



THE CREEPING DEATH

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CHAPTER I. DYING WORDS

A DOUBLE row of taxicabs and automobiles came to a stop on the street in front of the Metrolite Hotel. Motors roared and horns honked as impatient drivers waited for the Broadway traffic to clear. They were in the midst of one of the heavy jams that nightly congest the streets of Manhattan.

In one cab, a man leaned forward into the front seat and spoke to the driver. He was terse in his tone as he held out a dollar bill and gave an order.

"This is close enough," he said. "Let me out here. I'll walk over to the hotel."

The driver accepted the money; the passenger left the cab and threaded his way among the halted vehicles until he reached the sidewalk near the Metrolite Hotel. With quick strides he completed the last yards of his short trip, and entered the revolving door.

The Metrolite Hotel was one of Manhattan's newest and most popular hostelrys that specialized in moderate rates. Its lobby, although not large, was elegantly furnished, and constantly frequented by the guests. The arrival of one individual was nothing to excite particular interest.

Hence the man who had left the taxicab scarcely looked to either side as he approached the desk and made an inquiry of the clerk in charge.

"You have kept my room for me?" he asked. "Room 1414 as I requested when I left yesterday?"

The clerk hesitated a moment as he surveyed the man before him. Then he recognized the sober, quiet face, with its keen eyes and short-clipped mustache.

"Ah, yes," he said. "Of course we have kept your room, Mr. Fitzroy. Here is the key."

"No messages?"

"I don't think so"—the clerk turned to a stack of envelopes—"Fitzroy—Fitzroy -"

"Jerry Fitzroy."

"No messages."

The man with the mustache turned toward the elevator. He walked with briskness and precision. Jerry Fitzroy was square-shouldered, but slight in build. He carried himself with a challenging air across the lobby.

THE brief conversation between Fitzroy and the clerk had carried very little information. It had revealed the simple facts that Jerry Fitzroy had returned to the Metrolite Hotel after a short absence, and would be quartered in his regular room—No. 1414. Yet that meager information was of great interest to one man stationed in the lobby.

Hardly had Jerry Fitzroy disappeared; scarcely had the clerk turned to talk to another guest; before a young man arose from a chair close to the desk and walked to the telephone booths in another part of the lobby.

Entering a booth, this man called a number and waited thoughtfully until he heard a low, quiet voice on the other end of the line. This voice announced itself with two words:

"Burbank speaking."

"This is Vincent," declared the man in the booth. "He is back. Same room."

"Report received. No further instructions."

The distant receiver clicked. The young man left the phone booth and strolled through the lobby out into the street.

No one could possibly have suspected that this brief episode had taken place. Yet in that brief conversation, Harry Vincent, agent of The Shadow, had relayed to Burbank, another trusted agent, the fact that Jerry Fitzroy had returned to the Metrolite Hotel.

UP in Room 1414, Jerry Fitzroy was removing his coat and vest. He placed these articles of apparel on a chair, and sat down at a writing desk in the corner. He stared speculatively through the open French window, past a little balcony outside. Then he arose and went to his coat.

For a moment his hand rested upon the side pocket of the garment; then, with a slight laugh, Fitzroy returned to the writing desk and again pondered.

Although this quiet-faced man appeared neither worried nor hasty, his keen concentration showed that he was deep in thought, reviewing certain events with the utmost care.

He seemed oblivious to his surroundings, entirely ignorant of the fact that his presence in New York had awakened the interest of so strange a being as The Shadow.

For the very name of The Shadow was synonymous with mystery. He and those who served him were the sworn enemies of crime and evil. Where danger and death lurked, there did the hand of The Shadow appear to thwart and reveal the schemes of insidious monsters!

Again, Jerry Fitzroy returned to his coat. He brought out a pipe and a tobacco pouch, filled the pipe, and lighted it. He stared from the window, puffing; then, his plans apparently completed, he laid the pipe upon the desk and drew open the drawer.

Fitzroy picked up a sheet of hotel stationery. As he started to draw the paper from the drawer, it slipped from his fingers. He gripped the sheet again, and laid it on the table. He reached for the pen. It dropped from his grasp as he placed it with the paper.

The man's forehead furrowed in a puzzled manner as he looked at his left hand and slowly moved the fingers. Fitzroy laughed, in a hollow manner. He raised the pen in his right hand, and dipped it in an inkwell. He stared at his right hand. It, too, seemed numb.

Shrugging his shoulders, Fitzroy attempted to write.

Now his puzzlement became concern. The letters that he scrawled upon the paper were illegible. He dropped the pen and looked at both hands. He tried to move his fingers. He failed.

Shaking his wrists, Fitzroy attempted to restore normal action to his hands. The shaking became mechanical. The wrists, too, were rigid!

The man's forearms pumped up and down like pistons. They slowly lost their motion. With hands helpless upon his knees, Fitzroy gasped and moved his shoulders up and down, a look of horror clouding his features. The motion of the shoulders ended.

With a hoarse cry, Fitzroy attempted to rise from his chair. His body strained under the effort. He gained his feet and tottered; then, as his legs succumbed, Fitzroy fell headlong upon the desk!

Directly before his terror-stricken eyes lay the telephone. With panic overcoming him, Fitzroy swung his head and knocked the instrument on its side. The receiver fell loose from the hook.

"Help me"—Fitzroy's words were blurted—"quickly—a doctor! Room 1414—I may be dying!"

With that, the man lost his balance and rolled away from the desk, falling heavily upon the floor. He lay there, gasping, his head moving from side to side, his eyes bulging with horror.

MINUTES were moving by. The form on the floor had gained the rigidity of a corpse—all but the head, which moved from side to side with the monotonous motion of a pendulum.

Help! When would it arrive?

The head turned upward as the ears, still hearing, detected a sound at the window. The eyes, wildly

staring, focused themselves upon a living being. Stepping through from the balcony was a form in black.

For a long, weird moment, Fitzroy viewed the personage who had entered. This strange visitor was garbed in a long, flowing cloak. His face was obscured by a slouch hat. All that Fitzroy could see were two piercing eyes that glowed from mysterious depths as they viewed the plight of the man on the floor.

With the grip of death upon him, Fitzroy fancied that he was entering another world. The very sight of this phantom brought confusing thoughts to his terror-racked mind. The figure was stooping toward him!

Then came an interruption. A noise outside the door—a rattle of the lock—the door of the room was opening. Vaguely, Fitzroy saw the black form turn swiftly and merge with the outside darkness of the balcony.

Fitzroy tried to change the direction of his gaze, to look toward the door of the room. He failed. The muscles of his neck were paralyzed!

Men were in the room now—men who knew nothing of that strange visitor who had disappeared—men who saw only the pitiful shape of Jerry Fitzroy, prone upon the floor. They were stooping over this victim of an outlandish malady. A house detective and the hotel physician—both were looking into those glassy eyes.

Jerry Fitzroy's gaze was rigid. The muscles of his eyeballs were no longer functioning. His ears were scarcely hearing. The questions of those who had come to aid him were like distant voices, faint and obscure.

With an effort, the dying man attempted to respond. His lips moved, but no sound came from them. He seemed to sense the lack. He forced out words despite the invisible grip that seemed to clutch his throat. Yet even those words were articulate only in part.

"Tell—mark—secret -"

"Secret mark -"

The terse response came from the doctor.

Jerry Fitzroy's lips moved; then ceased. Only the eyes remained open; eyes that were seeing, for a light shone in them. Then, gradually, that light faded. The eyes still stared, but they did not see!

The physician arose from beside the body and stood with folded arms. He turned to the house detective.

"You heard what he said?" the doctor asked.

"Yes," replied the detective. "'Tell mark secret.' Something about a secret mark."

As the doctor nodded, the detective strode quickly to the window. He flashed a light along the balcony. The glare revealed nothing. The detective stepped back into the room.

The doctor was examining the dead man. He seemed a trifle puzzled by the twisted rigidity of Jerry Fitzroy's body. He shook his head doubtfully.

"A strange form of paralysis," he declared. "It must have ended muscular activity completely before it affected the brain. I shall call the police and have them send a medical examiner."

He paused as he juggled the hook of the telephone. He spoke thoughtfully to the detective.

"Remember those words," he said. "Those words about a secret mark. They may be important. Only you and I were here to hear them."

The detective acquiesced with a nod. He thought that the doctor was correct. Yet both the sleuth and the physician were but half right. The words that Jerry Fitzroy had uttered were important; but they had been heard by another than these two.

From the darkness of the balcony, The Shadow had been listening. Somewhere—not far away—The Shadow, too, was pondering over the significance of those dying words!

CHAPTER II. THE HAND FROM THE DARK

A SECRET mark?

The questioner was Detective Joe Cardona of the New York force. Standing beside the desk in Room 1414 of the Metrolite Hotel, he put the inquiry to the house detective and the hotel physician.

"Tell mark secret," declared the doctor. "Those were the only words we heard him say."

Cardona paced up and down the room. He looked toward the open window. He stared at the body on the floor, which the medical examiner had just inspected. Cardona walked to the writing desk and curiously surveyed the small collection of articles that had been taken from Jerry Fitzroy's pockets.

Two objects commanded Cardona's attention. One was a French coin—a gold twenty-franc piece. The other was a mottled brown feather.

"Outside of these"—Cardona indicated the two articles—"there's nothing of importance except those papers that show this fellow's name was Jerry Fitzroy. But a foreign coin and a bird feather—why was he carrying them?"

No one answered the question. The medical examiner was approaching to make his report.

"An unusual form of paralysis," he declared. "A natural death. I see nothing to indicate violence."

The house physician nodded to show his agreement with his medical colleague.

"All right," said Cardona gruffly. "I'll be here a while. You stay" - he nodded to the house detective—"and we can talk this over."

As a matter of routine, Joe Cardona knew that all that remained was to order the removal of the body of Jerry Fitzroy. Yet before he sent that rigid form to the morgue, the detective was desirous of learning the answer to the questions that perplexed him.

The Metrolite sleuth watched while Cardona walked across the room and stared out upon the balcony. Cardona had a high reputation in New York. He was a crime solver in a class by himself. But here was a case that had no evidence of crime.

Cardona sat at the writing desk. He studied the unfinished scrawl that Jerry Fitzroy had begun. He grumbled in a dissatisfied tone. A man of intuition, Cardona sensed foul play, even though he could not trace it.

At last Cardona shrugged his shoulders. He reached for the telephone, intending to call and give orders for the removal of Jerry Fitzroy. At that moment, the phone bell rang. Cardona, answering it, heard the voice of one of his men.

"We just arrested a man in the lobby," was the information. "He came in here, asking for Jerry Fitzroy -"

"What's his name?" demanded Cardona.

"He won't tell us. Wants to talk with you -"

"Bring him up."

Cardona smiled grimly as he hung up the receiver. Here might be a clew. An unknown visitor, coming to visit Jerry Fitzroy after the man had died.

The house detective waited with interest. He wanted to see Cardona in action, grilling this man whom the police had arrested.

THERE was a knock at the door. The house detective opened it to admit two plain-clothes men who were bringing in a stocky, heavy man whose swarthy face was emotionless. Cardona studied the man who had been taken into custody.

"See what he's got on him," he ordered.

The plain-clothes men made a quick frisk. They brought forth a businesslike automatic, and handed it to Cardona. The detective stared at the captive.

"Carrying a gun, eh?" he demanded. "What do you know about this?"

The swarthy man was staring at the still form of Jerry Fitzroy. Cardona prompted him with another question.

"What's your name?"

"You are in charge here?" the prisoner asked quietly.

"Yes," declared Cardona.

"May I speak with you privately?"

A look of perplexity came over Cardona's face. The request was an unusual one. Cardona suspected a ruse. At last he nodded to the plain-clothes men.

"Go on outside," he ordered. "You, too"—he nodded to the house detective—"and wait by the door. There'll be no trouble here."

As the men obeyed, Cardona drew a revolver from his pocket and motioned the prisoner to a chair in the corner of the room. A few moments later, Cardona and the swarthy man were alone. Cardona was glowering and suspicious; the suspect was calm and expressionless.

"Spill it," ordered Cardona. "Your name -"

"Victor Marquette," came the response, in a quiet voice. "I don't suppose that you have ever heard of me. I keep well under cover. I am a secret-service agent."

"With the secret service -"

While Cardona spoke Vic Marquette calmly drew back his coat and turned back the inside of his vest. Cardona saw the badge that gleamed there.

"That is why I wanted a private discussion," announced Marquette. "There are certain reasons why I do not want my identity known to any but yourself."

Cardona, knowing that the man was genuine, calmly pocketed his revolver. Marquette's words explained why he had been carrying an automatic.

The secret-service man's next statement brought a new revelation.

"I am also anxious," added Marquette, "that Fitzroy's identity should not be known. He is—or was—a secret-service man also."

"Ah!" Cardona's exclamation denoted understanding. "You and he were working together."

"No," responded Marquette, shaking his head. "Fitzroy was working alone. I did not know he was here. But I received a call a short while ago, telling me to meet Fitzroy here at the Metrolite Hotel."

"A call from whom?"

"I do not know. Probably some one whom Fitzroy had instructed to call me. I came here, only to be arrested by your men. I was amazed to learn that Fitzroy was dead. How did he die?"

"Paralysis. Natural death, apparently. But if you think -"

"I suspect nothing"—Marquette was thoughtful—"but I should like to know any peculiar circumstances -"

"Fitzroy spoke before he died," interposed Cardona. "He said something about a secret mark -"

"A secret mark -"

"Yes." Cardona drew a paper from his pocket. "This is what the hotel physician and the house detective said. Fitzroy, just before he died, was trying to speak. His words could not be understood, except these three: 'Tell mark secret.' Those words seemed to be part of a sentence -"

"Wait a moment"—Marquette was smiling—"I think I understand. I know what Fitzroy was trying to say. 'Tell mark secret'—with little gaps between -"

"Yes—with gaps between."

"In full, 'Tell Victor Marquette of the secret service'—or something to that effect."

CARDONA was thoughtful for a moment. Then he slowly nodded. He saw the connection.

"You've got it!" he declared. "He wanted to get in touch with you. That was the idea, eh?"

"Of course. Fitzroy knew I was in New York. He would naturally have tried to communicate with me. Did you find any articles upon his person?"

Cardona pointed to the writing desk. Marquette arose and went in that direction. Cardona indicated the gold coin; also the feather.

"What do you make of those?" he asked.

"The coin"—Marquette was thoughtful—"well, any secret-service man might pick up one of those. The feather—hm-m-m—it's odd, but hardly significant. But just a moment—where's Fitzroy's badge?"

Cardona looked puzzled.

"We went through his pockets," he said.

"Including his watch pocket?" asked Marquette.

"We may have missed that," admitted Cardona.

Marquette stooped over the body. He reached into the watch pocket of Fitzroy's trousers and brought out a secret-service badge.

"Fitzroy always carried the badge in his watch pocket," observed Marquette. "Poor Fitz"—he looked solemnly at the body—"I didn't expect to find him dead."

"There's no evidence of murder," declared Cardona, "but the whole affair looks bad to me -"

"What are you doing with the body?" questioned Marquette.

"Sending it to the morgue," responded Cardona, "unless you have some other plan."

"Send it there," said Marquette solemnly. "The less talk about this, the better. Fitzroy—this is strictly confidential—was engaged upon certain work of investigation. I see nothing to indicate that he was murdered. Nevertheless, it would be a great mistake to have it known that he was a secret-service man. You understand?"

"Send the body to the morgue. I shall see to its identification, with very little said."

Cardona nodded. He pointed to the articles on the table.

"You want those?" he asked.

"Yes," said Marquette. "I can assure you that if Fitzroy was involved in any dangerous business, it must have taken place outside of New York. I may be able to trace his activities. If so -"

"I get you."

Cardona walked to the door of the room. He summoned the men who were outside. They entered, surprised to see Marquette standing free.

"This man is all right," said Cardona gruffly. "He's an old friend of Fitzroy's. We're sending the body to the morgue. That's all."

He followed the three, and spoke in a low tone to the house detective. The two were outside the door during the discussion. Vic Marquette was leaning over the body while they were absent.

With deliberate action, Marquette slipped his fingers into Fitzroy's watch pocket and drew forth a small slip of paper. His back turned toward the door, Marquette examined the paper.

He had noticed it when he had withdrawn Fitzroy's badge, but had made no comment. The slip was a railroad coupon, indicating a cash fare paid from a town named Westbrook Falls to New York City.

Marquette was standing by the desk when Cardona returned with the house detective. In his hand, the secret-service man was holding an envelope.

Within that envelope, he had placed the slip of paper that he had found.

"These two articles"—Vic Marquette picked up the coin and the feather—"may be of some importance. I shall study them."

He dropped the two objects into the envelope and carelessly laid the latter on the desk. He took the rest of Fitzroy's belongings and put them in another envelope. Cardona nodded his approval.

"I think," said Cardona, "that we can tell this man the circumstances -" He was indicating the house detective.

Marquette was thoughtful; then gave his approval. In a low tone, Cardona explained Marquette's connection with the secret service.

"Nothing is to be said," warned Marquette. "I know what Fitzroy was doing. He probably gained some results. It will be my job to follow out his work."

POLICEMEN arrived to take the body to the morgue. The dead form of Jerry Fitzroy was carried from the room. Cardona and Marquette followed, and stood just outside the door.

The envelopes which Marquette had used were lying, unsealed, upon the writing desk.

It was then that a strange incident occurred.

While the men at the door were watching the removal of Fitzroy's body, something moved inward from the blackness outside the window. A human arm reached toward the desk. A black-gloved hand plucked the envelope that contained the coin, the feather, and the railway coupon.

A few minutes later, Cardona and Marquette returned to the room. They were preparing to leave. Vic Marquette picked up the two envelopes. The one that had been removed, was now replaced in its former position, by the same hand that had taken it.

The detective and the secret-service man went down the elevator together. They shook hands and parted outside the Metrolite Hotel. They went in opposite directions.

Alone, Vic Marquette opened the more important of the two envelopes. Standing near a light, he quickly examined the three articles. He smiled as he held the twenty-franc piece. He nodded as he looked at the railroad coupon; he frowned as he held the feather.

The significance of two articles was plain to Vic Marquette as he went on his way. The gold coin and the railway coupon held a definite meaning. The feather—despite the fact that Marquette had expressed no interest regarding it to Cardona—might also be important. What it meant was something Vic Marquette intended to learn.

