashion. He paced across the room; then turned about and said:

"It's good, sheriff. The right way to work. And if it would do with Spadling, it would do with Covell, too."

"You mean you know Covell when you see him?" queried Marquette, while Brock sat puzzled.

"I could spot his ugly mug a mile away," returned Lieth. "Big chin, with a long scar across it. Funny, squinty eyes. Sheriff, I'm mighty glad I arrived here tonight. My coming is going to double your chances. If Spadling isn't there, Covell may be. How about it? Am I one of the shock troops?"

Brock looked to Marquette, who signified his approval. The sheriff nodded.

"We're taking thirty men," he explained. "We're going to make camp on the private road just below Mountview Lodge. We'll pick men for the raid. They'll go inside the grounds."

"And suppose the raid flukes?" queried Lieth.

"We'll keep the place surrounded," returned Brock. "Thirty of us will be plenty strong enough. We're waiting now because —"

Brock broke off. Again, footsteps were coming up the stairs. A man was making protest; angry voices were discounting it. Hank and two deputies appeared. They were dragging Corey with them.

"Picked him off purty, sheriff," informed the big deputy. "Snatched him right outa that coupe of his. He's been hollering; but I told him it hadn't no good. Here's his keys."

Corey was looking about with the expression of a trapped rat. The man's face showed guilt; he was plainly oppressed by fear of the law.

Brock received a ring of keys from Hank. The sheriff dangled them in front of Corey's eyes.

"Which of these opens the gate?" demanded the sheriff. "Come on, speak up!"

THE CONDOR

"The big key," whined Corey. "But I tell you, sheriff, this isn't right! I haven't pulled anything. It's all straight up at the lodge. I was just coming down here to buy supplies. I've got the list here in my pocket."

"Never mind that," snorted the sheriff. "Hank, you rassle this prisoner over to the town jail. Leave his car there. I'll keep these keys. Have our cars outside; all the deputies ready. We're starting."

Corey eyed all present defiantly. Then Hank and the two deputies dragged the chauffeur from the office. The sheriff put in a telephone call to Burgess Dowden's home. He explained that the capture had been made.

"The burgess will take a look in at the jail," clucked Brock, as he hung up the receiver. "Just to make sure that Corey is nice and comfortable. We're not going to lose any time in starting. They'll be expecting Corey back. Come along."

CARS were pulled up beside the office building when the sheriff and the others arrived. Brock chose a light sedan. He took the wheel and motioned Lieth in beside him. Harry and Vic climbed in back.

Hank arrived beside the car; the deputy had left Corey at the jail, only a half block from Dowden's office. Brock gave his instructions so that all could hear.

"Take six men with you in the big car, Hank," ordered Brock. "You know the fellows we picked. Stop on the road and sneak your bunch up to the big gate."

"When we come along, Marquette's dropping out; and so is this new man, Lieth. You get in this car along with me and Vincent. While I'm stalling with the gate" – Brock turned his head so that Marquette and Lieth would understand their parts – "two squads sneak through. Three each: one under Marquette, the other with Lieth."

"They've got to be close by the house. Get the idea? One bunch at each side of that big veranda. Then we come rolling up in the car. While the folks in the lodge are opening up for Corey, the squads will be sitting ready."

"I'll flash the search warrant when we get out. That's the signal for Marquette and Lieth to pile in. Right up on the ends of the porch and into the house."

Brock paused. It was Harry who voiced a query.

"This is a sedan," reminded The Shadow's agent. "Perhaps the people in the lodge will notice immediately that it is not their coupe."

"That's what I'm hoping they will do," laughed Brock. "I want them to come out, kinda suspicious-like. Sort of wondering who's blowed in on them. Then, by jiminy, the boys come bowling up from the ends of the porch."

"A flank attack," approved Marquette. "Good headwork, sheriff."

"What about the rest of the posse?" queried Hank. "There's two dozen of them, sheriff."

"They follow this car," stated Brock. "They stop on the private road, midway to the lodge. I'll leave the gate unlocked, so they can come up to support us."

He signaled for Hank to start. The big deputy went to a large sedan, called the men he wanted and piled them in the car. Hank's automobile pulled away. Brock gave it a few minute's leeway; then started his own car.

Harry Vincent looked back as they rolled from Paulington. Behind the sheriff's sedan came a small cavalcade of motor cars. The posse was following in full strength. Harry made comment to Marquette. The operative laughed.

"It's going to be a set-up," assured Vic. "All we've got to do is lay quiet and be ready. How about it, Lieth?"

The new ally looked back from the front seat. His broad grin showed confidence.

"A cinch!" was his comment. "And it brings us in right at the start. Where we belong, Marquette."

Harry Vincent leaned back against the cushions. He had not gained opportunity to inform Clyde Burke concerning the unexpected arrival of this stranger, Carl Lieth.

That, however, did not matter. The private detective was merely a strengthening factor, in Harry's estimation. Considering the sheriff's well-laid plan, Harry decided that, in all probability, The Shadow would this time find no part to play.

Harry's guess was a poor one. The coming attack was planned as a surprise. It was to prove such; and in its climax, The Shadow was due to play a startling role.

CHAPTER XX. THE ROUT

SHERIFF BROCK'S sedan drew to a standstill. Its headlights shone upon the bars of the formidable gate that blocked the driveway to Mountview Lodge. The glare showed blackened streaks upon the ground beyond crisscrossed shadows of the gate's strong bars.

From the darkness of the slope above were squared blocks of illumination. These were the window lights of Mountview Lodge. The evening was young; none of those within the lodge had retired at this early hour.

Brock spoke to his companions. When the sheriff alighted, Marquette and Lieth did the same. One to each side of the sedan, they joined trios of waiting men. Hank stepped up and entered the front seat.

The sheriff was unlocking the gate. The large key worked. Brock swung the gate open and came back to the sedan. He drove through and stopped some fifty feet beyond.

"I'm stalling to give them time," he whispered to Harry and Hank. "Sit tight until I come back."

The sheriff returned to the gate. Through the open windows of the rear seat, Harry could hear the creep of advancing men. Lieth, he knew, was leading a band far out to the right. Marquette and his trio were skirting the left.