One matter perplexed the secret-service man. To-night, as he had told Cardona, he had received a call, telling him to come to the Metrolite Hotel, to meet Jerry Fitzroy. Marquette had answered that call immediately.

The message had been sent after Fitzroy was dead—not before! The person who had communicated by telephone—a man who spoke in a quiet voice—had given no statement of identity. This was puzzling. It indicated the presence of an unknown person in the maze that surrounded the death of Jerry Fitzroy.

Nevertheless, Vic Marquette was not worrying about the identity of the unknown informant when he boarded a sleeper for Westbrook Falls, some time after midnight. The secret-service man was content with the thought that he possessed the only clues to Jerry Fitzroy's actions—and that of those clues, the most important was his alone.

He had the railway coupon that told where Jerry Fitzroy had been. He, only, had connected the mystery with the town of Westbrook Falls, wither he was now traveling!

With all his confidence, Vic Marquette was mistaken: A hand from the dark had performed a deed to-night. That hand had plucked the evidence, had carried it to unseen eyes, and had returned it, unknown!

A gold coin—a railway coupon—a feather! The secret of strange doings rested upon three clues. Vic Marquette had kept that information from Joe Cardona; but he had not kept it from the hidden figure who had been shrouded in the darkness of the balcony.

The Shadow, too, knew of those mysterious clues!

His hand had come from the dark to gain them!

CHAPTER III. THE SHADOW PLANS

A BLACK-SHROUDED room, lighted only by the weird glow of a bluish light that shone upon the polished surface of a flat-topped table. Two hands, moving like pale white creatures beneath the circle of light. A mysterious gem that glimmered from a tapering third finger.

The Shadow was in his sanctum!

Somewhere in Manhattan, secluded in a spot known to himself alone, this strange being was at work! Only his moving hands denoted his presence; only the glowing jewel, a fire opal that constantly changed in hue, revealed the identity of the hands.

To police, as well as to criminals, The Shadow was a figure of mystery. His place lay in that borderland between the realm of law and the dominion of the underworld. A strange figure—a weird presence—his very identity was a matter of vague conjecture.

Who was The Shadow?

Many had asked that question. None had answered it!

Those who had encountered The Shadow had seen him only as a figure garbed in black—a tall, sinister form that came and departed as a phantom of the night.

Time and again, fierce wolves of the underworld had been thwarted by that sinister shape. Fiends of crime had faced the being in black, had met the burning gaze of eyes deep-set beneath the brim of a slouch hat, and had died with gasps of terror on their lips.

Minions of the law, too, had experienced the presence of The Shadow. More than once, a black-gloved hand, thrust from the folds of a crimson-lined cloak, had reached to rescue those who combated the hordes of evil.

Helpless men and women, doomed to die by the design of criminal plotters, had found salvation through the timely efforts of The Shadow. Yet none had seen the face of the being in black. In all his missions of retribution, The Shadow had departed; he was still unknown!

The voice of The Shadow, although a clue to his identity, had never enabled any one to trace him. When The Shadow spoke, his words were eerie utterances that chilled all hearers. More spectral than the voice was the laugh of The Shadow. When its mocking tones resounded, evil-doers trembled at the sound.

On certain nights, the voice of The Shadow was heard over the radio, on a national hook-up. With it came the echoing tones of the gibing laugh.

Shrewd persons had sought to learn the identity of The Shadow by watching the broadcasting station, but their efforts had been constantly frustrated. The Shadow spoke from a curtained room, where no one dared enter. His method of entrance and departure was known only to himself.

When daring crooks had hidden within the room to await the arrival of The Shadow, their purpose had been artfully thwarted by The Shadow's uncanny forethought. His voice had come to the studio over telephonic connection to a distant point!

OF all his amazing activities, none were more important to The Shadow than those which took place in this black-walled sanctum, where two white hands, one wearing that priceless fire opal known as a girasol, were the only shapes in view. Here it was that The Shadow formulated his plans and received reports from his trusted agents. Sworn to secrecy, ready to risk death in service of their master, these agents of The Shadow were faithful men; yet despite their contact with the being in black, they, too, lived in ignorance of his identity!

They knew only what others suspected: that The Shadow was a master of disguise, who assumed many identities that were not his own. These agents had witnessed the prowess of The Shadow. Had they told their truthful stories, their statement would not have been credited. For the power of The Shadow surpassed all belief.

To-night, The Shadow was engaged in a deep and careful study. Before him, on the polished table, lay typewritten papers; reports compiled by his agents. The long white hands were fingering these carefully compiled records with care.

One sheet of paper bore the typewritten heading:

Foreign Coinage Report

This sheet was the top one of several that were carefully clipped together.

The Shadow's finger moved down the paragraph, passing one page and following through another, stopping momentarily as it rested on certain sentences. These were the most important statements that were noted:

The suspicion of counterfeit gold coins now rests upon Peruvian and Bolivian currency in addition to that of the Argentine.

Reports of investigation in France, Italy, and Australia not received.

Coins possessing specific gravity of gold and meeting other tests have yielded base metals when melted.

Foreign reports lacking as coins not suspected as counterfeits have not been melted in the countries where coined.

No trace of source of this cheap alloy which is virtually synthetic gold.

Only test appears to be melting, hence no samples of counterfeit coins remain as existing counterfeits pass as genuine.

Secret-service investigation under way.

Turning to an appended sheet, The Shadow's finger rested upon a paragraph that included the name of Jerry Fitzroy as a special agent assigned to the work of tracing counterfeiting activities. The name of Vic Marquette also appeared.

Laying aside the report, The Shadow inspected another document. This was headed:

Gold Mining Report

Again, the moving finger pointed out certain items in the paragraphs:

The steady production of gold from the New Era Mine in California has created unusual interest.

Generally believed that this mine had been fully worked and about to be abandoned.

Development of new veins has created a heavy demand for stock offered by New Era Mining Syndicate.

Rumor of mine being "salted" is not credited as no outside source of supply has been noted.

Steady production of gold is out of proportion to possible gain through sale of stock.

Clifford Forster, controller of New Era Syndicate, is constantly on ground in California.

THE papers lay still upon the table. The hand of The Shadow drew forth a white sheet and a pen. But before the fingers began to write even while the pen was poised above the paper—a tiny light glowed beyond the table.

The left hand, with its radiant girasol, reached forward and brought back a pair of ear phones. These disappeared beyond the fringe of light; then the lamp clicked off.

A solemn voice spoke amid the darkness—a low, whispered voice that sounded hollow in the blackness of that shrouded room.

"Report."

A quiet tone came over the wire.

"Burbank speaking. Word from Burke, in California. Received, in code, by Rutledge Mann. Report on Clifford Forster. Has left New Era Mine for the East."

"Exact destination?"

"Probably New York—to-morrow night. Traveling alone. Sent word to his home in New York that he might be there to-morrow. No other facts available."

"Report received."

The little light was extinguished. The ear phones were replaced. Connection was ended. The glare of the lamp appeared; the hand of The Shadow poised above the sheet of paper.

The hand wrote a single word at the top of the paper. That word was the name:

Fitzroy

Beneath the name, the hand inscribed these cryptic statements:

Where: The railway coupon.

Why: The French coin.

Who: The partridge feather

The hand moved away. Only the words remained emblazoned upon the sheet of paper in vivid blue ink, surveyed by invisible eyes that studied them from the darkness.

Then, as though responding to an unseen touch, those words began to vanish. First the name of Fitzroy disappeared, letter by letter; after that, the other words were lost in the same uncanny fashion. Only the blank piece of paper remained!

These words, written in the amazing disappearing ink used by The Shadow, had been like uttered thoughts. Now they were gone, existing only in the brain of the one who had inscribed them.

Two facts had been mentioned here that would have been obvious to Vic Marquette, the secret-service man who had gone back over Fitzroy's trail. These were the facts that Jerry Fitzroy, investigating the matter of spurious foreign coinage, had gone to a place named Westbrook Falls.

But the final fact—the identity of the person whom Fitzroy had visited—had been divined by The Shadow alone.

To Vic Marquette, the presence of the feather in Fitzroy's pocket was a mystery. To The Shadow, it was a proclamation of an unknown identity. Vic Marquette had looked upon the feather as one from any bird; The Shadow had recognized it as a partridge feather.

What was the connection between some unknown person and that feather? This was a problem that The Shadow was prepared to solve. But when the hand again appeared beneath the light, the new words that it wrote referred to another subject.

Again a name was inscribed in that ink of vivid blue—a name that was followed by carefully written comments:

Clifford Forster.

Home in New York.

To-morrow evening.

The light clicked out. The ear phones clattered slightly as they were lifted by unseen hands. A tiny bulb gleamed as the voice of The Shadow whispered across the wire to Burbank.

"Post Vincent at the home of Clifford Forster. Immediate report upon Forster's return."

The ear phones were back; the glow was gone; the room was in total darkness. The Shadow's plans were made. Vic Marquette had gone to Westbrook Falls; but while he was absent, a new trail would be opening, here in Manhattan.

Temporarily ignoring the events that had preceded the death of Jerry Fitzroy, The Shadow was training his observation upon a man who had been far away, but who soon would be in New York.

To-morrow night would be the test. From Clifford Forster, wealthy mining promoter, The Shadow would gain information relating to a riddle that involved events of international importance.

Where death once struck, death would strike again. To Vic Marquette, the demise of Jerry Fitzroy had been an unfortunate incident. To The Shadow, it meant the beginning of a reign of fiendish crime.

A laugh resounded through the blackness. It was a harsh, mirthless laugh, that laugh of The Shadow. It carried none of the mockery which the hidden being so often uttered. It was a laugh that denoted the grimness of the game ahead.

The lure of gold—that lust that has made men kill throughout the ages—was at work. Heinous crime was the ruling motive in the minds of evil villains.

To The Shadow was given the duty of thwarting great crime. Shrouded by darkness, a hidden factor in the cross-purposes of scheming men, he had planned to-night.

The echoes of the laugh rippled through the sanctum as though caught and shaken forth by the motionless curtains that covered the walls of the black room. The echoes died away like the cries of distant, spectral beings.

The sanctum was now empty. The Shadow had departed.

Two forces were already at work to oppose the crime that threatened. One, The Shadow, had planned and issued his orders. His work began in New York.

The other, Vic Marquette, was directed at the point of Jerry Fitzroy's last activity—Westbrook Falls.

A giant struggle was already in the making!

CHAPTER IV. AT WESTBROOK FALLS

ON the following afternoon, an eastbound limited came to a stop at the little station of Westbrook Falls. Several persons alighted from the train, among them a bulky, full-jowled, middle-aged man who was carrying a suitcase.

There were three or four men lounging about the platform. One of them, a stocky, firm-jawed individual, eyed the various people who had left the train. This observer, standing in an obscure portion of the platform, was none other than Vic Marquette.

The secret-service man watched the newly arrived passengers go to the dilapidated automobiles that served as cabs between the station and Westbrook inn, half a mile away. Satisfied that all—among them the bulky man—were going to the hotel, Marquette strolled away.

Had he been closer to the vehicle in which the bulky man placed himself, Vic Marquette might have learned something of interest. For when the driver asked his passenger if he were going to Westbrook Inn, the reply was in the negative.

A short, low conversation transpired between the newcomer and the cabman. The driver nodded his head, and the car pulled away.

But although Vic Marquette had failed to catch this conversation, the words between driver and passenger had been overheard by another bystander.

A thin, dark-faced man garbed in khaki trousers and flannel shirt, was standing quite close to the car, and his teeth glistened in a broad smile as he watched the vehicle depart. Shortly afterward, he, too, walked away from the station.

The cab in which the bulky gentleman was riding started up the road toward the inn; but turned off after it had gone less than a quarter mile. It rolled along a side road, crossed a bridge over a deep ravine, and swung through the woods.

After a trip of some four miles, the car emerged from the woods and skirted the fringe of a deep gorge—a continuance of the stream that ran through the woods.

This chasm was below the falls, which were back in the neighborhood of the hotel. The roar of rapids, far below, was audible to the man riding in the car, and he peered from the window, trying to catch a glimpse of the river beneath.

Then the car swung away from the gorge and traveled beside a high picket fence, running at right angles to the river. The fence turned, running parallel with the stream, and the road also went in that direction. The automobile stopped in front of an iron gate in the center of the fence.

"Here we are, sir," informed the driver. "This is Mr. Partridge's place. Guess you'll find him at home. He's always here."

THE bulky man alighted, paid the driver, and told him to stand by. He rang a bell on the gate. A dark, evil-faced man appeared on the walk beyond the gate, and the stranger addressed him through the bars.

"Is Mr. Partridge at home?"

"Who wants to see him?"

The dark man's reply had a surly foreign tone—the voice of an Italian poorly acquainted with English.

"I am Clifford Forster," said the visitor.

A gleam of understanding flashed in the dark man's face. He grinned, showing yellow, fanglike teeth. He unbarred the gate.

Clifford Forster waved the driver of the cab away, and entered the confines of this strange domain.

The dark-complexioned man led the way to a house among the trees. They reached the building—an old frame structure of considerable size—and the man who was conducting Forster motioned to the visitor to enter.

Up the steps, across a decaying porch, into a hallway—there Forster stood face to face with a stoop-shouldered old man.

"Ah! Mr. Forster!"

The greeting came in a querulous voice. Forster, a foot taller than his host, bowed in acknowledgment.

"Come this way—come this way—into my library."

Forster, following, noted the precision of the old man's stride. He realized that the man was a very dynamo of energy; that despite his apparent age, he possessed an extraordinary degree of youthful vigor.

They entered a gloomy room, and the old man turned on a light. Closing the door, he faced Forster, who was looking about the room, noting the shelves of curious old volumes that adorned the walls. The sound of the old man's voice brought him out of his reverie.

"So here we are," chuckled the old man. "Clifford Forster and Lucien Partridge. Again we meet—this

time in my home instead of yours. Be seated, Mr. Forster. Tell me why I am honored by this unexpected visit."

Forster seated himself in a comfortable chair. He drew two fat cigars from his pocket, and offered one to Partridge. The old man declined. Forster lighted his own perfecto, and stared calmly at the old man.

"Partridge," he said, "I want to talk with you. I thought it advisable that we should get together. I have left you very much to your own resources. It has occurred to me that the time has come for closer contact."

The old man, sitting with folded hands, nodded in a vague manner, as though he did not fully understand.

They made an odd pair, these two. Forster, heavy and bulky, was a puffy-faced, dominating type of man. Partridge, with parchment skin and white hair, looked like an old professor, while his manner was almost wheedling toward his visitor.

"You agree with me, Partridge?" asked Forster.

"I am glad to have you visit me," responded Partridge. "But I do not understand. Has not all been going well? Are you not satisfied?"

"Yes," returned Forster slowly, "matters are progressing. Nevertheless—one can never be too sure of others working in his full interest."

A troubled gleam came into the old man's eyes. Forster detected it, and hastened to amend his statement.

"Do not misunderstand me, Partridge," he said. "I am not speaking of you. It is Guthrie to whom I refer."

"Ah! Guthrie. He is a fine man, Mr. Forster. He has been very patient with me. He has been ready always to listen to what I have to tell him -"

"That's just it!" interposed Forster. "Guthrie is a good listener. He is also a good promiser. It simply occurred to me that, after all, Guthrie is nothing but a go-between. It is you and I who are working together. Guthrie might prove to be a disadvantage."

"Ah! But he brought us together Mr. Forster -"

"Certainly. He has served that purpose. I want to be sure that he is still useful."

AGAIN, Lucien Partridge nodded. He was an eccentric sort of a man and his eyes held a far-away look. They also showed an expression of worry. Seeing this, Forster became blunt in his comments.

"I am a business man, Partridge," he declared. "A man who deals in big business. You are an inventor—a chemist—a scientist—a man of remarkable genius. Your work is proving valuable to me. I want it to prove more so."

"Certainly, Mr. Forster -"

"Therefore, I thought that it would be best for me to check up on Guthrie's activities. I let him conduct all negotiations with you until matters began to move. I did not want to worry you, or to disturb you. But now that you are producing, I feel that the time is ripe for our direct contact."

Forster paused and watched the old man nod. Then he continued in the same vein.

"I have made an investment in you, Partridge," he said. "An investment of more than two hundred and

fifty thousand dollars. When Lawrence Guthrie first told me of you and your synthetic gold, I laughed at him. But when I saw you at work, I was willing to invest in your genius.

"This place—house, laboratory, and all—are part of my investment. They belong to you, and here you are producing the gold that I desire—a fair return for the money that I have invested. But I am desirous of accomplishing the maximum in results. The maximum! You understand?"

"Certainly, Mr. Forster."

"Guthrie," continued Forster, "painted me a wonderful picture. I invested a quarter of a million. I was willing to invest more. I wanted to see results, and I told Guthrie so.

"At last, a few months ago, your process began to work. Since then, I have been receiving gold regularly—approximately twenty thousand dollars' worth each month.

"It seemed to me that now that the process was completed, the output would increase. Guthrie promised me that it would. But it has not. Guthrie has not explained why. So I have come to you to find out."

"My gold," said Partridge thoughtfully, "is something that I do not value in terms of money, Mr. Forster. I love to make it—to see that shining yellow gold and to know that it is my own creation.

"For a long time"—the old man's tone became reminiscent—"I sought the infallible secret. The weight of lead; the luster of copper; the polish of silver—these I sought to combine to make my gold. Ah! The processes I used"—Partridge began to close his clawlike fingers as though molding an invisible object—"the discoveries I made—the metals I formed that looked like gold—until at last I found it!"

He paused and stared at Forster with wild, glaring eyes, his lips spread in a triumphant grin.

"I found it!" Partridge's voice was a crackly, gasping scream. "I found it! I found it! Gold!"

AS though exhausted by his fervor, the old man slumped back in his chair. Forster surveyed him thoughtfully. He knew that he was dealing with a fanatic. He resolved to humor him.

"Make your gold," he said approvingly. "Make much of it. The more the better. But remember—I am the one who requires it; not Guthrie. He is nothing more than my agent."

Partridge nodded.

"You could make millions of dollars' worth," urged Forster. "Millions, instead of thousands. So Guthrie has said; but he has not acted. Make more and more -"

Forster paused as he saw the gleam in the old man's eyes. He knew that he was arousing Partridge's interest. He waited to give the old man a chance to advance a promise.

"You want millions?" questioned Partridge. "I shall give you millions! But you must remember—this secret is my own. For you only I make this gold. No one must know where it comes from."

"No one knows," declared Forster. "No one—except you, myself, and Guthrie."

"Those at your mines?"

"They know nothing."

"You are always there?"

"I have been, since the first shipment was made. I have come East— after wiring Guthrie to stop shipments—to speed up production. That is why I wired you that I would make this visit."

"I understand," nodded Partridge. "You wished to see for yourself— to learn if all that Guthrie has said is true. You would like to have me show you."

Eagerness showed on Forster's face. The man's cupidity, apparent in his every action, was stressed to the utmost.

As Lucien Partridge motioned for him to rise, Clifford Forster sprang to his feet and walked forward as the old man started toward the hall.

Outside the door, they encountered the dark-faced man who had met Forster at the gate. Noting Forster's questioning gaze, Partridge made an impromptu introduction.

"This is Vignetti," he said. "I call him my faithful Corsican. I have traveled many places—to many lands"—he smiled wanly—"and in Corsica, many years ago, I offered shelter to a young lad whose parents had been slain in one of those fearful feuds they call a vendetta. Vignetti has served me ever since."

During this explanation, the Corsican stood silent and immobile. Partridge saw that Forster was noticing this, and the old man supplied the reason.

"Vignetti speaks very little English," he declared. "Enough to inquire the business of strangers—to meet people at the gate as he met you. He is like a watchdog; and for that reason he is the very man I required here."

With a few words of Italian, the old man ordered Vignetti to follow as he led Clifford Forster through the premises.

THEY entered a large room off the hall. This formed a chemical laboratory. They descended a stairs to the basement. Here were vats and crucibles.

In one corner lay a stack of yellowish bars. Forster's glance was avid. Partridge smiled.

"Unsuccessful experiments," he said. "That metal is not gold. It represents wasted effort."

The old man unlocked a door, and they ascended stone steps to a long expanse of lawn around the house. Partridge motioned Forster forward. They passed a small tool house fifty yards from the big building; then Partridge held up his hand warningly as they came to the edge of a cliff.

Forster moved forward cautiously and peered down into the chasm. The river foamed a hundred feet beneath. On each side, as far as Forster could see, were sheer, stonewalled precipices as smooth as though they had been cloven by a mighty ax.

"These premises are immune from intruders," smiled Lucien Partridge. "No living being could scale that mass of rock."

"But the fence -"

"See there?" Partridge pointed first in one direction; then the other. "Observe how the ends of the fence project over the edge of the cliff. Now note this wire"—he indicated a cord that ran along the edge of the cliff from fence to fence—"which serves as the connecting link. This forms a network within the fence. It is insulated, only here it borders the cliff. At night, the current which passes through the wire would spell

death to any who might touch it."

"The gate?"

"That, too, is wired at night. No one can enter these grounds. You see. Mr. Forster, how well I am protecting my operations."

They walked back to the house, Forster nodding his approval more and more as he noticed burly-looking men working about the premises. With Vignetti and these others, Lucien Partridge had the necessary protection from intruders.

Greedy though he was for profits, Forster recognized these factors as necessary expenditures. But when they had reached the house, and were again standing in the library, Forster returned to his original theme.

"I must leave shortly," he said, glancing at his watch. "But before I go, I would like to talk more regarding the output -"

"Certainly," interposed the old scientist. "Wait a moment. I shall have Vignetti summon a cab to take you to the station." He spoke to the Corsican, then turned again to Forster.

"From now on," resumed Forster, "I shall keep in contact with you, Partridge. I am tired of Guthrie's promises. The output now should be one hundred thousand dollars' worth of gold a month. Perhaps more."

Partridge smiled gleefully as he raised his hand.

"Millions, Mr. Forster," he crackled, in a whisper. "You shall have millions. All that you want. So long as my secret is preserved -"

"It is known to none but myself and Guthrie."

Vignetti was returning. He spoke in Italian, and Partridge responded in the same language. The Corsican departed.

"The cab is on its way," remarked Partridge. "You are going to New York. I am returning to my laboratory. Returning to plan a greater flood of pure gold."

CLIFFORD FORSTER was elated. He listened in rapture as the old man babbled on. Vignetti reappeared, carrying a smock upon which rested a pair of long gloves.

Lucien Partridge paused to don the gloves, taking each at the wrist, and slipping his hands into the depths. Then Vignetti helped him with the smock; and the old man walked to the hall, with Forster at his elbow.

The front door was open. As they waited there, Partridge still listening eagerly, the expected cab appeared beyond the iron gate. Vignetti walked ahead to unbar the way. Partridge and Forster followed.

Halfway to the gate, the old man paused to bid his guest farewell. There was a quiet warning in the old man's voice as he said adieu.

"Your hopes will be realized," he declaimed. "Have confidence in my ability. I am working in your interest."

"Say nothing to Guthrie," advised Forster, in return. "Do not tell him that I was here. This matter concerns

us only. This has been a secret visit."

The old man nodded. He extended his gloved right hand. Forster gripped it warmly in a parting shake. Then the bulky man lumbered hurriedly to the waiting automobile.

At the railroad station, passing away ten minutes before the arrival of his train, Clifford Forster again came under the observation of two watching men—Vic Marquette and the slender individual who looked like a Spaniard.

Clifford Forster did not know that he was being watched. He was thinking of the visit he had just paid to Lucien Partridge. His mind was filled with dreams of wealth. Forster was confident that the near future held much in store for him.

Could he have seen the true future, his dreams would have turned to dread!

CHAPTER V. DEATH CREEPS

LONG shadows lurked in the misty night as Clifford Forster ascended the brownstone steps of the old house which was his New York residence. His key clicked in the lock, but before he could open the door, some one responded from the inside.

"Ah! You are in to-night, Graver," said Forster approvingly. "I did not know whether or not you had received my wire."

"I am always here, Mr. Forster," responded the tall, solemn-faced man who had answered the door.

"You are a good caretaker, Graver," rejoined Forster. "I shall not need you to-night, however. I am going in the library, and when the doorbell rings, I shall answer it myself. I am expecting a visitor."

"Very well, sir."

Forster watched Graver go upstairs. Then he went into the library, a room at the side of the house. This room was damp and musty. The windows were closed, and the curtains drawn.

Outside, the street was dark. The temporary glow of light that had revealed Forster entering the door no longer showed. But in that darkness, a man was emerging from an alleyway opposite the house.

This individual, clad in a dark suit, walked briskly along the street, away from the house. He entered a small store, and went into a telephone booth. It was Harry Vincent, calling Burbank to notify him that Clifford Forster had arrived in New York.

While Harry Vincent was thus engaged, footsteps again resounded on the sidewalk in front of Forster's home. A man ascended the steps and rang the bell. The door opened, and Clifford Forster invited the stranger in. The two went into the library.

"Well, Guthrie," inquired Forster, "what have you to report?"

The man who had joined Clifford Forster made a striking contrast to the bulky mine owner.

Lawrence Guthrie was a cadaverous individual, who looked much older than he actually was. His face was long and shrewd, his hair was thin; his eyes stared sharply and cunningly.

Now, he was looking at Forster with the evident intent of learning why the mine owner had made this surprise trip to New York.

"I got your wire," said Guthrie, in a quick, nervous voice. "I have come here as you told me; but I do not understand why you needed to see me. Matters have been going well enough."

"Well enough to suit you, perhaps," growled Forster, "but not well enough to suit me!"

"Why not?"

"Look here, Guthrie," declared Forster, in a direct tone, "we might as well have a show-down right now! I'm going to start right from the beginning."

He reached in his pocket, withdrew a parcel of folded papers, and spread them on the table.

"Here's everything," he said. "Your agreement, Partridge's agreement, a list of expenditures, everything that pertains to our transactions. So if there's any argument, we've got it in black and white. You understand?"

Guthrie looked puzzled.

"I—I don't understand -"

Clifford Forster interrupted the weak protest.

"You will understand!" he affirmed. "I'm looking into matters, coolly and impartially. You do the listening while I do the talking. Then I'll hear from you."

GUTHRIE was silent as Forster examined the documents before him. A worried expression came over the cadaverous man's brow. Nevertheless, he kept his silence and waited.

"We'll start with the beginning," declared Forster. "You are a promoter, Guthrie, and a good one. Somehow, you uncovered Lucien Partridge, who wanted to be financed in the making of synthetic gold. You aroused my interest. I met Partridge. I took a chance. I put up the money."

"That's right," agreed Guthrie.

Another pause followed. Forster was looking at the papers. Guthrie was staring at Forster. Neither man noticed an almost imperceptible motion of a window shade at the side of the room.

A long, flat shadow began to project itself across the floor, almost to the table across which Guthrie was facing Forster.

"I saw a way to make millions," continued Forster, "and I promised you your share. The terms were satisfactory to both of us. I waited while the old man got things working.

"I felt good when the first lot of gold landed at the New Era Mine a few months ago. That was the beginning. I looked to you and Partridge to keep it up."

"Which we have," said Guthrie.

"Yes," retorted Forster coldly. "You have—in dribbles! With those dribbles, you have given promises. Double the output—double that again—but you haven't done it. Why not?"

Guthrie chewed his lips.

"It's Partridge's fault," he said. "He's the one that's making the gold. I don't know anything about it -"

"Passing the buck to Partridge, eh?" questioned Forster. "That stuff doesn't go, Guthrie. What about your promises?"

"I was telling you what Partridge promised me."

"Yes? Well, why hasn't Partridge produced?"

"I thought he was producing. I've stayed away from Westbrook Falls, like I told you I would. The shipments go out from there. It would be bad business for me to be hanging around the place -"

"Some one is stalling," interrupted Forster. "It's either you or Partridge. I've talked with"—he hesitated quickly—"I've good reason to believe that you're the one to blame."

Guthrie made no answer to the implication. Slumped in his chair, he was the figure of dejection. His attitude might have been that of a guilty party; on the contrary it might have indicated an innocent man faced by unjust accusations.

"I've dealt squarely with you, Guthrie," said Forster. "Maybe I've been too much on the level. I told you from the start that this synthetic gold business would have to be handled quietly. If we told the public we were manufacturing gold, the gold market would take a drop. That's why I'm planting the yellow stuff in the New Era Mine.

"Now that I'm in the racket, I'm going the whole way. The New Era can't last indefinitely. It would excite suspicion. That's why I'm going to sell out—and start planting gold in the Procyon Mine instead of the New Era.

"After that"—Forster shrugged his shoulders—"well, why go on further? You know the game, because I let you in on it. Now it looks like you're trying to start a racket of your own."

"No! I'm playing square!" protested Guthrie. "I want to see your plans work. The more gold you get from Partridge, the bigger the cut I get -"

"Yes?" Forster's interruption was cold. "But suppose you are double-crossing me? Suppose you are holding out some of the gold Partridge is producing?"

"Maybe Partridge is holding out on you. I'm not."

"Partridge?" Forster's question was disdainful. "The value of gold means nothing to him. He's contented, now that he is established. I know your past, Guthrie; that's what makes me leery; and it puts me in a position where I can dictate.

"You've always been out for all you can get. A slick promoter, looking for easy money. Well"—Forster's pudgy lips hardened—"for once you're trying to bleed the wrong man!"

LAWRENCE GUTHRIE leaped angrily to his feet. He shook his fist at Clifford Forster, and shouted his reply to the other man's accusation.

"I'm no double-crosser!" he cried. "I'm in the middle—between you and Partridge. He's eccentric; I've got to handle him sensibly. Instead of giving me a chance, you—you -"

Leaning forward across the table, Guthrie hurled a series of loud expletives at Forster. The mine owner, his own face aglow with fury, leaped up to meet the challenge. In his haste he overturned the chair in which he had been seated.

As Guthrie still mouthed curses, Forster shot across the table and swung a futile blow. For a moment, he and Guthrie were locked in ferocious struggle; then Guthrie shoved Forster away. The bulky man caught himself at the edge of the table and stood glowering fiercely.

Guthrie, rapidly calming, was chewing his lips as though regretting what he had said. He knew that Forster held a whip hand over him; that he had made a mistake in losing his temper. He saw Forster half leaning against the edge of the table, panting heavily.

"There's no use fighting about this," declared Guthrie, in an apologetic tone. "I guess we're both wrong. Why not be reasonable about matters -"

Forster, slowly recovering from his exertion, began to move along the edge of the table. He made no threatening gesture toward Guthrie— in fact, Forster seemed almost incapable of such action. But he showed intense antagonism in the glowering look that he directed at the visitor.

"You—you"—Forster's voice was filled with growling rage— "you're trying to crawl out of it now, eh? We'll see about that— we'll see -"

Forster began to pick up the papers that lay on the desk. His hands fumbled. The documents eluded his grasp. Still staring at Guthrie, Forster kept on in his vain attempt.

Suddenly his hands seemed to become rigid; his arms lost their strength. He sank upon his elbows, and stared with bulging eyes toward his hands.

"What—what is happening?" he exclaimed, in a frightened voice. "My hands —my arms -"

He stared at Guthrie, and his voice rose to a wild scream as he saw the other man's pale face.

"You've crippled me!" screamed Forster. "I'm paralyzed! My hands— my arms —my shoulders! This is your work, Guthrie! Your work, you hound!"

Guthrie's eyes were wild as he heard these words. He backed across the room toward the door. Forster screamed new imprecations as he saw Guthrie departing.

"This is your work, Guthrie—your work -"

Guthrie opened the door and stepped quickly into the hall. He was panic-stricken now. He hastened across the hall toward the street door. As he hurried, he passed a man who was coming down the stairs. It was Graver, alarmed by the cries that he had heard.

The caretaker did not follow Guthrie. In fact, he scarcely noted the departing man, so anxious was he to reach the library, where new shouts were coming from Clifford Forster. The bulky mine owner was slumped across the table; his glassy eyes saw Graver the moment the caretaker arrived.

"Stop him!" Forster was shouting hoarsely. "Stop Guth—stop Guth" - his voice choked as he tried to pronounce the name—"stop that man -"

The rest of Forster's words were inarticulate; but Graver understood. Turning, the caretaker hastened in pursuit of Lawrence Guthrie.

The front door slammed as he ran through it to the street. A moment later there was a dull thud in the library as Clifford Forster tumbled to the floor.

The dying man was staring straight upward, his eyes glazed, his lips moving helplessly. The terrible

paralysis had reached his throat; his limbs were numbed. The creeping death was claiming another victim!

THEN those staring eyes saw a strange sight, which to Forster's feverish vision appeared to be a vista of the world beyond.

Into the range of Forster's gaze came a tall figure garbed completely in black—a being wrapped in the folds of a long cloak, with features obscured by the broad brim of a slouch hat.

The spectral form came closer. It stood above Clifford Forster; it leaned over him. The eyes of The Shadow burned like points of light as they met the stare of the dying man.

Instinctively, the numbing brain of Clifford Forster realized that here was some one who might prove a friend. The sight of those eyes cleared his fading mind. The thought of Lawrence Guthrie vanished from his clouded brain. A wild gleam of new suspicion came over him.

With a last effort, Forster tried to speak. His lips moved; his voice came in a creaky groan as he sought to pronounce the words that he desired.

The effort was too great. The trembling lips ceased their motions. Clifford Forster's bulging eyes saw no more. The creeping death had gained its victory!

Somber and motionless, The Shadow stood looking at the dead man before him. Then to those keen, hidden ears, came a sound from the street outside. The Shadow turned, and, with one gloved hand gathered up the papers that lay on the desk.

Voices sounded as the front door was thrown open. With a quick, swift stride, The Shadow moved across the room, his long cloak showing its crimson lining as it swished through the air.

When Graver and a policeman burst into the room a moment later, they saw only the dead form of Clifford Forster. The silent witness of the encounter between Forster and Guthrie—the one man who had observed Clifford Forster in his final death throes—was no longer there. Only a long shadow lay across the floor, projecting from the window. Neither Graver nor the officer observed it.

That shadowy shape silently slid away. The window curtain rustled so slightly that its sound could not be heard. The two men were alone in the room where the creeping death had struck.

The Shadow had departed. Death had done its work here. This part of crime was over. But elsewhere, The Shadow knew, more crime was breeding; the source of the evil was somewhere else!

CHAPTER VI. IN THE LABORATORY

LUCIEN PARTRIDGE was at work in his laboratory. Garbed in a stained frock, and wearing long white gloves, the old man was making a series of unusual tests. Holding a test tube in his hand, he poured a small quantity of a colorless liquid from a bottle.

To this he added a few drops of a purplish fluid; then a few grains of a reddish powder. The liquid in the test tube clouded; then changed to a brownish hue. Within it appeared tiny flakes of gold!

Partridge set the tube in a holder above a Bunsen burner. He ignited the flame and kept it at a low point. The gold flakes moved slowly within the liquid. The old man watched the results eagerly; then walked away and descended the stairs to the room below.

Here two men were standing beside a furnace. As Partridge approached, one of them leaned forward

and opened the bottom of the furnace to reveal a crucible filled with a yellowish mass of molten metal. Partridge smiled and nodded.

The door was closed, and the roar of the furnace sounded, the old man listening as though hearing music that was pleasing to his ears. He walked from the room and went upstairs. From the laboratory he went through a door that led outside.

Dusk was falling. A single star glimmered in the dulling sky. Lucien Partridge's eyes turned in that direction. But they did not notice the star. They were centered upon a chimney at the top of the building.

A spurt of flame appeared through the chimney. It died away. Then came another red spurt. Lucien Partridge chuckled. He went back into the laboratory and again stood watching the tube that glowed with flakes of gold.

The old man turned to see Vignetti entering the laboratory. He motioned to the Corsican, and the faithful servant came to stand beside him. Partridge pointed to the test tube and chuckled. Then, in a low voice, he began to speak to Vignetti.

Partridge's method of conversation was curious. He spoke in English, as though expressing his thoughts aloud. Whenever he came to certain remarks, he turned to Vignetti as he spoke, and added a few words in Italian as an interpretation.

"You see it there, Vignetti?" he questioned, as he pointed to the now boiling tube. "Perhaps I have discovered it—perhaps not. Ah— some day, Vignetti, I shall have it!"

"Gold—gold!" The old man's voice rose to a scream. "The alchemists sought it"—the voice became a whisper—"but they could not find it. They tried to transmute baser metals into gold. My way has been different. I have compounded those metals. By seeking first that which would resemble gold, I have sought to some day step beyond and form gold itself.

"Perhaps I shall fail"—the old man smiled wanly—"but it does not matter now. My false gold has brought me true gold. That is because I am clever, Vignetti."