Creeping sounds faded. Still Harry listened. He had decided that The Shadow – informed of plans – would choose this opportunity also. He could picture his black-cloaked chief coming through the opened gate, hard on the heels of advancing squads.

Harry heard no sound. That, however, was not proof of The Shadow's absence. Harry recalled numerous times when The Shadow had crept close by him without giving the slightest clue to his mysterious presence.

THE CONDOR

Hank was consulting a watch by the dashlight. Brock arrived, after considerable delay. Hank stated the time that the sheriff had taken to go back to the gate and fake the action of locking it.

"Three and a half minutes," was his verdict. "They ought to be close to the house, sheriff."

"We'll give them half a minute more," decided Brock, stalling the motor. "I'll fool with the starter, like the engine had stopped by itself."

The sheriff took a half minute to get started. By this time, the car's delay had obviously attracted attention in the lodge. The front door had opened; a figure appeared and stepped out to the veranda. Two others joined the first.

"Good," commented Brock. "They still think it's Corey. Have your revolvers ready, both of you. Back me up when I get out and flash the search warrant. You won't be having trouble, though, because those fellows will be covered from the flank. When Marquette and Lieth –"

The sheriff broke off suddenly as a revolver barked from one edge of the veranda. He jammed the brake as a bullet whistled by his rolling car. Another flash spat from the same side of the porch – the right – and at the same instant, a second slug drilled the hood, just in front of the windshield.

"Stop them!" came a man's shout from the blackness of the porch. "Stop. them! They are enemies! Foes of The Condor!"

THE sedan was no more than a hundred feet from the lodge. Searchlights gleamed of a sudden – a battery of revealing glares, all along the front of the veranda. Someone had pressed the switch inside the lodge. The men at the door were yanking revolvers.

Brock spat an oath as he pointed to the porch. There, halfway in from the edge, was Carl Lieth. It was the new ally who had delivered those first shots. It was he who had cried out the alarm.

He was turning, pointing back where his trio of men should be. The glaring lights showed three deputies a full fifty yards from the porch. Lieth had told them to remain behind while he sneaked forward alone. The deputies had obeyed the new ally's order.

The Condor's henchmen saw Lieth point; then saw him swing and indicate the other end of the veranda. There Marquette and his trio were rising in the light. The Condor's crew swung to aim at these closer enemies, while Lieth, backing over to join the crew at the door, blazed shots against the trio that he had commanded.

Hank was firing wildly. Harry joined in. Marquette and his men dropped below their end of the porch; the deputies whom Lieth had betrayed went sprawling to the ground for shelter.

A harsh order came from within the front door. The Condor's men – Lieth with them – went diving from view. The big door slammed behind them. Sheriff Brock fired useless shots against the barrier.

Brock had clambered from the car, Hank with him. Harry followed; they stood a dozen paces from the sedan, viewing the silent lodge. Upstairs lights blinked suddenly; the window frames blackened.

Only the glare of the searchlights remained. In it stood those three men from the car. Not one of them had sensed the meaning of the darkened windows; but there was a being present who knew the significance of what was about to come.

THE CONDOR

Rising over the top of the sheriff's sedan came a looming, shaded figure. The Shadow had been further down the lawn; he had entered as Harry had hoped; but he had stayed back while the law attacked.

Lieth's treachery had been unforeseen by The Shadow; for he had not learned of the man's arrival in Paulington. During the brief exchange of shots about the veranda, The Shadow had swept forward from his distant post, obscured by Brock's sedan. Mounted on the far side of the vehicle, head and shoulders barely discernible above the top, The Shadow took aim and fired.

The burst of his automatic was accompanied by a sharp ping high on the front of the lodge. One of the searchlights blackened. Its clattering glass dropped to the veranda. An instant later, The Shadow fired a second shot; another searchlight vanished.

Brock wheeled to look for the sharpshooter. He did not see The Shadow. Those two lights were the central ones of the row along the lodge; with their glares ended, the sedan was bathed in partial obscurity.

THEN came the answer which The Shadow had expected; it told why he had dealt his strokes against the lights. Flashes came from darkened windows along the second floor. The Condor's henchmen were firing through loopholes, aiming for the three men in the center of the lawn.

These were no revolver shots. High-powered rifles were speaking from The Condor's fortress. First shots sizzled high, as sharpshooters tried to pick their targets. Brock shouted an order; he dived for the sedan, with Harry and Hank behind him.

The Shadow dropped away. Prone in the darkness, he aimed another shot as the car took to the center of the lawn, under Brock's mad guidance. Rifles were crackling after the fleeing sedan. The Shadow blotted out another searchlight; then a fourth. A weird laugh rose from his lips as the sedan sped to safety.

All center lights, those four. There had been a dozen at the start; hence each side of the lodge front still boasted a blazing quartet. The glares from the side showed three deputies rising from the ground to scatter. Those at the other side revealed Marquette and his trio as they ran for cover.

Rifles boomed pursuing shots; but The Shadow's automatics spoke as well. Steadily, like a marksman engaged in target practice, he was pinging the remaining searchlights, bringing blank darkness as a cover for fugitives who would have otherwise been doomed.

One of Vic's deputies staggered; another managed to help him to his feet. Then the last light blinked out at that side of the house. The Shadow aimed for one lone orb of light; the last one at the other side. A whistling slug from his automatic produced the final clatter.

Already, riflemen had begun a loophole fire for the terrain from which The Shadow's automatics flashed. Steel bullets were digging up the turf; some shots but inches wide of the hidden target whose exact location was guesswork on the part of the men within the lodge.

But with the last light gone, The Shadow ceased his fire. Fleeing men were lost in blackness. So was he. Rising, he quickly withdrew from the danger spot that sharpshooters still sought blindly.

The sedan had passed the distant gate. Rifle shots told that the crooks in the lodge were starting a barrage to cover the spot where others would emerge. Then the firing ceased. The Condor had recognized its uselessness.

THE CONDOR

The whole lawn afforded shelter for deputies, who could lie there and let the crooks waste ammunition. There was no way by which The Condor could stop those saved men who had fled.

Firing ended, scattered men crept toward that path to safety. Covered by darkness, their way was clear. They were free to join their comrades. Six men, led by Vic Marquette, were saved from doom.

The Condor had been warned. A surprise attack had boomeranged; its authors had been routed. But The Shadow, covering the wild retreat, had prevented simple defeat from becoming absolute disaster.