PARTRIDGE turned off the Bunsen burner, and watched the gold flakes settle to the bottom of the muddy liquid. The old man shrugged his shoulders, and turned again to Vignetti.

"You remember that man who was here a few days ago?" he asked. "He wanted my gold, Vignetti. The real gold—not that yellow stuff that looks like gold.

"I have been giving him gold Vignetti—gold that is mine—gold that I have obtained by my own brains, in exchange for the false gold. But he wanted still more—more—more—always more.

"Well, Vignetti"—the smile kept over Partridge's lips—"we need not worry longer about him. He was too greedy, Vignetti."

The old man paused. When he spoke again, his tone became reminiscent. His English words were freely interspersed with Italian, and Vignetti listened with intent pleasure.

"You have traveled far with me, Vignetti," said Partridge. "We have been everywhere. You have seen—you have learned. The vendetta that you saw in your youth was nothing, eh, Vignetti? A few people— killing—there on one island. Those who killed were killed in turn.

"But my vendetta"—the old man's gleaming eyes found their reflection in Vignetti's flashing optics—"ah, my vendetta is with the world! One man against many—and I never fail! Not when I have you helping

me, my faithful Vignetti.

"You remember in Peking, Vignetti? My quarrel with that Chinese savant, Li Tan Chang? He knew that I sought to kill him. He would not tell me the secrets that he knew. To kill him was my only way. He tried to kill me, when he so blandly stretched forth his hand.

"But you were there, Vignetti! You knew what he meant to do. Your knife saved my life. I gained what I wanted; and with it, I learned the secret of the death that Li Tan Chang had sought to deal to me. Ah! That secret has served me well!

"Remember how I used it in Hamburg, when Tolfens, the German scientist, would not reveal his methods of experiment? Tolfens is dead - but his work goes on. It is my work, now. You have done well, Vignetti, to be faithful to me."

The old man drew himself up proudly. He stared across the room as he mechanically removed his working gloves. He gave the gloves to Vignetti. The Corsican unlocked a drawer in a table and placed the gloves at the front of the drawer.

"Gold!" Partridge pronounced the word in a tone of grandeur. "Gold! I shall have all of it, Vignetti! All that is in the world, some day. So much that I shall rule! Rule as master!

"Those men who are working for me—those friends of mine in so many lands where I have been. They are gaining wealth. Morales—Gleason—Armagnac—Pallanci—Sukulos"—the old man's lips formed other names—"they are gaining wealth; but I have more. All mine is gold—I want nothing else. Gold—gold—more gold—I shall have it. Forster wished it, but I shall have it. I have much of it now—millions!"

A crackling laugh came from the old man's throat. He seemed to be enjoying a long joke. Vignetti stood by, calmly surveying the old man. His expression showed that this eccentric conduct was a regular routine with Lucien Partridge.

"Yes, Vignetti"—the old man's new tone was cunning and calculating—"wealth is already mine. With wealth I shall have power. Other wealth cannot equal mine. My power shall never fade. Soon I shall be ready to rule the world.

"Still, I must beware. There are men who will try to shatter my power. Out of chaos, I shall rise to my great glory. I must create chaos! Death brings chaos! There are men who rule here in America. Big men of business—big men of politics—big men of power—and I shall meet them.

"As friends we shall meet—they and I. As friends they shall die! Is that not wonderful? It is better than the knife, Vignetti—for the knife is a sign of enmity.

"That is your method of vendetta that you knew in Corsica. My method is infinitely better—the method of Li Tan Chang—the method of friendship! Ha-ha-ha-ha!"

THE cackling laugh echoed through the laboratory. Even stolid Vignetti had imbibed the old man's enthusiasm. His dark face was livid with an insidious pleasure.

"Bankers—millionaires—presidents"—Partridge's tone was contemptuous—"what do I care for them? They shall die, at my bidding. Any who shall question me shall die!"

In the bright electric illumination of the laboratory, Lucien Partridge's face had gained a fierceness that was unbelievable. But now his frenzy faded. Once again he became the quiet, placid old man that Clifford Forster had found so amiable.

A bell sounded from another room. Lucien Partridge looked at Vignetti. The Corsican nodded. That bell indicated a visitor at the outer gate. The servant hurried from the laboratory, and Lucien Partridge waited by the door until he returned.

"It is Mr. Lawrence Guthrie," explained Vignetti, in his broken English, a method of speech that he frequently used in his announcements.

"Ah Guthrie!" Partridge's voice indicated pleasure.

With gleaming eyes, the old man walked into the hall. There he spoke to Vignetti in Italian. The Corsican nodded. Partridge pointed to the door and made a motion that indicated that admittance should be granted. Vignetti started for the gate.

A few minutes later, the Corsican ushered Lawrence Guthrie into the laboratory. Lucien Partridge, his lips framed in a pleasant smile, stood waiting to greet his unexpected visitor.

CHAPTER VII. GUTHRIE SPEAKS

THERE was a troubled look in Lawrence Guthrie's eyes as he faced Lucien Partridge. The old man saw that his visitor was worried. He also saw Guthrie turn an anxious glance toward Vignetti, who had entered behind him. Partridge spoke in Italian. The Corsican retired.

Guthrie, his face more cadaverous than ever, became a pathetic object the moment that he stood alone with Partridge. It was obvious that he was under a terrific strain; that he had borne up under a mental ordeal.

Now, with none but the old man to witness his plight, Guthrie collapsed upon a stool that stood beside a workbench. He turned hunted eyes toward Lucien Partridge.

"What is the matter, Guthrie?" questioned Partridge, in a solicitous tone.

"I didn't do it!" exclaimed Guthrie. "You will believe me, Partridge! I didn't do it."

His voice choked, and he buried his head upon his outstretched arms. Lucien Partridge stood quietly by; then spoke in an inquiring tone.

"What is it that you did not do?" he questioned.

Guthrie raised his head and stared, unbelieving. He saw Partridge's puzzled expression. For a moment, an elation glimmered on Guthrie's countenance; then it changed to suspicion. Partridge observed the dissimilar emotions. He spoke in a gentle, kindly tone.

"What is the trouble, Guthrie? You seem weighted by worry -"

"Nothing," protested Guthrie, staring about him with a hunted expression. "Nothing—that is—if you don't know about it—yet I can't believe that you have not heard -"

"Heard of what?" inquired Partridge.

The mild manner of the old man accomplished more than a sharp questioning might have done. Staring, Guthrie saw only friendliness in the benign countenance of Lucien Partridge. He gripped the old man's arm and spoke in a tense voice.

"You have not heard"—his words were breathless—"you have not heard of Forster—of Forster's

death?"

"Forster?" Partridge seemed puzzled. "You mean that Clifford Forster is dead?"

Guthrie nodded; then lowered his gaze.

"Clifford Forster dead!" declared Partridge, in a stunned tone. "I cannot believe it!"

"The newspapers were full of it," said Guthrie suddenly. "I thought that surely you must have read the reports."

"I have no time for newspapers," responded Partridge. "I live in a world of my own, Guthrie. I have few friends outside. You were one; Forster was another. Now, he is gone. You must feel the loss also, Guthrie."

"I do!" blurted Guthrie eagerly. "It is a shock to me, Partridge. That is why—why I am so worried—why I have come to see you— because I thought you might suspect -"

He paused, afraid to continue; but as he saw Partridge still solicitous, Guthrie gave way to a sudden resolve. He arose and stood beside the workbench, facing Partridge while he spoke.

"FORSTER came to New York a few nights ago," he declared. "While he was in his home, he was overcome by a paroxysm that resulted in his death. Now the police suspect murder. They are trying to find a man who was in Forster's home when death came over him."

"Ah! They suspect foul play?"

"Yes. They are still seeking the visitor. They have not found him. Apparently, they have gained no clew to his identity."

"Do you know who he is -"

"Yes."

"Who?"

"Myself."

Guthrie uttered the last word in a bold, deliberate manner. Lucien Partridge seemed staggered. He stared at his visitor in a startled manner, totally unable to recover from his surprise.

"Listen to me, Partridge," pleaded Guthrie. "I'll tell you all I know— why I am here—everything. You will believe me?"

"You are my friend," replied Partridge simply. "I believe my friends."

A relieved expression swept over Lawrence Guthrie's visage. He felt free to speak, and his words shouted a new confidence.

"I went to see Forster that night," he explained. "Forster summoned me there. Unfortunately, we had a misunderstanding. I left because Forster appeared to be unreasonable.

"As I was leaving, he seemed to be suffering from a momentary attack of dizziness; but I had no idea it might prove fatal. His caretaker was there; I had no reason to remain. But the next morning, I was amazed to read in the newspaper that Clifford Forster had died, and that an unknown visitor was

supposed to have caused his death the previous night!"

"Why did you not go to the police?" asked Partridge. "You could have told them."

"They would have asked me why I visited Forster. I would have had to tell them all about the gold—about your secret—about my deal with Forster. Such a strange story would have excited suspicion."

"I understand."

"But the strain was terrible," continued Guthrie. "The longer I waited, the worse the case would be against me when they found out my connection. I was afraid."

"Then I realized that there was one person who might suspect the identity of the visitor at Forster's house. That one was you!"

Lucien Partridge made no response. His eyes had a thoughtful look.

"You understand, don't you?" questioned Guthrie. "I was sure that you had learned of Forster's death—that you would wonder where I was - that you would suspect me as the unknown man."

"The strain became so great I had to talk to some one. I realized then that it was my duty to tell you what had happened. I slipped away from New York—I came here—here—to find my only friend!"

"You have done wisely," declared Partridge in a slow tone. "Come, Guthrie. You are tired. Let us go in the library, where we can rest and talk at ease."

THE old man led the way, and Guthrie followed him like an obedient child. In the library, Guthrie slumped into a chair and sat staring straight ahead, while Partridge watched him.

"Tell me," said the old man. "Why did you and Forster quarrel?"

"It was about the gold," responded Guthrie, in a monotonous tone. "Forster was angry because the production had not been increased."

"What did you tell him?"

"I told him"—Guthrie hesitated—"I told him that you were doing your best; that the promises I had made were based purely upon my belief that you would increase the output."

"What did he say?"

"He claimed that I was double-crossing him; that you were producing more gold than he was getting; that I was secretly appropriating some without his knowledge."

"And you replied -"

"I told him the truth. I said that I came here seldom; that I left the shipments to you. He doubted my story. He became so insulting that I lost my temper and cursed him. Then I thought it best to leave."

"And now -"

"Now I do not know what to do. I am innocent; yet I am afraid to tell my story. I cannot bring your name into the picture, of course. It would be unfair to you."

"You would not have to mention my name to the police."

"They would force it from me, Partridge. I would have to tell all if I told part."

The old man nodded thoughtfully; then he walked forward and placed his hand on Guthrie's shoulder.

"Did people know that you were a friend of Clifford Forster?" he asked.

"Very few," responded Guthrie uneasily. "Our relations were kept secret; but I am afraid that my name may become known. Forster had papers—there on his desk."

Lucien Partridge tightened his lips as he heard this statement. Guthrie was sitting with bowed head. Partridge nodded thoughtfully to himself.

"I have a plan, Guthrie," he declared. "A wonderful plan. I can protect you."

"How?" questioned Guthrie, raising his head in eagerness.

"Wait until the morning," urged the old man, in a cryptic tone. "Have confidence, Guthrie. Get some rest to-night. I shall have Vignetti call you early."

"You are sure that your plan will work?"

"I am certain of it. Do not worry, Guthrie. Remember, I have wealth. While Forster lived, the gold that I produced belonged to him. Now that he is dead, it is ours."

The statement was uttered in a most matter-of-fact tone. Nevertheless, it brought a bright look of eagerness to Guthrie's haggard face. Like Forster, Guthrie was governed by cupidity. In his worry, he had forgotten that the principal recipient of Partridge's synthetic wealth was now eliminated.

Gold! The very thought of it elated Lawrence Guthrie. He raised his head and managed to force a smile to his lips. That smile was an ugly grin. Lucien Partridge returned it with a mild, benign smile.

"Perhaps you can rest more easily now," declared Partridge. "Come. I shall summon Vignetti to show you to a room upstairs. You must have sleep—for a journey lies ahead of you to-morrow."

Guthrie arose and nodded. His face showed relief; his tired frame was capitulating now that his mind no longer worried.

The Corsican entered in response to Lucien Partridge's call. He conducted Lawrence Guthrie to a room upstairs.

VIGNETTI was the last person whom Lawrence Guthrie saw that night; he was also the first person whom Guthrie encountered in the morning. It was six o'clock when the Corsican knocked at the door and summoned Guthrie to rise.

Guthrie was in good spirits when he came downstairs. The door to the laboratory was open. He entered the room, and found Lucien Partridge, bright and cheery, standing at a worktable.

"You slept well," was Partridge's comment.

"Yes," responded Guthrie. "You appear to have enjoyed a good rest."

"I have been here all night," smiled Partridge. "This afternoon I shall nap for a few hours. That is all the sleep I require. When one is older and completely engrossed in great work, sleep is scarcely more than

an occasional habit."

Guthrie stared incredulously.

"Now," declared Partridge, in a calm tone, "I shall tell you your plans. A train is due at Westbrook Falls at seven o'clock. You will take it."

"To New York?"

"No—away from New York. It reaches Buffalo before noon. There you must take a train for Canada. Go to Toronto—change again, and take a train to Montreal. Remain there, at the Hotel Francais, where you will receive a message from me within a few days. Do you understand?"

"I do. This message -"

"It will be most welcome to you. It will bring you funds—enough money for you to travel to Europe in luxury and comfort. It will also give you full instructions regarding your passport. Everything will be in proper order. Rely upon me. Register under your own name; there is no reason for worry.

"But under no circumstances must it be known that you have been to Westbrook Falls. Therefore, upon arriving in Buffalo, you must be sure to destroy any ticket stubs that you have received.

"Do the same when you arrive in Toronto; and also in Montreal. For in Montreal you are starting upon a new career. You are to forget the worries of the past. You understand?"

"Everything is quite plain," nodded Guthrie. "Rely upon me to follow your instructions."

Vignetti entered the laboratory. Lucien Partridge beckoned to him, and spoke in Italian. Vignetti responded in the same language.

"Vignetti will get the car to take you to the station," explained Partridge, to Guthrie. "You can wait here with me while I start the day's experiment. I am anxious to be back at work."

Guthrie watched Vignetti reach into the drawer. He noticed a pair of gloves at the front of the drawer; the Corsican passed over them, and picked up another pair that were folded at the back of the drawer. He brought them to Lucien Partridge, who laid them on the table. Then Vignetti produced a smock and helped the old man don it. The Corsican went away.

"Remember," said Partridge, "you must obey my instructions. I have confidence in you, Guthrie; you must have the same in me."

"I have," responded Guthrie. "You have given me a new hold on life; you are a real friend, Partridge!"

The old man smiled quietly as he picked up one glove and let it dangle from the fingers of one hand, as he inserted the other. He drew the glove on from the wrist; then he repeated the operation with the second glove. He turned to the worktable, as though to begin a new experiment. At that moment Vignetti entered.

"Ah!" exclaimed Partridge. "The car is ready. Come."

He led the way through the hall, out through the front door and to the gate. Guthrie and Vignetti followed. The Corsican entered the car. Guthrie paused to say good-by.

"I can never thank you enough," he said sincerely. "You are indeed a true friend."

"Wait," replied the old man. "Wait until I have completed all my plans. Much is in store for you, Guthrie. Much that you do not expect."

Their hands joined in a shake, Guthrie's bare palm gripped within Partridge's glove. Guthrie entered the car. Vignetti drove away.

Looking back, Guthrie saw the figure of Lucien Partridge, standing at the open gate. With white hair flowing in the morning breeze, the old man was the picture of benignity.

The car turned the corner, and the picture ended. Vignetti was silent at the wheel; Guthrie was complacent as he leaned back in the seat.

Lawrence Guthrie's mind was no longer troubled. Through his brain rang those words that Lucien Partridge had uttered after the parting handclasp.

"Much is in store for you, Guthrie. Much that you do not expect."

Like Clifford Forster, Lawrence Guthrie had left Lucien Partridge carrying a promise. Like Forster, Guthrie thought of gold. Like Forster, Guthrie felt sure that he had left a true friend.

Not for one moment did Lawrence Guthrie's mind turn to thoughts of creeping death!

CHAPTER VIII. THE MAN FROM THE ARGENTINE

DIRECTLY across the river gorge from the spot where the road turned to the woods, a man was standing in a clump of bushes. In his hands he held a pair of powerful binoculars. His eyes were peering through the glasses.

As the car which Vignetti was driving came into view, the concealed observer saw it from a distance of less than one hundred yards. With the aid of the binoculars, he clearly discerned the faces of Lawrence Guthrie and Vignetti, for the car was moving slowly at the turn.

When the sound of the motor had disappeared into the woods, the man lowered his glasses and emitted a short laugh. Turning, he strolled along a faint path that took him away from the place where he had been watching.

Tall, dark-haired, and with flashing black eyes, this man had all the appearance of a Castilian grandee. His dark complexion was another evidence of his Spanish ancestry. As he walked along through the woods, the man smiled in a satisfied fashion.

The path bordered the cliff opposite the rear of Lucien Partridge's well-protected stronghold. It was just far enough from the edge of the gorge to hide the presence of the walker. When the man arrived at one particular spot, he stopped and again raised his binoculars. Pressing aside the branches of a small tree, he sighted across the chasm to the estate where Partridge dwelt.

The large frame mansion showed among the trees. The little workhouse near the gorge was hidden behind sheltering trees. The observer seemed to be watching for any sign of activities upon the premises. At length, he ended his lookout and continued along the path.

The way led from the cliff, and after a short walk, the man came to a small cottage that was situated in a clearing. There was no road to the cottage. It was an old deserted building, apparently on the verge of abandonment.

The man ascended the steps of the cottage and walked quietly through the open door. He turned into a

room where a short, powerful man was seated dozing in a chair. At the sound of the footfalls, the short man leaped up excitedly. When he recognized the man who had entered, he sheepishly resumed his chair. The tall man laughed.

"Frightened you, eh?" he questioned. "Ah, you are becoming nervous, Jose."

Jose made no reply.

"Our friend has gone," remarked the tall man. "You remember—the one you saw arrive last night? I suspected that he would be leaving early to-day. That is why I was on watch to see him. They must rise early, Jose, if they expect to catch Alfredo Morales asleep."

The speaker laughed and walked across the room. He placed the binoculars in a case and turned again to Jose.

"Bring me some breakfast," ordered Morales. "We will not wait for Manuel. It may be some time before he arrives."

JOSE went from the room. Some minutes later, he returned with a tray of breakfast, and set his burden upon a table.

Although Jose was evidently the servant of Alfredo Morales, the two men were on an equal basis after Jose had completed his task, for one sat at each side of the table, and both began to eat.

"Yes," remarked Morales thoughtfully, "he is gone. That makes three of them, Jose. Three visitors since we have been watching. I suppose that this last man has gone to New York like the others. Well, we shall wait for Manuel's report."

Breakfast completed, Morales waited impatiently, watching through the open door. At last a man appeared in the clearing. This was the slender, dark-complexioned man who had seen Clifford Forster arrive at Westbrook Falls. The newcomer advanced across the clearing and greeted Morales.

"Well?" questioned Morales.

"He has gone, senor," was the reply.

"To New York?"

"No. He bought a ticket for Buffalo."

"Hm-m-m," observed Morales. "That is different, eh, Manuel? Did he seem like the others had—pleased with his visit?"

"Yes, senor," responded Manuel. "He was rubbing his hands while he waited for the westbound train. Rubbing them—so"—Manuel imitated the action—"like one who is happy. He seemed very pleased, senor."

"Good," declared Morales. "Now tell me, Manuel. Are those two men still at the inn?"

"Yes, senor. I believe so. I have not seen them to-day -"

"Then you do not know if they are still there. Go back, Manuel. Keep watch as before—at the station—and come back here later on."

When Manuel had left, Morales strolled about the clearing, smoking cigarettes, one after another. He

went back into the house, and again startled Jose by his stealthy arrival. This time Morales laughed in an irritable manner.

"What is the matter with you, Jose?" he questioned. "Do not tell me that you are still frightened at every shadow that you see."

A troubled look appeared upon Jose's greasy face. The servant tried to avoid the glance that Morales directed toward him.

"You and your shadows. Bah!" Morales spoke contemptuously. "You are a fool, Jose. I brought you with me because you were a brave man—and one who could speak English fluently. Around here you are useless. Every night, when you watch, you talk of shadows. Bah!"

"But I have seen them, senor!" blurted Jose. "I have seen them. Out there—in here—everywhere!"

"You have madness, Jose. You spoke to me about those shadows twice. I looked where you pointed. I saw nothing. What is it that you can see and I cannot see? Nothing! That is what you have seen, Jose—nothing!"

"But, senor, I have seen the same thing more than once. It is not just shadows that I have seen. One time I looked quickly—there I saw - him! He was like a shadow himself, senor!"

"I was there Jose," responded Morales, in an annoyed tone. "I looked where you pointed. I saw nothing—not even a shadow."

"But he was gone, senor. Gone before you saw -"

"Gone? From the middle of the clearing? You are crazy, Jose. You are crazy! No man could have disappeared into the ground or into the air."

"No man, senor! I am afraid of no man. But if he is more than a man - some one that certain eyes can see and other eyes cannot -"

"Forget those superstitions, Jose," cried Morales. "We are dealing with people, not with ghosts. Enough of such foolishness!"

With that Morales took the binoculars and left the house, turning again toward the path that led from the cottage to the lookout spot upon the cliff.

When his chief had gone, Jose stood at the door of the cottage. Apprehension showed on the man's greasy countenance.

Jose, a creature of ignorance, was fearful as he gazed about him. His eyes wandered upward to the flat-topped roof of the cottage. Moving backward, the man stood still; then, looking about him, suddenly discovered that he was standing in the center of the clearing. Fearful of this haunted spot, Jose sprang to the door of the cottage, looking behind him as he ran.

After gaining the house, the man's trepidation faded. He went into the main room and sat in a chair. There his worry began to fade as he dropped into a doze. This one place seemed to give Jose a sense of security. Here his laziness overcame his apprehension.

It was afternoon when Alfredo Morales returned to the cottage. Again, Jose sprang up in alarm when his master entered. The servant prepared a lunch, and Morales ate in silence. It was obvious that his spying had not brought new results.

Morales went back to his observation spot after his meal. He returned a few hours later. Jose was awake, this time, standing on the porch. The sky had clouded; here in the woods, premature darkness was settling.

Almost immediately after Morales had arrived, Manuel appeared from the woods, and hastened to make his report. Morales listened with intense interest.

"They are there," declared Manuel. "Both of them are at the inn. The man with the hard face; the man with the beard. You can tell them easily. They are both very wise; but they have not seen me. I have been too careful."

"You will stay here, Manuel," ordered Morales. "You will do as I have instructed. Jose will prepare your dinner. I am going down to the inn. Remember—I shall walk back alone. Be ready then, with Jose to help you."

Long shadows had settled on the clearing when Alfredo Morales set forth into the woods. Manuel and Jose were watching him from the porch. Manuel was indifferently rolling a cigarette; but Jose was watching intently. The presence of those sinister shadows seemed to worry him.

"What is the matter, Jose?" questioned Manuel, as he happened to glance toward his companion. "One would think that you were looking at a ghost or something."

"I have not been well," growled Jose. "It is that sea-sickness that began ever since we left Buenos Aires."

"Bah! You have been here more than a week. That is a poor excuse, Jose."

The greasy-faced man did not reply. Jose was watching the figure of Alfredo Morales, the man from the Argentine, as it disappeared amid the thickening blackness of the wood. When he could no longer glimpse his departing master, Jose, after a last troubled look at the shadows in the clearing, shrugged his shoulders and went back into the cottage. Manuel laughed and followed him.

PERHAPS it was fear that had governed Jose; possibly the man was possessed of an overkeen vision. At least, Jose had sought to study every suspicious shadow that he had seen from the porch of the cottage. Yet despite his sharp gaze, Jose had failed in his self-appointed task.

For something had moved at the edge of the clearing the moment that Alfredo Morales had passed. That something had cast its shadow across the path; yet even Jose had failed to see the ominous patch of black.

Moving after Morales as though it were the man's own shadow, that changing splotch of blackness had followed—lengthening and shortening amid the flickering light that trickled through the waving branches of the leaf-clad trees.

On went Morales, striding directly along a path that broadened and became more firm. Always, close behind him, slid a shape that was nothing more than an inky silhouette. It was not until Morales emerged from the woods and struck a dirt road that the moving shadow assumed a new appearance.

Then, momentarily, it appeared in more sinister form. Instead of a gliding shadow, it became the outline of a being clad in black—a tall figure garbed in a cloak. Two sparkling eyes shone from beneath the covering brim of a shapeless hat.

The vision persisted only for a moment. It merged with the trees at the side of the road. On through the dusk strode Alfredo Morales, totally oblivious of the weird apparition that had appeared behind him.

This evening—Alfredo Morales was bound upon a special mission—a work that concerned Lucien Partridge as well as others. Confident that no one knew of his presence in this vicinity, Morales was convinced of his security. He had no thought for the vague fears that had been expressed by Jose.

Yet those fears had now become reality. A phantom shape had become a living being. Alfredo Morales had come beneath a mysterious surveillance.

The Shadow was trailing the man from the Argentine!

What was the connection between Alfredo Morales and Lucien Partridge? What cross-purposes and counter-plots were reaching their culmination here in the peaceful vicinity of Westbrook Falls?

Only The Shadow knew!

CHAPTER IX. MORALES RECEIVES A VISITOR

IT was scarcely more than a mile from the cottage where Alfredo Morales lived to the Westbrook Inn. But from Lucien Partridge's abode, it was necessary to travel several miles around the outer course of the semicircular stream to reach the bridge, which, in turn, was more than a mile above the hotel.

Hence Morales, living but a short way from Partridge, had a tremendous advantage so far as traveling distance was concerned when it came to visiting the summer hotel. Partridge's situation across the chasm was one of isolation—which was exactly what he desired.

When Morales arrived at the Westbrook Inn, he was still unconscious of the fact that he was being followed. As the man from the Argentine came into the lighted area of the hotel veranda, the trailing blackness disappeared behind him. No trace of The Shadow's presence was visible.

Dinner was being served at the hotel. Morales went into the dining room and seated himself at a table. There, he began a cold survey of the people about him. It was not long before he had selected two objectives.

One was a stocky, firm-faced man who apparently paid no attention to the presence of Morales. This was Vic Marquette, the secret-service agent who had come to Westbrook Falls in an effort to solve the riddle that surrounded the strange death of Jerry Fitzroy.

The other was a man of medium height—an eccentric-looking individual—whose principal note of physiognomy was a thick, short-cropped beard of blackish hue.

This man appeared to take a keen interest in his surroundings. As soon as he was observed by Morales, the bearded man returned the other's stare. That settled, the two men shifted their gaze elsewhere.

Morales sensed that he was being watched by both Vic Marquette and the bearded man. One had not appeared to notice him; the other had apparently forgotten him. Nevertheless, Morales smiled to himself. He had come here to observe these men; there was no objection whatever to them observing him.

Only one guest entered the dining room after Morales had arrived. The Argentinian threw a quizzical glance toward the newcomer; then smiled again when he saw that the arrival was a nonentity.

The belated guest was an old man who hobbled with the aid of a cane. He was a sour-faced person, and his deafness was apparent by the way he shouted his order at the waitress, much to the amusement of the other guests.

Dinner went by. Morales did not leave the dining room until after Marquette and the bearded man had

departed. When he at last arose, the only person remaining in the room was the old man.

OUT in the lobby, Alfredo Morales lighted a cigarette and sat in a comfortable chair. He began to take a shrewd interest in everything that was going on about him. He became nervous in his demeanor. He threw away his cigarette, although it was only half finished; then lighted another one immediately.

From the corner of his eye, Morales spotted both Marquette and the bearded man. Neither one seemed conscious of the other's presence, but it was obvious to Morales that they were both interested in his actions. The only lull in this game of watchdog was when the old man with the cane hobbled through the lobby and obtained his key at the desk.

"Eccentric old chap," Morales heard some one say. "Phineas Twambley is his name. Supposed to be worth a lot of money, but I've never seen him give even a nickel tip."

Morales settled back in his chair and lighted another cigarette. He seemed half asleep as the minutes ticked by. He was thinking of the two men whom he had watched. He had completely forgotten old Twambley, who had gone upstairs.

Had Alfredo Morales caught a mental flash of Twambley's room, he would have been amazed. For the old man, at that particular moment, was old no longer.

His cane was out of sight in the bureau drawer. From the back of an upright trunk, Phineas Twambley was drawing forth two garments—a black cloak and a slouch hat.

One minute later, Phineas Twambley was The Shadow. Tall, silent, and swift, he swept across the room and entered a dimly lighted hall. Half a minute later, his sinister figure disappeared through a large window that led to the fire escape.

DOWN in the lobby, the lethargy of Alfredo Morales came to a sudden end. With a suspicious glance about him, the Argentinian suddenly arose and hurriedly left the hotel lobby. Once outside, his manner became stealthy as he moved toward the road by which he had approached the Westbrook Inn.

Morales was wearing a panama hat. In the darkness, it shone almost like a luminous object. Had any one chosen to follow him now, the trail would have afforded no difficulty.

There was a strange change in the actions of Alfredo Morales. He had been in a hurry to leave the inn; now he was calm and deliberate as he began the stroll back to the cottage. All along the way, he left a trail of half-consumed cigarettes.

When he entered the woods, the Argentinian was humming to himself. When he reached the clearing, he continued the noise. The lights of the cottage shone through the gloom, and cast a reflection upon the open space in front. There Morales sauntered onward.

He crossed a patch of black that seemed like an extension of the darkness. He did not notice it. Alfredo Morales was not like Jose, his servant. He did not pay attention to shadows—even though they might be long, like this one, and shaped like a silhouette.

The door of the cottage was open. Morales entered it with the air of a man returning to his home. He went into the main room, which was located at the side. Here he drew the blinds. But he had left the front door open behind him.

The silhouette upon the clearing was motionless. But now a moving object made its appearance. A man came into the sphere of light. It was the bearded stranger whom Morales had observed at the Westbrook Inn.

Stealthily, the stranger ascended the steps and entered the open door of the cottage. He made his way quietly to the door of the main room. He peered in to see Alfredo Morales seated at a desk in the corner.

The Argentinian was writing. Now he laid the papers aside. With a sign of weariness, he leaned his head forward upon his arms.

The bearded stranger moved into the room. His objective was the table where the papers lay. It was a job that required stealth; but the odds were in his favor. Alfredo Morales seemed totally oblivious of all that was happening about him.

The intruder reached the center of the room. He was smiling, his lips forming a ruddy curve amid the black beard. One hand was in his pocket, in readiness to draw a weapon should Morales be suddenly aroused.

He paused, as motionless as Morales. His eyes were watching the man in the chair. So intent was the intruder that he did not see a thin splotch of black that came creeping inward from a farther window of the room—a shadowy shape of inkiness that edged forward with uncanny ease.

Nor did Morales see that weird shade. Seemingly half asleep, he was unaware of the black-bearded man. Not cognizant of the presence of a human intruder, how could he have noticed a creeping shape that neither lived or possessed physical form?

The bearded man was carefully advancing; then he paused again, his lips pursed within the black beard. He sensed danger. Not from Morales, who was unwatching; not from the shape that now formed an unmoving blotch upon the floor; but from a new direction.

Instinct suddenly dominated caution. The intruder swung quickly toward the door of the room, drawing his hand from his pocket. That hand did not bring forth a weapon. Instead, it came from the pocket with fingers spread out wide.

The bearded man's hands went above his head.

STANDING at the door, armed with rifles, were the two henchmen of Alfredo Morales. While the bearded stranger had advanced, Jose and Manuel had entered behind him to cut off his retreat.

Sullenly, the intruder faced his captors. Then, as a chuckle reached his ears, he turned his head toward the chair where Alfredo Morales was seated.

The tall, shrewd-faced man from the Argentine was wide awake, laughing at the success of the trap that he had prepared.

The stranger no longer considered Jose and Manuel. He recognized that they were mere underlings, who had obeyed the orders of Alfredo Morales.

Whatever his fate might be, it rested in the hands of the suave Argentinian. For long, cold seconds, the bearded man faced his smooth-shaven captor. It was Morales who broke the silence.

Rising from his chair, the man from the Argentine made a low, courteous bow. There was nothing of mockery in his action. That role was ended. With an imperious wave, he signaled Jose and Manuel. The rifles were lowered. Another wave, and the henchmen departed.

This action came as a surprise to the bearded stranger. In fact, he had encountered a series of surprises, each as sudden as his unexpected capture. Morales appeared to be a friend—not an enemy. He had

ordered his men away— leaving his uninvited guest still armed.

The bearded man lowered his hands. Morales offered no objection. But the stranger made no motion toward his pocket. Instead, he quietly waited for Morales to speak, wondering what new surprise might be forthcoming.

Again Alfredo Morales bowed. Then, in his suave, modulated English, he spoke.

"Good evening, Monsieur Armagnac," he said. "I have been awaiting you. This visit is a pleasure."

Complete bewilderment showed on the bearded face. The stranger's expression clearly showed that Morales had guessed his identity. In view of this new astonishment, Armagnac was incapable of a reply. Alfredo Morales smiled.

"I have business with you, Monsieur Armagnac," he said. "It is business that will interest you. Be seated"—he indicated a chair— "and let us converse."

Still bewildered, the bearded man obeyed the request. He sat in the chair indicated by Morales. The Argentinian resumed the seat where he had been resting when Armagnac had entered.

With a suave smile, Morales opened his silver case and offered a cigarette to Armagnac, who accepted it. Morales took one for himself, and proffered a light.

Then, resting back in his chair, Alfredo Morales began to speak in a quiet, methodical tone. His visitor listened intently—still wondering at these new words.

They formed an odd contrast: Morales calm and unperturbed; Armagnac, puzzled and uncertain.

The eyes of the listener were focused upon those of the speaker. Neither man observed that long black blotch that lay upon the floor— that strange, silhouetted projection that came from the window.

Silent, unnoticed, and motionless, the shadow of The Shadow rested within this room!

CHAPTER X. ONE AND ONE MAKE TWO

ALFREDO MORALES was an easy, convincing speaker. He had the remarkable aptitude of divining the thoughts of those who listened to him. Hence the discourse which he commenced took on a turn that was both illuminating and interesting.

In his talk, Morales made statements, put forth questions, and gave both replies and answers, while his bearded visitor sat in silence.

"It is a pleasure to meet you, Monsieur Armagnac," purred Morales. "It was quite thoughtful of you to pay me this visit. It is not every one who can have the honor of a guest so talented as Pierre Armagnac, from Marseilles, France.

"You see, I have heard of you, Monsieur Armagnac. I know who you are; but you do not know who I am. Ah, well. I am of lesser importance. It is not surprising that Alfredo Morales of Buenos Aires should recognize Pierre Armagnac of Marseilles; but it would be surprising if Monsieur Armagnac had ever heard of Senor Morales."

Morales paused and smiled. Then he continued in his soft, catlike tone.

"Pierre Armagnac is a great man in his chosen profession. Alfredo Morales is much less capable. Hence,

while Armagnac was indifferent to the existence of others of his craft, Morales was more inquiring. He studied to learn who was great and who was small. He did that before he schemed for greater things.

"But Armagnac, too, was a schemer. He and Morales both had the same idea" —the speaker tapped his forehead—"and both came to the same place. Armagnac was the greater, but Morales held the advantage. For Armagnac had never heard of Morales; while Morales knew much of Armagnac."

Another pause while Morales studied the effect of his words upon Armagnac. Then, with a calm movement, Morales drew an envelope from his pocket and opened it. He held a small object in his hand. He tossed it in the air, and it fluttered to the floor—a mottled partridge feather.

The action brought a smile to Armagnac's bearded lips. The Frenchman uttered a low grunt to signify that he understood the gesture. Morales pointed to the feather.

"You carry such trophies?" he questioned.

In reply, Armagnac produced a wallet from which he extracted a feather similar to the one that Morales had brought. The Frenchman let the feather flutter from his hand. It reached the floor almost at the same spot where the other lay. Morales saw significance in the result.

"A feather," he remarked. "A sign of recognition between myself and another man. A sign between yourself and that same man. It is my thought that those feathers may be a sign between Pierre Armagnac and Alfredo Morales. Do you agree?"

"I agree," responded Armagnac in a deep voice.

"GOOD," Morales commented warmly. "Now I shall speak plainly. I shall tell you much that you already know—and some things that you may not know. Question me when you wish; I want you to understand all.