CHAPTER XXI. DEEP STRATEGY

BEYOND the turn below the gate to Mountview Lodge, Sheriff Brock stood in the glare of automobile headlights. About him were grouped the thirty members of his posse. Harry and Hank were with the sheriff; Marquette had arrived with the rescued deputies.

Two men had been clipped by bullets. They were being carried to a car while Brock, his voice a heavy boom, was telling his followers the course that he intended.

"There's thirty of us," Brock declared. "I reckon we're four to one against those inside that place. We'll have another thirty men inside the next hour. Hank will get them after he takes those wounded fellows to the Southbridge hospital.

"I'm leaving the big gate open. We're spreading off the road. We'll watch along that fence. The moment anybody tries to leave that lodge, we'll see them move.

"Move up there, men. Keep watch. We'll have the word pass along if there's any trouble. Right here below the gate is where I'll be. This is where Hank will bring his reinforcements."

Wounded men were aboard their car. Big Hank took the wheel and drove away. Deputies advanced; then spread in obedience to their leader's order. Marquette talked with the sheriff. Harry stood a few paces away, beside an empty touring car.

A soft whisper brought The Shadow's agent to the alert. The sound came from the car. It was a command in The Shadow's strange, sinister tone. Harry heard the words, then whispered his understanding. He walked away and approached Brock.

"How about it, sheriff?" he questioned. "Wouldn't it be a good idea if I went down to Paulington and told the burgess what has happened? He might send some men back with me –"

"That is an idea," broke in the sheriff. "You're right; the burgess ought to know what's happened. Take one of those cars and head for town."

Harry chose the touring car. He turned it about in the narrow road and swung off down the slope. He had followed The Shadow's first order. Now came the whispered word from the rear of the open car:

"Report!"

Briefly, Harry recited the facts that concerned Carl Lieth and the detective's surprising treachery. He told of Corey's capture; how the man had been brought to Dowden's office. The Shadow's laugh came as a token of weird mirth.

THE CONDOR

A hissed voice gave instructions. Listening, Harry stared wide-eyed along the road that he was following. He was amazed by the orders that The Shadow delivered. Yet he could do nothing but nod his assent.

The touring car was nearing Paulington. Harry drove slowly through the streets of the town and parked behind the old hotel. He heard a slight swish as The Shadow alighted; then he glimpsed the momentary outline of a cloaked figure. The Shadow was crossing the street; his figure blended with a blackened area.

Harry went into the hotel. He nodded nonchalantly to the clerk; then entered the solitary telephone booth and put in a call to a hotel in Southbridge. He gained connection with Clyde Burke and gave the reporter brief instructions.

That done, Harry called Burgess Dowden. He told what had happened at Mountview Lodge. He said that the sheriff could use a few picked men. The burgess promised four. Harry arranged to meet them in the hotel in fifteen minutes. His call finished, he sauntered to the street.

MEANWHILE, events were happening in the Paulington jail. A small, decrepit structure, the jail stood opposite the railroad tracks. The lone jailer kept vigil in a little office at the side of the building. He was there tonight, staring stolidly from the window as he jingled a chain of keys.

The jailer could see the railroad lights from his window. Suddenly a strange blackness obscured them. For a moment, the jailer's fat face showed perplexity; then he realized that the darkness was a reflection from the room itself. Some strange shape had come up beside him.

The jailer turned. He saw burning eyes – unreal eyes – from beneath the brim of a slouch hat. Then gloved hands gripped his throat. The jailer subsided under pressure. Limply, he rolled to the floor. The Shadow's form stood above him.

Finding handcuffs in the jailer's pocket, The Shadow used them to clamp the man's wrists. He gagged the fellow with his own handkerchief; then used the jailer's belt to bind the limp ankles. Hoisting the fat-faced man, The Shadow propped him in the corner; then extinguished the light.

The jailer, recovered, blinked at sight of a flashlight's glow upon a desk. He fancied that he saw a white hand, writing something on a sheet of paper. Then glovelike blackness obscured the hand; the flashlight was extinguished.

The Shadow appeared in the lighted hall outside the little office. He watched the front door open cautiously. Harry Vincent stepped into view. Harry saw The Shadow and approached. The Shadow gave him the jailer's keys; also, a sealed envelope. A gloved finger pointed toward the rear of the jail. Harry nodded and marched in that direction.

A door barred progress. Harry found the right key and unlocked it. He stepped into a lighted cell room. There were only two cells there; of these, but one was occupied. Corey's face was that of a trapped rat as it showed white through the bars.

The Shadow had remained outside. Yet he was watching, listening, ready to note the result of this interview between his agent and the prisoner.

"HELLO, Corey," greeted Harry, quietly. "Listen: 'I've got a proposition for you.'"

"Who are you to give it?" snarled Corey.

"My name is Vincent," stated Harry. "I'm working with Marquette of the secret service; also with Sheriff Brock. You saw all of us up in the office today."

"There was another wise guy there, too."

"Lieth. He's a detective. We managed to get him into Mountview Lodge. He's putting up a bluff there."

"Yeah? Well, he won't fool the chief –"

"He is fooling him already, Corey. But we've had to change our plans. We've got to get word to Lieth. You're the man to help us."

Corey's defiance changed to an expression of shrewd interest. Harry noted an evil, scheming glint in the man's ratlike eyes. Corey nodded; he wanted Harry to continue.

"Your coupe is out back," explained Harry. "The key is in it. I'm going up toward the lodge in a touring car; you follow and keep going right past me."

"The gate is unlocked. Barge right through it and don't stop until you reach the lodge. After they let you in, tell them you escaped from here. Don't let your chief know that you were set loose. Do you understand?"

Corey nodded wisely.

"When you get a chance" – Harry drew The Shadow's envelope from his pocket – "sneak this to Lieth. Remember: it's important; and nobody else is to see it. After this business is all over, we'll see that you're let off light. That'll be your reward for working with us. Do you get me?"

Corey nodded as he took the envelope. Harry produced the cell key and unlocked the door. He led the chauffeur out into the hall. The Shadow had already gone.

"Remember," said Harry, as they reached the outside air, "follow my touring car. I'll swing past here after I leave the hotel. Keep right through when I stop."

"Some of the deputies may fire wild shots; but you just keep going through the gate. That will be to make it look like you were really running for it. There's your coupe" – they were at the corner of the jail – "so hop aboard. Lay, low until I've passed."

The rumble seat of the coupe was lowering as Harry spoke; neither Corey nor The Shadow's agent spied its motion. Again, Corey was scheduled to carry The Shadow as a hidden passenger.

HARRY strolled on to the hotel. In the lobby he found four men awaiting him. They were the huskies whom the burgess had called. Harry took them to the touring car. Starting out, he rolled along the street past the jail, then swung about to cut over to the open road.

They had passed the fork when one of the new squad delivered a remark. The man was looking out the rear window. He had spotted trailing lights.

"Looks like somebody's coming along with us," said the townsman. "Guess maybe the burgess called up a couple more fellers."

THE CONDOR

Harry grinned to himself. He was driving at an easy rate. He wanted to get back before Hank and the new posse from Southbridge, but not too long before they arrived. There was still a little more time to kill.

Harry skirted the hill and neared the Mountview road. The coupe was keeping close behind; Harry could spy its headlights in his mirror. Reaching the private road, he stepped on the gas, sped up a bit and reached the spot where the cars were parked.

Harry pulled over and leaped to the ground. He spied Brock and Marquette; they recognized him as he stepped in front of his own headlights.

"Hello, Vincent," greeted the sheriff. "Back already, eh? Say – whose car is that coming up here?"

Corey's lights had appeared. Harry made casual comment.

"Somebody else from town," he stated. "The burgess probably sent some more men along."

Brock stepped aside as the coupe approached. The car gave a sudden forward lurch; it shot by at increasing speed. Brock stared; then barked an excited exclamation:

"That's Corey's coupe! Stop him! He's running for the lodge!"

The order was too late. As Harry joined Brock in a dash to the turn in the road, they saw the speeding coupe crash the huge gate. The unlocked barrier clattered inward. The coupe roared ahead.

Two deputies fired from the fence. Their shots were far too late. Fuming, Brock dashed up to the gate, then shouted for the firing to cease. The coupe's tail-light had arrived near the side of the lodge. Harry saw the lights blink off.

"So he slipped us, eh?" growled Brock to Harry. "Well, I reckon it won't do him much good, if we ever manage to get in there. Listen – I hear cars down below. Hank and his new men are here. Come on, while I post them."

Harry followed the sheriff down the road. The Shadow's agent felt a keen sense of coming triumph. Corey's run had succeeded. Brock might think it a lucky jail-break; Harry knew differently.

For the release of Corey had been a master stroke of strategy; one that The Shadow had devised to nullify the schemes of crooks. Already, unrealized by Sheriff Brock, potential victory was in the making.

Such was the depth of The Shadow's strategy.

CHAPTER XXII. THE CONDOR DECIDES

"So Corey is here!" Griscom Treft chuckled. "Excellent, Delland, excellent! Show him in at once."

The Condor was seated behind his study desk. Opposite him was Carl Lieth; the traitor's face displayed a pleased grin. Upon the table lay a mass of chunky crystals. Uncut diamonds, the latest of The Condor's spoils.

One stone twinkled as Treft removed it from a tiny weighing machine. Lieth had brought this diamond separately. It had been his token; its exact weight the factor that had made Treft recognize Lieth as another of the brood.

THE CONDOR

The door opened; Corey entered with Delland. Treft chuckled as he indicated Lieth.

"You two have met before," stated The Condor. "Lieth is our latest member, Corey. Until recently, he was a private detective, tracing a thief who had stolen uncut diamonds."

"And when I found Burton Covell," laughed Lieth, "I offered to make a deal with him. Told him I'd let him go if he'd slip me a split on those rocks. Say, chief, you should have seen Covell's face when he found out I was as big a crook as he was."

Corey stood listening. He wanted to hear more. Treft laughed as he watched the chauffeur.

"Covell was the man that I expected, Corey," explained The Condor. "His position being precarious, he left the country and Lieth came in his stead. Tonight, Lieth performed a signal service for us. You tell Corey about it, Lieth."

"When I came into town," explained the traitor, facing Corey, "some mugs stopped me at the station. It looked bad – these diamonds were on me, you know – but I had credentials with me. That fixed everything with Sheriff Brock. Soon as he knew I was a dick, he wanted me to help him, especially when I put up a yarn about Covell."

"The bunch came in here for a surprise attack. I gave the gag away. We beat them back and I came inside. Sorry I couldn't help you out, Corey, when they dragged you into that office. This was the only way I could work it."

"You know, chief" – Lieth's face furrowed as he turned to The Condor and spoke in serious tone – "I'm afraid we're in for it. I told you there were thirty men outside. Like as not, they're bringing more in by this time."

"Maybe they can't tear down this place, but we'll have to surrender sooner or later. They've got us surrounded; there's not a chance for us to make a break for it. Once they get in here, they'll find the swag."

"I'd like to see where you're keeping all the stuff. I'd like to know, too, if there's any way for me to do a slideout. After all, you may be able to put up a bluff. They were invading your property. But they've labeled me as a crook, since I pulled that fast one on them."

THE CONDOR waved for silence. He scooped up the uncut diamonds, placed them in a wooden box and arose from his chair. He motioned toward the side door.

"Come, Lieth," he chuckled. "I shall show you our strong room. On the way down, we shall hear the details of Corey's escape. His report should prove of value –"

"Wait!" Corey blurted the word harshly. "Don't show Lieth anywhere, chief! It's you that he's double-crossing."

The Condor stopped short. He glared fiercely at the chauffeur. Delland stared in alarm. Lieth had risen from his chair; he was rooted and his face showed puzzlement.

"I didn't escape," spoke Corey, his fists half clenched. "A guy named Vincent let me out. One that was up in the office with this palooka" – he indicated Lieth – "and a Fed, Marquette, operating with the bunch."

"I was told to come here, faking it like an escape. That's why those guys fired at me down by the gate. I'm supposed to be let off easy after the jig is up. That's my price for helping Lieth pull a fast one."

THE CONDOR

"I'll prove it to you, chief. You know what I was to do here? Hand you a phony story; then wait until I had a chance to slip a note to Lieth. Well, it's you I'm giving the note to, chief" – Corey produced Harry's envelope – "and you're the one that can read it."