"Here, across that gorge"—Morales pointed to the direction of the river—"lives a very clever man. The partridge feather is his sign, for his name is the same: Partridge.

"Some time ago, this man—Lucien Partridge—discovered the secret of making a metal, or alloy, that is very much like gold. In seeking a use for that metal, he discovered one. He planned to introduce his synthetic gold into the coinage of the world.

"To do that, he required agents. He chose them. Pierre Armagnac in France; Alfredo Morales in the Argentine; Eleutherios Sukulos in Greece; Enrico Pallanci in Italy; Jasper Gleason in Australia; Otto Larkon in Scandinavia. There are others in the list but it is unnecessary to name them. A dozen in all. I suppose you were at least aware of their existence?"

"I thought there must be at least eight," responded Armagnac. "I did not trouble myself much about any of the details."

"No, that was unnecessary in a way," admitted Morales. "You knew that there were many; that was sufficient to indicate great wealth. For Lucien Partridge sold his synthetic gold throughout the world; sold it, for real gold, to these counterfeiting agents. He is a widely traveled man, Partridge. A schemer always, he knew such men as you and myself in every country.

"You gained wealth, Armagnac. With Partridge's metal, your coins, like mine, could not be detected as counterfeits.

"But a thought occurred to you, Armagnac. For every million francs you made, Partridge obtained a

million also. You began to wonder how many millions of pesos, of pounds, of bolivars, of lire he was obtaining. That is what I, too, began to think.

"Ah! A wonderful thought. Why be a counterfeiter in one corner of the world, while somewhere a lone man is drawing in wealth from everywhere? You thought—as I thought—that Lucien Partridge must possess a tremendous supply of gold—of real gold.

"You knew—as I knew—that counterfeiting must have its end. You wondered—as I wondered—what would happen then.

"You and I, Armagnac, were working to create a world emperor—a gold-crazed man who would draw gold as a mosquito draws blood; on, on, on, until the burst.

"So you asked yourself—as did I—why should that go on? Would it not be wonderful to find the center of that vast gold supply; to grasp it and to hold it; to end this ceaseless activity that might lead to ruin?

"So you came here—as I came—to locate that gold supply. We have been seized of the same desire. Two of us—two of the entire dozen who knew the truth!"

Morales rested back in his chair and stared at Armagnac. The talk of fabulous wealth had brought a bright flush to the Argentinian's sallow cheeks. Armagnac, now, was the one who remained placid. He put forth a question.

"WHAT do you propose to do?" he questioned. "What is your plan, now that you have discovered a rival in myself?"

"We shall join forces," responded Morales, with a smile. "Perhaps you wonder why I make the offer. I shall tell you.

"First, it would be unwise for us to quarrel. It might bring disaster to both of us. Second, there is gold enough for both of us— as much as either of us can desire. Third, I am stalemated. I have reached the point where I am ready for the grand coup; yet I am afraid to move without the help of another man of wisdom."

"You have your subordinates," suggested Armagnac warily.

"Bah!" responded Morales. "What are they? Men who know nothing. Men of ignorance. Good servants, yes, who will prove useful; but men who will give the game away. Tell me, Armagnac, how have you schemed to crack this nut across the river?"

"I have come quietly," replied Armagnac, in a shrewd tone. "I have been watching, studying, waiting. There must be a way, to the man who knows."

"But you have not found it?"

"Not as yet."

"My case"—Morales was smiling—"is different, Armagnac. I came prepared for action. I am ready. I have spied from without; but I have not been able to spy from within. Is that your case?"

"It is," admitted Armagnac.

"I have advanced beyond you," declared Morales. "Yet I have encountered the same difficulty. I am wary, because I wish to avoid what you would term a contretemps. There is but one way to learn all that I

wish to know. That is to openly visit Lucien Partridge. But should I do so—ah—then would I be helpless to proceed. Is that not true?"

"It is."

"Should Pierre Armagnac work from within," suggested Morales, in a cagey tone, "he, too, would be unable to work from without. But should you do that inner work"—Morales was becoming direct in his statement - "nothing would hinder me from the outer work, for which I am already prepared."

Armagnac nodded thoughtfully.

"That is why I led you here," declared Morales. "Together, we can accomplish our desire. Alone, either of us may fail. I must have another; so must you. We must each have a man who knows all. So why not—the two of us? One and one make two."

"You wish my agreement?"

"Exactly."

Armagnac arose and extended his hand. Morales came to his feet and joined in the clasp.

Two men of evil genius were united in a common cause. The strategy of Alfredo Morales had won him the alliance of Pierre Armagnac.

Now, as the two resumed their seats, Morales leaned forward and spoke in a low confidential tone.

"I shall tell you all my plans," he said, "but before I do, it would be wise for you to obtain the information I require. When you have assured me that you have the facts I need, we will be on a fair basis. Each of us will have some knowledge that the other must need. You understand?"

"That is good," returned Armagnac.

THE Frenchman spoke thus because he realized that he was at a disadvantage. He had no idea what scheme Alfredo Morales might have designed; but he knew well that the man from the Argentine must possess a workable method. Despite the friendliness evidenced by Morales, it was obvious that Armagnac had first fallen into the other's power.

Crafty to the extreme, Pierre Armagnac saw that he was necessary to Alfredo Morales. Why should he balk or why should he demand to know everything, now?

Morales had been frank. He needed contact with what was going on across the river. Armagnac was ready to get that contact. Then, he knew well, he would possess an advantage of his own. There could be no talk of other than equal terms.

But even as he visualized the fabulous wealth that the future was to bring, Pierre Armagnac experienced a disturbing thought. He hastened to express it before Alfredo Morales proceeded with other discussions.

"You drew me from the inn," remarked Armagnac, "because you were sure you knew my identity. You made yourself conspicuous so that I would follow. But there was another at the inn—a man whom I was watching. Who is he? Some other man who has designs?"

Morales shook his head.

"He is not one of us," he declared. "I obtained information on every one of Partridge's agents before I set sail from Buenos Aires. I do not know the man's identity. He has not been to Partridge's, for I have

watched there. But I have prepared to interview him."

"To interview him? Where?"

"Here. As I interviewed you."

A gleam of understanding came over Pierre Armagnac's bearded countenance. Surely, he should have realized this scheme. The same lure that had brought him to this cottage would bring another also. But where was the other? Morales seemed to divine the question that was in Armagnac's mind.

"I study men," declared Morales. "I studied two at the inn to-night. One was yourself—a man who meets a risk quickly. The other, I could see, was slower of action."

"I did not think that both would follow me. I felt sure that one of them would follow me; and that the second would trail the first. You, I knew, would be the first. The second should be here shortly. He is one who would not enter."

"Then you expect him?"

"Very soon."

"But if he will not enter?"

"He will enter." Alfredo Morales pronounced the words in a prophetic tone.

As if in answer to his statement, footsteps sounded outside the room. Pierre Armagnac leaped to his feet. Alfredo Morales remained seated, smiling.

Into the room came three men. Two of them were armed with rifles. They were Jose and Manuel. Between them was the third man, his hands raised above his head, his face sullen and expressionless. It was Vic Marquette of the secret service.

Alfredo Morales chuckled, and Pierre Armagnac smiled as they recognized the features of the man whose identity they did not know.

CHAPTER XI. THE DEATH SENTENCE

ALFREDO MORALES had become an inquisitor. His victim was Vic Marquette. A shrewdly watching spectator, Pierre Armagnac listened to the questioning. Jose and Manuel, rifles crooked over elbows, stood in readiness behind the man whom they had captured.

"Good evening," remarked Morales, in a suave tone. "May I ask the purpose of your visit?"

No change of expression appeared upon Marquette's stolid countenance.

"A rather out-of-the-way spot, this cottage," resumed Morales. "It is not surprising that we should wish to know the identity of a chance visitor."

Vic Marquette maintained his indifference.

"Who are you?"

The question snapped from the lips of Alfredo Morales like the crackle of a whip. The Argentinian's eyes were flashing angrily, as he demanded the identity of the prisoner.

"I happen to be a guest at the Westbrook Inn," replied Marquette, speaking for the first time. "I was walking through the woods, and I saw the light of the cottage. I approached, not expecting the welcome that I have received."

A sneer appeared upon the Argentinian's lips. He knew well that Marquette was bluffing. He had expected such a statement.

"Visitors are not welcome here," he said. "unless they state their name and purpose."

"My name is not important," retorted Marquette, "and I have no purpose here."

"This is private property," stated Morales. "It is risky for a person to enter here unasked. I regret to say that I cannot be held responsible for any accidents"—he accented the word in a sinister tone—"that might occur to intruders."

Marquette had no reply. Morales glared at him; then seeing that the secret-service man was obdurate, he spoke to Jose and Manuel.

"Search him," he ordered.

Manuel obeyed, while Jose kept watch. The one item that came from Marquette's pocket was a businesslike automatic that Manuel tossed on the floor. Then Manuel stepped back and joined guard with Jose.

MORALES reached forward and picked up the automatic. Jose watched the action. An odd look appeared in Jose's eyes. At the very spot from which Morales had lifted the gun, Jose saw the shadowed silhouette of a man's features!

Morales, apparently, did not notice the shadow. But Jose's eyes moved along the floor, following an extended blotch that terminated at the window.

The greasy-faced man trembled. It was with an effort that he managed to retain his rifle.

Had it not been that Morales was interested in other matters, the leader would have noticed the servant's trepidation. But Morales, now that he had examined the automatic, was again ready to question Vic Marquette.

This time, Morales spoke in a harsh voice that brooked no delay. He betrayed impatience in his words.

"Who are you?" he snarled. "Why are you here? Answer—or take the consequences!"

Vic Marquette did not answer. He knew well that he was dealing with two dangerous men. Both, he realized, were foreigners. Anything that Marquette might say would lead to the one fact that he did not wish to reveal—namely, his connection with the secret service.

Lurking near the house, Vic had been trapped by Jose and Manuel. They had been lying in the clearing after their capture of Pierre Armagnac. Now, facing two men from other countries, Vic knew that he could expect no mercy if he told them who he was.

Of all the forces of law in the United States, these men would be most antagonistic to the secret service. So long as they doubted, Vic might remain secure. That, he felt sure, was his only chance.

Vic Marquette was a great believer in luck. Usually, he was a man of caution. But here, at Westbrook Falls, he had blundered unwittingly into a trap that he had not believed could exist.

Morales was talking in a low tone to Armagnac. Suddenly Morales turned a quick glance toward Marquette, and put a sharp question to take the prisoner off guard.

"You are one of Partridge's men, eh?" he asked.

Vic made no response. His expression puzzled Morales. There was nothing to show that the name was known to the prisoner. At the same time, this fellow had the perfect poker face. The fact that he betrayed no surprise might well mean that he had been prepared for such a question.

Again Morales went into conference with Armagnac. Morales had a great respect for the Frenchman's shrewdness. The fate of the prisoner was resting in the balance. Morales wanted advice.

"Shall we hold him or -"

Morales did not finish the question. Armagnac knew the alternative that he was suggesting.

"That depends," whispered Armagnac.

"Depends upon what?" asked Morales.

"Your plans," declared Armagnac, in a low tone. "How soon do you expect to act?"

"As soon as you have done your work."

"I shall complete that to-morrow."

"Then I can act on the next night."

A cruel smile appeared upon Armagnac's bearded lips as he heard this statement. With only two days ahead, the Frenchman preferred certain action.

"I have been watching this man," he whispered. "He has no contacts at the inn. I think that he is working alone. That means -"

Morales listened, but Armagnac did not finish the sentence. He turned his right thumb downward. The action indicated death.

VIC MARQUETTE was the victim of unfortunate circumstances. At the worst, he expected nothing more than harassing imprisonment. That was because he did not realize the situation existing between these two schemers who were discussing his fate.

Alfredo Morales, ruthless though he was, would scarcely have decreed death. But Pierre Armagnac had a reason for indicating the extreme sentence. He felt that somewhere in the mind of Alfredo Morales might lurk a suspicion of a connecting link between the Frenchman and the new prisoner—both of whom Morales had seen at the inn.

For Armagnac to indicate mercy would have been to excite doubt. With this prisoner a common enemy, the more drastic the fate proposed by Armagnac the better established would be the alliance between the Frenchman and the Argentinian.

So calloused was Armagnac's decision that Morales did not hesitate further. He knew that the rest lay in his hands.

There was no more need of questioning Vic Marquette. All indecision was ended. Action alone remained.

In the midst of this dramatic scene, one man was experiencing a fantastic terror. It was not Vic Marquette, who calmly watched the men who were deciding his fate. The worried individual was Jose. With eyes still upon the floor, the squat, greasy man stared at the mysterious shadow that lay before him.

The shadow was alive! Backward and forward it moved—a silhouette without a human form to cast it! To Jose, it was a sinister creature that seemed to view him with invisible eyes!

Both superstitious and intuitive, Jose was convinced that unseen eyes were watching him. He was sure that here, in this strange country, he had come under the domination of one of those weird phantoms of another world—a being that could strike him dead!

Jose, brutal and uncouth, feared no human enemy. But all that lack of physical fear was counterbalanced by his terror of the unknown.

Here, at this cottage, he had been obsessed by shadows. Now one was alive, and at his very feet!

As the long shadow moved toward him, Jose cowered away, almost expecting to see it rise and materialize into a black being that would overpower him with ghostlike clutches!

In another moment, Jose would have betrayed his terror with a wild, frightened scream. But as he watched, the shadow on the floor began to move away. It dwindled toward the window, and both horror and relief dominated Jose's superstitious mind. He trembled as he saw this convincing demonstration that the black blotch was alive; he panted in relief because it was no longer haunting him.

Now orders were coming from Morales—orders which Jose must obey. The leader was calling for a rope to bind the prisoner. Manuel responded before Jose could recover from his inertia. So Jose remained on guard, the muzzle of his rifle against Vic Marquette's ribs.

From the corner of his eye, Jose watched the floor. The weird silhouette did not return.

Manuel arrived and bound Marquette's arms. Morales took a coil of rope. He signified for Armagnac to accompany him.

Under the direction of Morales a procession left the cottage and crossed the clearing. First was Vic Marquette, his arms tightly roped behind him. Jose followed with the rifle, forcing Marquette onward. Then came Armagnac, suave and interested.

Last of all was Morales, carrying an automatic in his right hand, a coil of rope about his arm, and a flashlight in his left hand.

THE illumination of the electric lantern showed a vague path ahead. Vic Marquette walked stolidly along it. Strange, grotesque shadows shimmered across the path. Jose noticed them and shuddered.

The path went off into the woods away from the gorge, a distance of a quarter mile. It came to an abrupt ending by a large mound of rock.

Morales gave a low command. Dropping his rifle, Jose drew a huge handkerchief from his pocket and gagged Marquette.

Morales held the rays of his lantern on the scene, with the automatic ready. Jose tumbled Marquette on his back; then took the coil of rope from Morales. The henchman used it to bind Vic Marquette's legs.

Pierre Armagnac was an interested spectator. He knew that Vic Marquette was to die; but he had not anticipated the method. Now he was to learn the system which Morales intended to use.

Jose carried Marquette to the mound of rock. Morales beckoned, and Armagnac followed. As they reached the mound, Morales held out a warning arm. The Frenchman stopped. He was at the verge of a clearing, dull moonlight bathing the vista beyond.

Morales stooped and picked up a small stone. He tossed it in the air. It disappeared as it dropped in the clearing. After long seconds, a tiny plunk came from below.

Armagnac understood. They were at the edge of a precipice, with water far below.

"A quarry," whispered Morales. "A straight drop of a hundred feet; filled with stagnant water and slime. There is no one near here, but a splash is better than a gunshot, which might be heard for miles."

"The body?" questioned Armagnac.

"Jose is taking care of that," responded Morales. "See? It will remain at the bottom for a long time."

In the dull moonlight, Jose was affixing heavy stones to the body of Vic Marquette. It was now that the secret-service man realized the death that threatened him. He writhed upon the ground. Jose dealt him a tough blow. Marquette, half-stunned, lay still.

"Come," whispered Morales. "It is better not to wait."

"Why not?" questioned Armagnac.

"The road," replied Morales. "It is not far away. We will go there and make sure that no one is parked near there. Sometimes cars stop."

Morales spoke to Jose, cautioning the underling to wait several minutes before proceeding. That would allow time for Morales and Armagnac to return, should they spy any one in the neighborhood. The sound of a heavy splash might carry to the road through the woods.

The flashlight glimmered through the trees as Morales and Armagnac retraced their footsteps. In the moonlight, the squat form of Jose was monstrous as it worked above the prisoner, taking care to attach the stones so that they could not possibly come loose.

Pierre Armagnac had passed the death sentence; Alfredo Morales had given the orders; Jose was to be the executioner of Vic Marquette, who was doomed by these fiends to a terrible death.

Only the moonlight showed on the mound of rock above the quarry—the moonlight which brought flickering shadows and among them a long, motionless silhouette which neither executioner or victim could see.

A blotch at the edge of the great quarry—nothing more than a shade of night. Such a trivial, formless object alone lay between Vic Marquette and the death which yawned below!

CHAPTER XII. THE SHADOW THAT LIVED

JOSE'S task was completed. The powerful henchman of Alfredo Morales had applied the sinking stones to the ropes which bound Vic Marquette. Crouched over the form of his intended victim, the squat, greasy-faced man paused to listen.

There was no sound from the woods behind. Long minutes had gone by. Morales and Armagnac had not returned. Obviously they had found the road deserted, and had gone back to the cottage. There would be no witnesses to the death of this bound man. The judges had washed their hands of it.

Jose grinned. This task was to his liking. A push—a long wait—a clunk from the water beneath. How easy it was to kill, and how pleasant! Jose was a villain who liked variety in methods of dealing death.

Vic Marquette moved feebly. His eyes stared straight up and saw the cruel, merciless face of Jose. This was a man with whom he could not treat. Jose was a creature who obeyed one master. That master had decreed death.

Jose sneered as he saw those eyes. He wanted to see the victim plead; but all he received was a cold, firm gaze.

Jose had encountered men before who had not feared death. There was no use wasting time with them. Stepping back, Jose leaned forward to raise the body on its way.

Then the clutching hands that gripped the body of Vic Marquette paused in response to Jose's gaze. Looking over the body, to the brink of the precipice a scant five feet away, Jose saw a flat shadow in the moonlight. It lay there, a long, gruesome shade, projecting from the edge of the precipice, directly over the path where Jose intended to roll the victim's body!