"Call in the others," rasped The Condor, harshly. "Sit down, Lieth. Frisk him, Corey. Take his gun."

Lieth started a wild protest; Corey pounced on him and gained his revolver. Delland had been ready to aid. Seeing Corey's success, the secretary went out to summon the other members of the band.

"Code," sneered The Condor, as he drew a sheet of paper from the envelope. "A crude one. Merely filled with dummy letters, to confuse the reader. I suppose, Lieth, that you and Marquette did not have time to arrange a better mode of communication.

"Take these diamonds, Delland" – the secretary had returned; others were filing in with him – "and put them in the strong room. Tell Toklar to place them in the special containers. He will understand your gestures.

"A clever bit of business" – The Condor's tone was scornful; he was translating the crude message as he spoke – "sending in real diamonds in hope of bluffing me! Well, Lieth, you came close to succeeding."

"It's no double cross, chief," blurted Lieth, half up from his chair. "Honest, I'm not in with Marquette –"

"Sit down!" snarled Corey, jabbing the revolver barrel into the traitor's ribs.

Lieth subsided. The Condor had finished his work with the message. His face was not pleasant. Its evil, vulturelike expression had accentuated in the light. Looking up, Treft viewed his henchmen.

"This message," he announced, harshly, "is addressed to Lieth. It is signed by Marquette. Corey was bribed to pass it along. I shall read it verbatim."

" 'Dear Lieth: Four of the seven deputies were wounded. Two men have taken them to Southbridge, leaving us but one. With Brock, Vincent and myself, we are only four.

" 'Vincent is going into Paulington; he may bring back three or four to join us. But our best men are gone. We are hopelessly weak. We are releasing Corey; he will deliver you this message secretly.

" 'We rely upon you to continue the bluff that we tried to create: namely, that our numbers are strong enough to resist an attack. By morning, there will be more men from Southbridge. We will let them be seen along the fence to prove your statements.

" 'Learn all you can, as I will send for operatives tomorrow. Our next attack will begin at ten thirty tomorrow night. We are counting upon you and Corey for evidence after we raid. Marquette."

RIPPING the paper into shreds, The Condor glared at Lieth. Treft's fury was terrible. Lieth cowered as the fierce-eyed man stepped to the side of the desk.

"No, no!" pleaded the traitor. "I swear I have told you the truth! There were thirty men; I'm positive they can get more –"

"Holding us here trapped," snarled Treft. "When we have the swag ready for our get-away. On this, the night of the twelfth. Thirty men! Bah! A mere half dozen whom we can annihilate!"

THE CONDOR

"But Burton Covell told me to come here –"

"Covell talked to you; yes. But you passed the word on to Marquette. You framed it with him, to get in here on the last night before the thirteenth. Bringing swag; playing your part in a fake attack. Getting in with us, to hold us here, knowing that tomorrow we would be gone."

Treft shot out a claw and gripped the revolver that Corey held. He plucked it from the chauffeur's grasp and leveled the weapon straight toward Lieth. The crooked detective gasped pitiful pleas. The Condor's lips froze in a venomous leer.

As Lieth cowered away, Treft pressed his long, thin finger against the revolver trigger. With unerring aim, The Condor pumped shot after shot into the unprotected body of the quailing traitor.

Lieth sagged with the first bullet. His body was a motionless corpse upon the floor when Treft desisted. With a gloating scoff, The Condor tossed the emptied revolver upon the bullet-riddled form.

"Prepare!" rasped The Condor to his henchmen. "To the gate! There we shall massacre those fools as I have finished with their tool!"

He pointed a scornful claw toward Lieth's body; then chuckled with a venom that brought gloating laughs from his murderous henchmen.

"Trossler will remain here," decided The Condor, as his henchmen brought revolvers into view. "He can guard the door until our return. We must first clear the way; then come back and remove the swag.

"We shall drive away in our own cars, from the garage. We shall dynamite the lodge. Until then, our swag is safe in the custody of the Singhalese. Should we find ourselves pressed for time, I can remove the swag in my own fashion.

"Have no worry. Our task is now one simple matter. We must clear that handful of meddlers from our path. Come! We are ready. Open the outer door, Trossler."

"What about Marsland?" queried the servant, as he turned toward the hall. "Do you want him with you?"

"No," decided The Condor. "His status is still doubtful. We can discuss his case later. Keep him in his room."

Trossler moved out ahead into the hall, which was darkened. Guns clattered in the hands of The Condor's henchmen. Murderers all, they were carrying a brace of weapons each. Faring forth behind their chief toward what they believed would be a certain victory.

The law had been crossed tonight, crossed by Carl Lieth, a man whose real role was that of crook. He had ruined a surprise attack; he had brought true facts to The Condor's ears. Men of crime had heard his warning.

But The Shadow, using Corey as an instrument, had changed the status of Carl Lieth. The traitor lay dead upon the floor of The Condor's study; his warnings were forgotten by those with whom he had sought to side.

The Shadow's crafty strategy was bringing a handful of desperadoes into the waiting toils of three score men who held The Condor's lair within a surrounding cordon.

CHAPTER XXIII. THE CONDOR'S THRUST

STEALTHY figures again were creeping through the night. This time, the attackers were coming from the confines of Mountview Lodge. Spread across the darkness of the broad lawn, The Condor and his tribe were converging toward the outer gate of the lodge

Eyes perceived those dim figures as they left the whiteness of the veranda. The Shadow, peering from the back of the coupe, laughed in whispered fashion at the success of his ruse.

Softly, his figure emerged from its hiding place. The Shadow, too, took to the lawn at the rear of creeping men. Another surprise attack was due to be heralded, too, soon; this time by The Shadow.

Figures had neared the gate. The Shadow was thirty yards behind them. His tall form rose in darkness. His leveled automatics picked out the approximate spot where villains crouched. The Shadow pressed triggers. Flames jabbed the darkness.

Snarls came from rising crooks as bullets whistled past them. The Shadow's blind shots had not found targets; but they had accomplished the result that he desired.

Flashlights glared from all along the fence. Glaring rays burrowed paths through darkness. A score of deputies were ready. They had The Condor and his compact crew within their focus. Revolvers crackled.

Crooks fired back; then wavered. Husky deputies came hurtling the fence to cut in from the flanks, no longer caring if the alarms were sent off. Motors roared from down the road. At the sound of gunfire, a score of reserves came into motion.

The hillside roared with gunfire. Crooks were scattering, shooting wildly. Shouting deputies were dropping them like scurrying rabbits. The Shadow's alarm had placed murderers in a hopeless trap.

The Shadow had wheeled in the darkness. Beyond the range of flashlights, he was driving toward the house. As he neared there, bells began to ring within. The tampered fence wires were causing the alarm.

As The Shadow reached the porch, a light glared suddenly above the door. The Shadow dived for the door itself and hurled the portal open. He came face to face with Trossler. The servant fired as the door swung wide.

But The Shadow had entered with a sidestep, dropping for the wall with the same movement that he had used to fling the door upon its hinges. Trossler's bullets sizzled past a cloaked shoulder.

An automatic barked from The Shadow's fist.

Trossler wavered; then slumped. Within the darkened hall, The Shadow delivered a laugh of challenge. It rose with unearthly shudders; it shivered into mocking echoes. Strange silence followed it; then came an answering cry.

CLIFF MARSLAND had heard The Shadow's taunt. He knew that the fortress had fallen.

The Shadow located the sound; then reached the door of his agent's prison. In hissed tones, he gave brief orders. Cliff acknowledged from the opened transom.

THE CONDOR

The Shadow saw the lighted study. He entered to find Lieth's body on the floor. He recognized who the man must be. His weird, lowered laugh was a knell above the dead form of a traitor whose fate had been deserved.

The Shadow knew that all but Trossler had fared forth. By now, The Condor and his band should have been eliminated. Cliff, as a prisoner, would be released; Harry would vouch for him to Vic Marquette.

The Shadow had a duty elsewhere; one that he alone had recognized. Well had he divined The Condor's craft. He knew that already some measure might have been taken to balk the triumph of the law. Reaching the veranda, The Shadow dived from the light. Reaching the edge, he skirted the lodge, heading for a deserted portion of the rear fence.

Already, flashlight-bearing deputies were converging toward the house. The Shadow saw lights reach the porch. He knew that men were entering. Off through the trees beyond the fence, The Shadow took the path for Table Rock.

A car had reached the lodge. From it sprang Brock, Marquette and Harry. They were among the first to enter the opened door. Pounding from within a door attracted their attention. The sheriff crashed the panel with the butt of his revolver. He drove his shoulder against the broken barrier. With Vic and Harry aiding, he demolished the door – to release Cliff Marsland.

A prisoner within this den was entitled to respect. That was a fact that The Shadow had foreseen. But before Cliff had time to begin an explanation, shots from the front door caused all four to swing in that direction.

A deputy sprawled. Another lost his grip upon a fiercely twisting man who dived across the hall. Cliff cried a warning as he recognized the wild invader. Griscom Treft!

The Condor alone had survived the withering fire of the sheriff's deputies. Unscathed by bullets, he had fled for the lodge. Plunging out of darkness, he had beaten his way into his own lost fortress.

Luck served The Condor still. As Brock and Marquette fired at his dashing form, Treft kept on and reached the passage that led past his study. Hasty bullets had gone wide.

"The strong room!" cried Cliff. "That's where he's heading! That's Treft – The Condor – the chief crook of all!"

BROCK and Marquette took up the chase; Cliff followed with Harry. Behind them surged a deluge of deputies. They reached the cellar stairs and dashed madly to the bottom. There Cliff pointed the way to the strong room.

The pursuers were too late. The massive iron door was swinging shut as Vic and the sheriff opened new fire. The Singhalese had admitted their hard-pressed master.

It was Cliff who supplied inspiration for a further chase. As Brock and Marquette stood with smoking guns, Cliff gave them new proof that he was a real ally, here within The Condor's domain. Cliff had recalled a fact that Treft had told him.

"There's dynamite here in the cellar!" he exclaimed. "Treft used it to excavate his strong-room. He blasted the old cabin with it. There's some here yet."

Deputies scurried to make search. They found the remainder of the store. One deputy, a quarryman, came forward as technical expert. He studied the iron door; then picked a quantity of dynamite. He ordered the

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others outside, with the rest of the explosive in their possession.

A few minutes after the raiders had reached the veranda, the blast-setter came hurrying out to join them. He had found fuses; the charge was properly placed and timed. He explained that a crevice in the rock beneath the door had given him a chance to plant the explosive without drilling.

A shivering blast shook the lodge. Rumbled echoes ended; the quarryman nodded to the sheriff. Brock led a new advance. The invaders reached the fume-filled cellar. Coughing their way through smoke, they found the huge door broken from its hinges.

The lights in the rock-walled corridor were banished. Flashlights showed the door ahead. The sheriff growled his disappointment; Cliff explained that the inner barrier was no obstacle. Its outside bar was loose; the sheriff swung the door wide.

THE invaders stared as they saw the grotto. The lights of the tinted cavern had not been extinguished by the blast. An iron bar, inside the door, showed that effort had been made to barricade this bulwark which The Condor had neglected to provide with inner fastenings.

"Look out –"

As Cliff exclaimed the warning, the two Singhalese sprang from hiding places by the walls. Like mighty jinns guarding a treasure trove, they hurled themselves upon Brock and Marquette. Cliff and Harry leaped to aid. A dozen deputies piled in with vengeance.

Guns boomed. Bullets clipped hanging stalactites and ricocheted from the cavern walls. Salyuk collapsed, wounded by a shot that Marquette had managed to discharge with accuracy. Six deputies dragged Toklar from the sheriff; the Singhalese went down beneath the combined force of the husky rescuers.

Cliff was dashing up ahead. Forgetful that he had no gun, he sought to show the way to The Condor's treasure niche. Cliff stopped short when he reached the spot. He stared at scattered teakwood boxes. All had been emptied.

Cliff dashed on toward the underground lake – the deepest spot to which The Condor could have fled. As he reached the sloping roof, he saw Treft. The master crook was hurling metal cylinders into the outlet of the underground channel.

He had reached the end of his task; he chucked the last of the smaller cylinders as Cliff arrived. Beside Treft was the six-foot cylinder that Cliff had described as a blunt-nosed torpedo. It was leaning against the wall.