That wide streak of black was motionless, but it made Jose tremble; for it was almost identical with the black shape that Jose had seen upon the floor of the main room in the cottage!

Jose's hands trembled; then, with an angry snarl, the villain pressed the body forward. Why should he fear shadows? Even such shapes might move. This one seemed to be swaying now. What of it? Morales was right; no danger could lurk in moving patches of blackness.

The lust for murder was stronger now in Jose's mind than any superstitious reasoning that might normally dominate him. The intended killer rolled his victim's body forward as he raised his head to sight the edge of the cliff.

Then came a gargling cry from Jose's greasy lips. It was the low, snarling whine of a hunted, beaten beast.

Leaping backward, Jose forgot the mission that he was here to perform. Then his trembling limbs failed him. He cowered on the mound of rock, staring across the body of Vic Marquette, that lay face downward in the moonlight.

THERE, before Jose's bleary eyes, was a shadow that lived! It no longer lay as a substanceless shade across the flatness of the rock. It was a real form, a solid form, rising like a grim specter from the limitless depths of the quarry, emerging over the edge of the cliff like a figure of avenging doom!

Upward came that dread form until it stood as a tall, weird shape in black. It was a being that had the semblance of a human. Garbed in flowing cloak and broad-brimmed hat, this apparition made a terrifying sight.

Jose tried to rise to his feet. Then he sank again as the folds of the cloak spread outward, impelled by the arms beneath.

Jose had fallen flat on his face, his eyes staring upward toward that monstrous, batlike form that held its ghoulish pose upon the very edge of the great cliff. All the superstitious fears that Jose had suffered during the past few days were molded into reality now.

Weird stories of human vampires—terrible forms of dead bodies that had come to life—grotesque shapes that had appeared like apparitions upon the broad expanses of the Argentine pampas—these were visualized by the cringing coward whose work had been thwarted.

Jose sensed that this was more than a mere ghostly phantom that might disappear as quickly as it had come. In that belief he was correct. It was The Shadow who stood before him; and The Shadow, a living being, dealt vengeance as well as fear.

Skirting the path from the cottage, this creature of the night had preceded the fiends who were marching Vic Marquette to doom. As they had approached, The Shadow had slipped from sight into the one spot where no one could have suspected a concealed observer—over the curving, rough-hewed edge of the quarry, where he had clung with ease to await developments.

There, The Shadow had been secure, ready to loose a surprise attack from an unexpected quarter. He was blocking the path along which Vic Marquette would be pushed to doom.

Had Alfredo Morales and Pierre Armagnac remained to witness the execution, they, as well as Jose, would have tasted the metal of The Shadow's automatics.

But they had gone; now, with only Jose before him, The Shadow had relied upon his spectral guise to strike terror into the heart of the superstitious man who had sensed his presence, and had feared it.

Before Jose could recover from the dread that had gripped him, a sound reached his ears and awakened greater fears. The whispered tones of a mocking laugh came from the being that stood before him.

Those chilling echoes left no room for doubt. This fantastic apparition was a reality. The figure in black that had come from nowhere lived—and living, it uttered mirth that was inhuman.

THE SHADOW was moving forward, step by step. The spreading arms were folded now. To Jose, that advance meant certain death; yet in his panic, he could not turn to flee. Words were spoken by concealed lips - words that were uttered in Spanish.

"Jose"—The Shadow's voice was spectral—"I have warned you! You have known of my presence, even though you have not seen my form until now. Death awaits you if you fail to do my bidding. Unbind this man who lies before you!"

Trembling, Jose looked up to see The Shadow standing just beyond the form of Vic Marquette. For an instant, the cringing man hesitated; then, catching the glimmer of two avenging eyes, he crawled forward by inches until he had reached the bound body.

While The Shadow watched, Jose tugged at the knots until the ropes were loosened. Under the glare of those burning optics, he struggled with frenzied haste. At last, Vic Marquette lay free.

The Shadow's arm formed a long black line in the dull moonlight. Jose saw a finger pointing back toward the cottage in the woods. He moved away in the direction indicated. He stumbled over his rifle and nearly fell.

"Wait!" The Shadow's low command was hissed. "Remember, I have warned you! If you say to any one that you have seen my presence, I shall strike you dead. I shall kill you, Jose; kill you with the most horrible death that man has ever suffered!"

The words were followed by a fearful laugh that brought new qualms to Jose. He was afraid to leave this spot until he received The Shadow's bidding.

"Pick up your gun"—The Shadow's words were tense and vibrant—"return to those who left you here. Tell them that you have done their bidding. Remember: I shall be there to hear you speak!"

Mechanically, Jose plucked the rifle from the mound. He faltered as he backed away toward the path.

Fierce eyes were upon him as The Shadow's voice gave its command.

"Go!"

Jose stumbled toward the path. For a moment, he lingered, about to raise his rifle in a frantic burst of rage at this indignity. But as he heard The Shadow's laugh, all thoughts of resistance passed from his terror-stricken brain. The sight of that avenging figure was too fearful. Gripping the barrel of his gun, Jose fled.

The laugh of The Shadow sounded mirthlessly. The right hand lowered. The left hand, close to the long black cloak, disappeared with an automatic that it held.

Jose had not seen the weapon. Had he aimed his rifle toward The Shadow, he would have learned the accuracy of The Shadow's aim.

Now with Jose gone, The Shadow acted swiftly. Vic Marquette had half arisen. He was staring blankly about him—a man just awakened from a daze. Stooping, The Shadow raised him to his feet.

Scarcely realizing whether he was guided by friend or foe, Vic felt himself guided along a downward path. Trudging through the woods, supported by a strong arm, the secret-service man was dimly recalling events which he had so recently experienced.

THE side path ended when they reached the road. Here, beneath the trees, The Shadow's form was invisible. Vic Marquette, regaining his alertness, realized that he was some distance from the cottage. He heard a low voice close beside him.

"Go back to the hotel. Do not approach that cottage again. Leave, to-night before you are seen."

The words were a command. Vic understood. He realized suddenly who had spoken. This was not the first time that Vic Marquette had encountered The Shadow. In his recollections, the secret-service man remembered a tall figure in black who had saved him in a battle against enemies of the law.

"The Shadow!"

Marquette's brain was no longer hazy as he gasped these words. He turned and groped through the dark, expecting to discover the mysterious person beside him.

The Shadow was gone. From the trees beside the road came the whispered tones of a low, sardonic laugh—the parting sign of The Shadow.

The secret-service man stood wondering. Then he realized the wisdom of The Shadow's injunction.

Vic could not grasp all that had happened, but somehow he understood that he had not only been saved from death, but that his enemies believed him dead.

The cottage in the woods was a trap—to go there unarmed would be futile. There was only one course—to follow The Shadow's bidding.

Moving slowly along the road, Vic recalled one question that had been asked him by Alfredo Morales. That question had concerned some one named Partridge.

Vaguely, Vic remembered the feather that Jerry Fitzroy had carried. A partridge feather! Yes—the cottage in the woods could wait. Let the men who had captured him believe him dead. Partridge was the man whom he must find. The others would be watched by The Shadow.

In the light of his recent experience, Vic had much confidence in The Shadow's ability to cope with them.

WHILE Vic Marquette was setting forth toward the Westbrook Inn, another man was stumbling through the woods a few hundred yards away. It was Jose, frantically working his way back to the cottage.

He had lost the path in the darkness, and he was impelled onward through the underbrush by the fancied sound of a ringing laugh that still echoed in his ears. Nearing the cottage, he rested. A gasp came from his lips. Did he hear that same laugh, close beside him? He was sure of it!

Again, Jose blundered wildly through the thicket until he staggered into the clearing and stumbled upon the steps to the house. The door opened, and Manuel looked out.

With an effort, Jose regained some of his bravado, and entered the building. He found Morales and Armagnac awaiting him.

Jose's bedraggled appearance immediately caught the attention of Morales. The Argentinian quickly asked a question.

"Well?" he inquired. "What has happened?"

Jose was setting his rifle against the wall. Momentarily turned away, he was facing the window at the far end of the room.

For an instant, his eyes were wild. There, on the floor, he saw that same long shadow—that black projection from the window that slowly swayed backward and forward.

The effect on Jose was electric. Frightened though he was, he stiffened, and his face took on a scowl as he turned to answer the question that had been put to him.

"Did you do the work?" demanded Morales.

"Yes," growled Jose.

"That is the trouble, then?"

"Nothing—except those ropes. One of them was tangled on my foot. I nearly went over the cliff myself."

Morales laughed. Jose's excuse passed without question. Jose was noted for his clumsiness. Morales turned to Armagnac.

"You see?" he asked. "That is the way. A good man to do the work, but a blunderer. We must not blunder when we deal with Lucien Partridge."

"There will be no blunder there," returned Armagnac.

An hour later, Jose, partly recovered from his former dread, crept back along the path to the mound of rocks above the old quarry. Now that he had spoken false to Morales, he was worried lest his lie be discovered. He was thinking of those ropes and stones that he had left on the brink of the cliff.

The moonlight was shining on bare rock when Jose arrived. The sight of the place worried the man. He was puzzled when he discovered that the stones and the ropes were no longer there.

It all seemed like a dream to Jose, who was imaginative despite his brutal nature. He wondered whether he had actually experienced that encounter with The Shadow. Perhaps—the thought was a hope to Jose—he had pushed that body off the cliff, and then imagined what he had seen!

As Jose stared into the moonlight, a sudden sound broke from close beside him. The noise was low and weird, like a ghostly echo of a laugh that Jose had heard before upon this very spot!

Before the man could turn, a whispered voice came to his ears. Its hissing tones carried a final warning in words that gave Jose new terror—for they brought up the future as well as recalling the past.

"Remember!" The Shadow's utterance was sinister. "You have done my bidding. When I appear again, you will still obey. For those who do not obey will die!"

The voice trailed into a hollow laugh. Jose waited to hear no more. He fled along the path, back to the cottage, striving to fight against his newly awakened panic.

Shortly afterward, a tall form in black emerged from a clump of bushes beside the mound of rocks. The Shadow stood like a spectral image upon the flat surface that glistened gray in the moonlight.

A low, triumphant laugh echoed from the cliff. Its hissing tones seemed to reach the sepulchral depths of the old quarry, to be reechoed like the tantalizing whispers from a myriad of elves.

Then The Shadow was gone. Silence and moonlight alone remained upon that spot.

CHAPTER XIII. ARMAGNAC PROPOSES

ON the next afternoon, an automobile from the Westbrook station swung up the road toward Lucien Partridge's estate. As it turned beside the river gorge, its occupants were plainly visible to Alfredo Morales, stationed across the river. Through the spyglasses, the Argentinian recognized the bearded face of Pierre Armagnac.

The Frenchman was paying a visit to Lucien Partridge, in accordance to the plan that he and Morales had agreed upon. When the car had passed the turn in the road, it was no longer in view, but Morales knew well that Armagnac would not turn back from his mission.

The Frenchman alighted in front of the heavily barred gate, and dismissed the chauffeur in the vehicle that had brought him. His keen eyes studied the arrangements of the high iron fence. It did not take Armagnac long to appreciate the formidable barrier that this made. He knew that it was in all probability protected by electric wires.

Armagnac was wondering about Morales when he rang the bell. Last night he had gained a high respect for the Argentinian's ability, but he felt doubtful that Morales possessed a sure scheme of entering the grounds.

It might be possible to counteract the electric barrier, but Partridge must certainly have signals that would signify the resultant short circuit.

Through the bars of the gate, Armagnac spied the evil face of Vignetti, and decided that the man must be a Corsican. So when Vignetti arrived at the gate, Armagnac spoke to him in French, and inquired for Lucien Partridge.

Vignetti growled a reply in poor English, and broke into a gusto of Italian dialect. Armagnac grinned. Base Italian was still the language of many Corsicans, and Vignetti appeared to be one of those who resented French domination of his native isle. So Armagnac repeated his inquiry in English, and gave Vignetti his name.

Despite the fact that Morales had assured him visitors were usually well received by Lucien Partridge, Armagnac waited rather doubtfully until Vignetti returned. The Corsican opened the gate, and the

Frenchman entered. A few minutes later, he was in Partridge's library, awaiting the arrival of the old man.

Lucien Partridge came in from the laboratory. He wore a rather puzzled expression as he faced Pierre Armagnac. It was difficult to tell whether the old man was pleased or displeased to see this visitor. He motioned to Armagnac to be seated, and quietly awaited to hear what the Frenchman had to say.

ARMAGNAC did not delay long with his story. He sized the situation quickly, and knew that his best procedure was to gain Partridge's confidence at the start.

"You must be surprised to see me here," he remarked.

"I am surprised," returned Partridge. "I thought that you were in France."

"I was in France until eight days ago," declared Armagnac. "Then I decided to come here—leaving Mercier in charge of operations at Marseilles."

"Do you think this visit is wise?" quizzed Partridge. "I did not request it. You sent me no notification."

"You will soon be glad that I am here," returned Armagnac. "Perhaps you think that I am bringing bad news. On the contrary, I am bringing the opposite. My news is good. It all depends upon one factor, however -"

"Which is -"

"Your ability to supply me with a tremendous quantity of the yellow metal."

An avaricious gleam came into Partridge's eyes. Armagnac saw it and resisted the temptation to smile. He leaned forward and spoke in a low tone.

"I have a scheme to make millions. Millions—beyond all dreams."

"In France? I thought that you were working to the limit there, Armagnac."

"Not in France."

"You cannot operate elsewhere, Armagnac," declared the old man coldly. "That is our arrangement. Each man with his own country."

"You misunderstand me," smiled Armagnac. "I intend to operate within my limits. But I intend to do exactly what the French government is doing to-day."

"Which is -"

"To assist in the expansion of the French colonial possessions," returned Armagnac, still smiling.

"The French colonies?" questioned Partridge sharply. "That would be too much effort for the gain, would it not?"

"You do not know the French colonies of to-day," returned Armagnac. "That is where the new wealth lies. Africa—ah—it is a rising empire! No one can realize it until they have been there.

"The French colonies are being backed by gold. Millions upon millions of gold. I can tap that tremendous source while I still work in France. Mercier is doing well at Marseilles. I intend to travel."

The enthusiasm in Armagnac's voice was contagious. Already, Partridge, with his love for gold, was visualizing new opportunity. He recalled that French colonial expansion was becoming a modern epoch. Armagnac was crafty and informed. Armagnac must be right.

The old man leaned back in his chair. Armagnac saw that he was interested. The Frenchman began to weave a picture of fabulous wealth. His stories of equatorial Africa took on the semblance of a new "Arabian Nights."

Time rolled by; still Armagnac kept on. At last his smooth voice died away. Armagnac hid a smile within his beard as he witnessed the effect upon Lucien Partridge.

"So you see," he added, "it required no code letter with a partridge feather to bring me here posthaste. I am ready; but my work must begin at once. A well-planned base in Africa must be heavily supplied with the metal I desire."

"You shall be supplied," remarked Partridge.

Armagnac appeared dubious. Partridge eyed him closely. The old man was slightly annoyed at Armagnac's demeanor.

"You doubt me?" he questioned sharply.

"Not your intention," returned Armagnac, in a suave tone. "I merely am afraid that you do not realize what a huge order this will be. Much greater than your former output."

"How much greater?"

"Double your total production. Double the amount you are sending to me in France."

There was a tone of conceit in Armagnac's voice. It aroused Partridge's reply.

"Double your supply?" quizzed the old man ironically. "Do you believe that you alone are using my output? Is France all the world? Bah! Come with me!"

He erased and beckoned to Armagnac to follow. The Frenchman was elated. Partridge was playing into the trap. As his name indicated, he was a wise old bird; but Armagnac fancied himself craftier than any bird.

PARTRIDGE led the way through the laboratory. They descended into the rooms below. Here men were at work about a crucible. Partridge passed beyond them. He unlocked a door of a storage room. A mass of yellow bars greeted Armagnac's eyes.

"There is some yellow metal," crackled Partridge. "Come. I shall show you more."

Partridge led Armagnac from one storeroom to another. When they had completed the rounds, they went up to the laboratory. There Partridge smiled at the astonishment which Armagnac now evidenced.

"Yellow metal," quavered the old man. "Tons of it! Metal that looks like gold. Metal that passes for gold—as you—and others—have learned."

"You have a vast store," remarked Armagnac, affecting a wise look. "I did not realize before the extent of your operations. But, of course, much of that is real gold that you have received from myself and others."

"Real gold?" questioned Partridge. "Real gold, in those rooms below? Do you think that I would leave the true gold in such proximity to the false? No, no, Armagnac. I am too wise for that. My real gold" - his

voice became cagey— "what I have of it—is kept elsewhere."

"On this property, of course."

The old man's eyelids flickered. He paused a moment; then smiled.

"Of course I keep it here," he said. "This place is a stronghold. But I do not keep the real gold with the false. I keep it out there."

He pointed from a window of the laboratory, across the lawn, to the little building a hundred yards away, by the edge of the cliff. Armagnac observed the steel-sheathed door.

"Deep in the cliff," remarked Partridge. "Down beneath the basement of that workhouse. There I keep my real wealth. You speak of millions. Come—I shall show you."

The two men strolled across the lawn. Armagnac, his eyes moving like little beads, was scanning every spot about him. The bearded Frenchman possessed a photographic mind. Already he was on the trail of the most essential detail that he had sought.

They arrived at the workhouse. Lucien Partridge unlocked the strong door. The two entered a one-room building that was equipped with shuttered windows. The door remained open, and the dull light that entered showed nothing but a barren floor with workbenches and tools.

Pierre Armagnac gazed about him in evident disappointment. Lucien Partridge chuckled. He moved a bench aside, and opened a trapdoor that was artfully concealed in the floor. He motioned Armagnac to descend a ladder. The old man followed with surprising agility.

They were in a stone-floored room. Partridge illuminated it with a hanging lamp. In one corner he raised a rough stone with his clawlike fingers. The stone was merely a flat slab. The light came down on an extension wire. Partridge held it above the hole.

"Look there, Armagnac," he said.

The Frenchman gazed below. It was staring into a veritable shaft that ran at an angle into the ground. It had roughhewn steps that served as shelves; and on those ledges Armagnac saw bars and masses of golden metal.

ARMAGNAC arose and looked at Partridge. He saw the old man's face beaming with miserly joy of possession. Here, he knew, was the secret storage room of the vast wealth which Lucien Partridge had gained through his illicit enterprises.

In the brief inspection permitted him, Armagnac knew that Morales had spoken the truth when he had declared there was enough for two.