The Condor swung suddenly, to spy Cliff. With a venomous snarl, he yanked a revolver from his pocket. Cliff dived beyond a projecting ledge of flowstone. The Condor's single shot was too late; it clipped the edge of the rock.

Cliff shouted for Harry and the others. He heard the clatter of arriving footsteps. The Condor snarled hoarse defiance; then raised himself upon the rock and dropped his wiry body into the big cylinder.

His hands shot out to seize the cap, which stood on a ledge beside the tube. Harry saw the master crook's head and arms; he fired rapid shots that sizzled within inches of Treft's hands. Then the top of the cylinder clamped down; Treft had yanked it by an inside bar.

THE CONDOR

Marquette and Brock were here. Cliff was springing forward with Harry. Four men were out to capture The Condor in his tubelike nest. Before they retached the cylinder, it lurched; Treft had toppled it by jolting with his body.

Falling, the cylinder bounded from the rocky floor. It careened into the outlet at the end of the pool. For seconds, it wavered there; clutching hands of the invaders made snatches at its slippery surface.

Then the big cylinder swung end upward. Caught by the surge of the water, it jounced over the edge of the natural dam, through a central channel of the outlet. An instant later, The Condor's submarine device was gone from sight.

Frustrated men stood gaping, their prey swallowed into the stream that roared to the depths within the sloping hillside.

No one had remained outside the captured lodge. Hence there was none to see the strange manifestation that occurred above ground while strange episodes were taking place below.

A flare had gone up from Table Rock. In answer to the signal, two lights were hovering from the darkness of the sky. Green and red, those glimmers settled to the ledge that had become The Shadow's goal.

The Condor had escaped a host of pursuers. There was one, however, who had not given up the chase. The Shadow, taking to the air by an arriving autogyro, was following The Condor, even though the fiend had chosen subterranean depths!

CHAPTER XXIV. SPOILS OF THE CONDOR

No noise of battle had reached the north side of the hill. The brow of the wooded mound had cut off sound from this further slope. Beside the old mill, only the ripple of the creek disturbed the hush of night.

A light was burning in the main room. There, Hiram Zegler was ordering his nephew Elisha in the accomplishment of a curious task. The two were stacking metal tubes of three-foot length. The cylinders were glistening with dripping water.

The door to the cellar was open. Zegler and Elisha had brought their burdens up from the stream below. Elisha was expressing high-pitched liking for the task. Zegler's half-witted nephew regarded the whole thing as a game.

"Say, this beats fishin', Uncle Hiram!" the dolt was saying. "What do you reckon is inside these here metal bottles? They're like the little ones you used to find in the net, hadn't they? The little ones that had notes in them?"

"Shut up, you fool!" snarled Zegler. "We've got to load this swag in the car and make a get-away. These are the last of the lot, I guess, but there ought to be a small one coming. With a message, telling us where to head. Come on – we're going down again."

The pair descended the winding stairs. They reached the net; Zegler flashed a light into the meshwork. It showed no glimmer of the little tube that he expected.

"Mebbe the note's in one of them big ones, uncle," suggested Elisha. "How 'bout us agoin' up to look?"

THE CONDOR

"Sometimes you aren't dumb," commented Zegler. "That might be it. Well, we'll wait here though. Just for sure. Something ought to ride along to tell us that we've got the whole shebang."

Elisha uttered an inarticulate cry as he gripped his uncle's shoulder. Pointing up the stream, the nephew indicated an object that was swinging out from beneath the floor boards at the right; through from that hidden channel that The Shadow had scented on his visit here.

"Hadn't that one a monster!" exclaimed the dullard, finding words. "More'n six feet long, that fellow. The biggest ketch of the lot!"

Twisting free of low-hung timbers, a mammoth cylinder revolved into the net. As one end swung around, Zegler thrust bared arms into the water. He snarled to Elisha to help him. They brought the cylinder against the side of the stream.

Zegler snatched up a hooked bar and tugged the big tube upward. Elisha caught hold; they rolled the cylinder from the stream. Madly, Zegler twisted at the cap; it gave. Elisha gaped as he saw a head and shoulders thrust themselves from the tube.

ZEGLER aided the gray-haired arrival from his torpedolike craft. Griscom Treft crawled to his feet. Seen in the light from a lantern that glowed on the cellar wall, Treft's face was the evil countenance of The Condor.

"I made it," he rasped to Zegler. "With all the swag ahead of me, except some of the gold. It was too heavy; it would have sunk the cylinder. I left it in a box in the strong room."

"Some of the tubes were mighty heavy weighted," observed Zegler. "But that channel comes down mighty steep through the slope. Remember the time we tested it? Even them logs with iron hitched to them came through."

Elisha was standing in a gawky attitude, listening. The Condor shot a look of alarm. He nudged Zegler.

"What's the matter, Elisha?" demanded the miller. "Hearing something?"

"Thought I heerd an automobile," returned Elisha. "Hadn't sure, though. She seemed mighty high up; like she was a-comin' over the hill. No noise now, though."

"There's no road over the hill," snorted Zegler. "And there's no cars go along this road. Don't stand there mooning, Elisha!"

"Come on!" rasped The Condor. "There is a road around the hill. It will take pursuers half an hour to reach here, assuming that the fools have sense enough to guess that the outlet of the subterranean stream is at this mill."

"Twelve miles around, if it's a foot," asserted Zegler, starting for the stairs. "But it's not more than two, through that underground stream."

"My passage required less than ten minutes," announced The Condor, following while Elisha brought up the rear. "It was a swift trip, Zegler, but rough in spots. There are waterfalls within the hill."

They had reached the top of the stairs. The Condor's eyes gleamed as he surveyed his precious cylinders. All had come through ahead of him. Save for a few thousands in gold, The Condor's swag was intact.

THE CONDOR

"Fetch up the net, Elisha," began Zegler. "We're clearing out of here right now –"

"No time!" rasped The Condor. "We're taking that north road, Zegler, the one we picked in case of flight. No one will think of following it."

"Things went bad at the lodge?"

"Completely. The sheriff is there with sixty men! I alone was clever enough to escape. Come! Let us carry these cylinders to your car. We have a million here; your share will be greater, Zegler."

The miller motioned to his nephew. They hoisted a three-foot cylinder. The Condor began to raise another, choosing a lighter one. Suddenly, he dropped the burden. His lips delivered a sharp, warning cry. Zegler stopped short with Elisha. Like The Condor, they stared toward the rear door.

A figure had arrived there. Tall, sinister, it had developed out of nothingness. The Shadow, cloaked in black, his fierce eyes burning their challenge, was here to stay The Condor's flight!

THE SHADOW'S autogyro had come from Southbridge, handled by Miles Crofton, The Shadow's skillful pilot. It had hovered above Table Rock; it had descended at The Shadow's signal. Taking to the air again, the ship had come directly here.

Elisha had heard its motor. The ending of the sound had been the beginning of the autogyro's straight descent to the clearing by the dimly lighted mill. The Shadow had picked this place as one that must be reached, no matter how the fight had turned at Mountview Lodge.

Contact with Zegler by those in the lodge; odd-shaped metal cylinders in Zegler's desk; the net beneath the mill, where a huge, hidden stream surged in to join the main body of the creek; Cliff Marsland's story of the outlet from the lake in The Condor's limestone strong room; Cliff's description of the cylinders that he had seen there – these were the conclusive clues that had told The Shadow all. He knew that The Condor, when trapped, would use the underground channel for removal of his ill-gained spoils.

The Shadow's one surprise was to find The Condor here. By all odds, the master crook should have fallen in the fray outside the lodge.

A thud sounded as Zegler and Elisha let their cylinder drop. Weighted at one end, it wobbled upright as Zegler shot his hand to pocket for his gun. The Condor, crouching, dropped behind the cylinder, snatching out a revolver of his own.

Automatics barked. One spat a bullet that sent Zegler sprawling while he sought to aim. The other sent hot lead toward the top of the cylinder. Slugs sizzled their way just above The Condor's head.

Treft had gained good shelter, thanks to Elisha. Half behind the tube, half behind the miller's nephew, The Condor was immune to those first shots. But he wanted greater surety when he fired.

Springing up, he clutched Elisha. Like an old man of the sea, he kept behind the stupid fellow, dragging him back toward the wall. Fiercely, The Condor returned The Shadow's fire.

Bullets from automatics; bullets from revolver – all zoomed wide. The Shadow, weaving across the floor, was trying to clip The Condor without striking Elisha. He knew that the nephew was an innocent party to crime.

THE CONDOR

The Condor, in turn, could not follow with his shots because he had Elisha as too heavy a shield. Between the lamplights this strange duel thundered, The Condor fighting to retain the living barrier between himself and The Shadow.

Suddenly, The Shadow dived forward to the center of the room. His automatics clattered to the floor. The Condor cried out in wild elation. He thought that he had wounded his black-clad foe. He stared, peering from the edge of Elisha's shoulder as he saw The Shadow seize upon a cylinder.

Treft fired one wild shot as The Shadow twisted the heavy burden. He was swinging it horizontally; with a terrific lunge, he sent it bowling forward along the floor as Treft fired again.

This bullet clipped The Shadow's arm. Off balance, he had slipped as he sought to dive along the floor. A slight wound only; but it made The Shadow slump slightly as his side struck heavily.

Treft had no chance to follow up his lucky stroke. The Shadow's full force had been behind that cylinder. Spinning across the floor, it clipped Elisha's ankles and whisked the miller's nephew from his feet.

As Elisha sprawled, hands foremost, Treft floundered also. Elisha flattened, then came puffing to his hands and knees, his breath knocked out by the sudden upset.

The Condor was flung clear. He landed on his knees and swayed dizzily while The Shadow, twisting forward on the floor, shot his uninjured arm toward one automatic.

Savagely, The Condor aimed. He fired hastily as The Shadow performed a quick roll. The Condor's shot zoomed wide. Hard upon the revolver blast, The Shadow's automatic roared its fire-tongued reply.

While the echoes of that shot still quivered through the mill, The Condor sprawled, face forward, to the grimy floor. His clutching claw lost its gun. His snarling lips spat incoherently. His frame quivered, then lay still. The Shadow's bullet had reached Treft's heartless breast.

ELISHA, quivering in a corner, saw The Shadow rise. He watched the cloaked avenger open a cylinder. Gold coins poured out upon the floor. This tube was one that The Condor had used to pack some of the precious metal – as much as it would hold without sinking.

Another tube disgorged stacks of bundled currency. A silver casket clattered on the floor. The Shadow pounced upon the object and opened it. He saw the false pearls that Cliff Marsland had carried to Mountview Lodge. The fake Blue Pearl was centered in the velvet.

Elisha whimpered fearfully as a fierce laugh came from The Shadow's hidden lips. Sinister, eerie, it rose to an echoing burst of sardonic mirth. The Shadow swept past the bodies of Treft and Zegler, the room still ringing with his triumph laugh.

The Shadow had taken back his own possession. The false pearls gone, Cliff Marsland would need no alibi for the part that he had played in The Shadow's service. Within the next few days, Michael Walpin would be the astonished recipient of his own genuine pearls. They would reach him from some unknown sender.

Elisha, still whining, heard the last shudders of The Shadow's laugh. Blinking, the dullard no longer saw the black-cloaked form. The Shadow, his last strokes delivered, had departed to the outer darkness. But Elisha dared not move. He still felt terror of the weird shape that he had seen.

THE CONDOR

The Shadow had reached the autogyro. He gave an order; the motor throbbed. Huge blades whirled; the strange craft rose precipitously from the open space beside the mill. Ground dwindled away as it hovered higher.

Peering down from the darkened sky, The Shadow spied tiny lights speeding along the west road. They were turning into the byway that led to the old mill. Harry had learned where the outlet from the cave could be found. The Shadow had explained it during their ride tonight.

Spoils of The Condor lay waiting on the floor of the old mill. The law would soon hold that wealth, to deliver it to the owners whom The Condor's brood had robbed. The law would find Griscom Treft also. The Condor had escaped capture, to find death.

From high in the darkened sky sounded a quivering laugh. A dirge to men of crime; another token of The Shadow's victory. Swishing winds submerged the eerie cry. The Shadow, triumphant, was riding into his chosen realm of night.

THE END