The bearded Frenchman tried to suppress the elation that he felt. He endeavored to show indifference after he and Partridge had left the workhouse. The old man pointed to the door after he had locked it.

"Protected with an electric signal," he said. "Let any one attempt to open it at night. The alarm would sound immediately. But no one will try"—the old man chuckled—"for no one can enter here, where I have my fence and my great cliff to the river."

They reached Partridge's laboratory. There, Armagnac expressed interest in Partridge's experiments. They talked together until after dusk. Then Armagnac suddenly remembered that he must take the train to New York.

"I told the driver to return, unless I notified the station otherwise," he said. "I presume that he will be here shortly. Well, Mr. Partridge, we are men well suited. I want the yellow metal that looks like gold. In return I shall add to your storage room of real gold."

"You are leaving for France immediately?"

"As soon as possible."

"That is wise. You may count upon me for all the synthetic gold that you require."

Armagnac's eyes had a far-away look. He seemed to be visualizing the vast opportunities that lay within the colonies of France. His lips curved in a foreboding smile.

Vignetti entered to state that the automobile had arrived to take the visitor to the station. Pierre Armagnac was about to leave, when Lucien Partridge restrained him.

"Wait a few moments," insisted the old man. "You have ample time. I shall walk outside with you. But first, let me don my laboratory garb, now that Vignetti is here."

The Corsican arrived with gloves and smock. Lucien Partridge calmly donned the garments. He accompanied Pierre Armagnac to the gate. The Frenchman was talking in a low voice, weaving vast, vague schemes of his future work.

At the gate, Lucien Partridge extended his hand. Pierre Armagnac clasped it, glove and all. He listened while the old man spoke.

"What I have revealed must not be known," remarked Partridge, in a low tone.

"Certainly not," responded Armagnac.

"It is a closed book -"

"Never to be reopened."

The men parted. Armagnac looked back as he drove away in the dusk. The benign old man was standing at the gate, with Vignetti close beside him. An old fool and a dumb servant; so Armagnac considered them.

The automobile rolled on toward the station. Armagnac sat back in the cushions, thinking deeply. He noticed that his right hand was tingling slightly. He rubbed his hands together, and the sensation ceased.

Armagnac was more than pleased as he stared from the car window. He had discovered the old man's lair. To-night, plans would be made that would mean great wealth for Pierre Armagnac and his partner, Alfredo Morales.

CHAPTER XIV. THE MEETING

IT was after nine o'clock that night when Pierre Armagnac left the Westbrook Inn for a quiet stroll. As usual, the bearded Frenchman was wary in his actions. He laughed at his own precautions, however, for he was sure that there was no one at the hotel who might be interested in his activities.

As Armagnac made his way along the road toward the cottage in the woods, he failed to notice a peculiar phenomenon—a drifting shape that kept pace close behind him.

Had Armagnac noted that fleeting form of blackness, he would probably have ignored it. For it was

scarcely more than a shadowy blotch moving along the path that he was taking.

When he reached the clearing in the woods, Armagnac gave a low whistle—a signal agreed upon between himself and Morales. He advanced; opened the cottage door, and entered. There he found Morales awaiting him. The Frenchman smiled in greeting. He sat down and began his tale.

"I have learned all you wish to know," he said. "Your surmise is correct. The gold is kept outside the house."

"Ah!" exclaimed Morales. "The real gold?"

"The real gold. The synthetic metal is in the large building."

"Excellent! How far is the real gold from the house?"

"One hundred yards—in a frame workhouse by the edge of the gorge."

"Better yet! Is it guarded?"

"By an electric alarm that evidently goes to the mansion."

"The mansion, too, is a frame structure?"

"Yes. The laboratory takes up much of the main floor. The furnaces are in the basement."

Morales drew Armagnac to a table and produced paper and pencil. The Frenchman began to draw an outlined plan of Lucien Partridge's domain. Armagnac's remembrance of detail was amazing. When he had completed his sketch, the territory across the river was an open book to Alfredo Morales.

"Wonderful!" exclaimed the Argentinian. "I could not have done so well had I covered the terrain by plane. That would have been a bad thing to do—and it would not have given me the details that I absolutely needed. For instance—the hiding place of the gold. I suspected that it might be outside the house.

"In the house or out, I would chance the scheme that I have in mind. But inside would not be so good as outside. Ah—you will understand, soon."

A line of darkness crept along the floor. To-night, as on the preceding evening, it extended inward from the window. The area of darkness became motionless, escaping the attention of the plotters.

Armagnac was telling Morales his estimate of the wealth concealed in Partridge's secret hiding place. The Frenchman was enthusiastic. Morales, now, was dreaming as he listened.

"GOLD—masses of it—shelves of it"—Armagnac was breathless—"and the old man has no need of worry. Guarded, hidden, weighing such a huge amount—how can it be spirited away?"

"Why do you think he showed it to you so readily?"

"I led up to it. He knew that I was planning to make millions of my own. He wanted to add to my confidence. He is gold-mad.

"You know, Partridge has sought to make real gold. He claims that he has succeeded, to a remarkable degree. This yellow metal is but inferior. But—according to his tale—he cannot produce the perfect metal cheaply enough to warrant its manufacture."

"He is a dreamer," declared Morales. "One cannot be too sure about his capabilities."

"But he has gold," said Armagnac. "I could see his ambition in his face. He wants to dominate the world by controlling the gold supply. A remarkable ambition, but too high. Better to seek what we have sought - a vast quantity of gold that will enable us to forget our counterfeiting."

"It will be ours," returned Morales, with a sallow smile. "Ours— very soon!"

Armagnac expressed doubt in his eyes. Morales smiled more broadly. Armagnac's doubt increased. He spoke thoughtfully, with carefully chosen words.

"I have done my part, Morales," said the Frenchman. "Now is your turn. By our agreement, we were to exchange information and services. I have found out all that you needed. Now I want to know your plans."

Morales began to laugh. Armagnac wondered why. The Argentinian arose and lighted a cigarette. His mirth continued. When he paused, he faced the Frenchman and explained the reason for his laughter.

"Armagnac," he said, "you are wondering what I intend to do. You have brought me information that is worth millions; yet you yourself cannot understand its value. Unthinkingly, you have ended your own usefulness in this enterprise."

"I am here with men; with method; with purpose. You are alone. I need you no longer. You have begun to realize that fact. Nevertheless" - his eyes flashed shrewdly—"I place each of us upon an equal basis. Why? Because one and one make two—and two are better than one."

"I am thinking of the future—of the vast possibilities that will open up to two clever men who can work in harmony. You understand? This will be the beginning."

"You ask me my plans? I shall show you. You, Pierre Armagnac, with all your experience, with all your genius, will admire the schemes of Alfredo Morales."

Approaching the door of the room, Morales uttered a low whistle. Jose entered from the outer door. Morales questioned him.

"Manuel has not returned?"

"No."

"Remain here, Jose. Keep watch until we return."

Armagnac expected to see Morales indicate that they were to leave the cottage. Instead, Morales went to a door in the corner of the room. He paused there, and spoke, with dramatic effect.

"You were in the great war, Monsieur Armagnac?"

"Yes," replied the Frenchman, puzzled.

"There were many successful attacks then," declared Morales. "Many attacks that were directed against strongholds more formidable than the one in which Lucien Partridge now barricades himself."

"Quite true."

"I have my forces, Armagnac. There are men whom you have not seen— men who are waiting. To sweep into Partridge's domain—to carry off that gold— such would not be difficult with proper

equipment, provided that -"

Morales paused to observe if Armagnac caught the thought. The Frenchman responded quickly.

"Provided that the way should be open," he said. "But it would have to be clear for quick action."

"Exactly," declared Morales. "Often, in warfare, infantry have gained their objective almost unmolested because of the attack that preceded it."

"The barrage."

"Yes. You have named the very method that I intend to use against Lucien Partridge. Come. I shall show you."

MORALES opened the door. He revealed a flight of steps that led upward. Beckoning, Morales ascended the steps. Armagnac followed, closing the door behind him.

Jose sat down in a chair. His task was to keep watch while his master was on tour of inspection. Jose gazed idly about the room. His eyes sighted the long shape of black that lay upon the floor.

A startled expression crept over Jose's greasy features. He looked toward the window; then at the black silhouette. Again his eyes were raised toward the window. Jose uttered a gasping scream as he cowered in the chair.

Silently, like a weird phantom of the night, a figure had appeared within the room. There, by the window, stood that strange being whom Jose had encountered on the mound of rocks.

The Shadow's arms were folded; his long black cloak swayed mysteriously from his shoulders. His fierce eyes glowed beneath the protecting brim of the slouch hat.

Chilling, whispered mockery emerged from invisible lips. That echoing laugh brought terror to Jose. It was unreal, that shuddering mirth that came from the personage in black. The very air seemed tense with the power of The Shadow's presence.

"Jose"—the words that followed were in Spanish—"I am here to warn you again. Should you speak one word against my bidding, I shall strike. Only while you obey me can you live."

The Shadow strode across the room. He towered over the cowering form of Jose. His burning eyes fathomed the man in the chair.

Jose could not meet that glance. He turned away, pitifully frightened, expecting doom which he could not prevent. The shuddering laugh echoed in his ears.

Then came silence. Jose waited. Slowly, he turned his head and gazed about the room. He was alone. The being in black had departed. There was no silhouette upon the floor. Jose's eyes sighted the door through which Morales and Armagnac had gone.

Was that the route which The Shadow had taken? Jose did not know. He was afraid to leave the chair. Still cowering, he waited, hoping that Morales and Armagnac would not be long in returning.

CHAPTER XV. DEATH ARRIVES

ALFREDO MORALES and Pierre Armagnac were standing upon the flat roof of the cottage. A trapdoor lay open behind them. They were not concerned with the route by which they had reached this

spot. They were examining a squat, bulky object to which Morales pointed with pride.

This object was a powerful, wide-mouthed mortar, firmly placed in the center of the roof.

"What do you think of this little toy?" questioned Morales, in a low voice.

"It is a beauty!" exclaimed Armagnac.

"You see," Morales spoke again. "Look there."

He pointed upward through the space amid the trees off toward the moonlit sky. Armagnac followed the direction that he indicated.

"That is the way to Partridge's house," explained Morales. "This mortar will send the messengers that I have prepared. That messenger will clear the way for me."

A figure was rising through the trapdoor. Neither Morales nor Armagnac saw it. They were staring through the trees. The Shadow grew into a tall, spectral form that moved silently across the roof and merged with the darkness of the single chimney that projected above the house.

"The range?" questioned Armagnac.

"It is perfect," answered Morales. "This mortar possesses remarkable accuracy. I have found the range by careful calculation. The target is a huge one—Partridge's mansion.

"The building is visible from different spots along the gorge. I have surveyed it by military engineering. My range is perfect. It cannot fail."

"But what will be the result?"

"Let me explain my purpose, Armagnac. There is one thing that we must counteract—that one thing is time. To attack Partridge; to overcome resistance; that would be easy. But it would take time. There are state police twelve miles from here. Once an alarm has been spread, they would come to the scene."

"That is the danger, Morales. After you have begun the attack, you must work swiftly."

"I am prepared for that. When the time has been set, I shall be waiting with a crew of men and motor trucks, ready to enter and remove the gold. It will be a simple matter, swiftly executed; but one factor is most necessary."

"The way must be clear."

"That is it, Armagnac. A stubborn resistance by Partridge and his men would bring about a disastrous delay. That is why I needed the information that you have brought me.

"If the gold were in the large mansion, where Partridge and his men are stationed, the task would present insurmountable difficulties."

"Because of Partridge and his men? You will encounter them when you attack the workhouse -"

"Partridge and his men will be no obstacle," interposed Morales. "They will be gone before we enter. They will be buried in the ruins of that old mansion."

A short exclamation came from Armagnac. Now the Frenchman was beginning to understand the details of the Argentinian's plan.

"This mortar," said Morales, "will deliver a giant bomb squarely upon the roof of the mansion. There will be a muffled report from this side of the river; then a tremendous explosion when the bomb strikes the big house across the gorge. That will be the end of Partridge and his men. But should the gold be in the doomed building -"

"I understand. You would be unable to remove it."

"Exactly. Now that I know where the gold is, I can get it. The wired fence; the protection on the workhouse; those mean nothing, so long as no living beings remain within. Alarms are utterly useless if there are none to hear them."

"Your plan is perfect!" exclaimed Armagnac. "You can drive the trucks through the broken gate. Load them and leave. People will hear the explosion, of course -"

"What of it?" questioned Morales, as Armagnac paused. "Partridge is known to be a chemist. His experiments may logically involve explosives. The wreckage of his building will be attributed to his own negligence."

"That is true, but the noise will bring many people to the scene."

"The nearest spot is the hotel. That is six miles by road. An explosion, in the middle of the night, will create bewilderment at first. Then the improvised investigating squads will start. We will be gone when they arrive."

Armagnac nodded. He realized that the plan was well founded. With a crew of strong workers, the removal of the gold could be swiftly executed. Morales smiled.

"The rescuers," he said, "will come from above Partridge's place. Both the hotel and the barracks are in that direction. They must cross the bridge over the gorge and take the narrow road. There they will find the way blocked by a wrecked truck. It will delay their progress, more than four miles from Partridge's."

"You could block the road altogether."

"I do not wish to do so. The old, broken truck must appear to be an accident. It will allow more time to get away. I have estimated exactly, Armagnac. It will be a full hour before the first arrivals reach there."

MORALES turned and started for the trapdoor. Armagnac followed him. When the two men reached the downstairs room, they found Jose seated in the chair, staring fixedly at the door through which they came.

"What is the matter, Jose?" growled Morales. "Are you still worrying about shadows?"

"Shadows?" questioned Armagnac.

"Yes," sneered Morales. "Jose is becoming so apprehensive that I can scarcely trust him here. Every time he sees a shadow, he is frightened. I intended to leave Jose here to discharge the bomb; but I think I shall intrust that task to Manuel."

"When will you attack?" questioned Armagnac.

"At three o'clock in the morning," replied Morales. "To-morrow, I shall make all arrangements. We will be prepared at midnight. Three o'clock will be the zero hour."

"An excellent time for operation."

Morales did not respond to Armagnac's reply. He was looking at Jose, whose eyes were staring across the room. Had Morales followed the direction of Jose's gaze, he would have seen a long, silhouetted streak of blackness emerging from the door to the stairway. Morales had not closed that door upon his return to the room.

"Come, Jose!" exploded Morales impatiently. "Why are you so frightened? Have you seen any one, other than your shadows?"

Jose shook his head. He opened his lips as though about to speak. The shadow on the floor was moving warningly.

Both Morales and Armagnac were staring at Jose, who seemed to be seeing ghosts. The bearded Frenchman laughed as he moved a few paces across the room.

"Shadows can hurt no one," said Armagnac. "What are shadows? Nothing!"

The bearded man was standing directly upon the silhouetted patch of blackness. Jose trembled. To him, that was a danger spot.

"Shadows?" Armagnac raised his arm so that his hand formed a shadow upon the wall. He moved his fingers. "See? There are shadows—they are nothing."

Armagnac's fingers became rigid. He stared at them in bewilderment. He raised his other hand. He tried to move its fingers. They, too, had stiffened. Armagnac shook his arms. They weakened and refused to function.

"My shoulders!" he cried. "They are numb! Something is happening to me! What can be the matter?"

The Frenchman began to sag. His legs could no longer support his weight. He collapsed upon the floor, his body covering that shadow which Jose dreaded.

Armagnac was gasping words in both French and English. Suddenly, his eyes were livid. A terrible horror was reflected in those optics as they stared toward Alfredo Morales.

"The creeping death!" gasped Armagnac. "I have seen it—have seen it kill —when I was in Saigon! Help me"—his voice was dwindling— "help -"

Armagnac's lips were moving, but they formed no articulate words. Morales was leaning over him.

A sudden light of fury flashed in Armagnac's eyes. A vivid recollection had come to him. His lips seemed to phrase a warning; then they moved no more. Firm, rigid they remained, pursed within the black beard. The staring eyes became glassy.

Pierre Armagnac was dead!

JOSE was wild with terror. To him, the fact that Armagnac had stood within the range of that patch of black upon the floor was proof sufficient of The Shadow's power.

Staring beyond the Frenchman's body, Jose saw a form in black. He thought that he caught the shudder of a vague, mocking laugh. Then, as Morales drew Armagnac's body across the floor, Jose saw that the patch of black was gone.

"The creeping death," remarked Morales thoughtfully. "In Saigon. Some strange malady to which he was subject. Poor Armagnac!" Morales laughed. "Well, his work was finished. Together, we might have

encountered trouble in the future. When death strikes, it often strikes wisely."

Thus philosophizing, Morales looked up to see Manuel entering the room. The slender, dark-faced henchman stared at the dead body of Pierre Armagnac.

"He is dead," remarked Morales. "A great misfortune—for Pierre Armagnac. Perhaps not for Alfredo Morales. I am glad you have returned, Manuel. You, are more reliable than Jose. We shall drop this body in the quarry, you and I, while Jose remains here. Jose"—Morales spoke contemptuously—"is becoming faint-hearted. He does not like to look at death."

Jose did not answer the derisive words. He watched while Morales and Manuel raised the body of Armagnac, and carried it from the house. Then he stared at the door that led upstairs. The floor began to blacken. Jose trembled.

The spectral form of The Shadow appeared from the stairway. Jose cowered in a corner. The Shadow laughed in a sepulchral whisper. He stood watching Jose. Then he spoke in his low, sinister tone.

"Beware, Jose"—the words seemed prophetic—"I have warned you. You have seen—death!"

The whispered laugh was repeated. When Jose again stared toward the spot where The Shadow had been, the room was empty. The being in black had gone.

LABORING along the path to the quarry, Morales and Manuel finally reached the mound of rocks. Their progress had been slow and troublesome.

Now they filled Armagnac's clothing with small stones. Together, they pushed the body over the edge. A resounding splash from beneath marked the watery burial of Pierre Armagnac.

After Morales and Manuel had gone back along the path to the cottage, a shade of black appeared upon the sparkling surface of stone. Then The Shadow stood in the moonlight, staring downward into the quarry. A low, sinister laugh came from the hidden lips beneath the turned-up collar of the black cloak.

Pierre Armagnac was dead. Jose attributed that death to The Shadow. Alfredo Morales believed that it was due to a strange ailment. Manuel had no theory.

The Shadow, alone, had suspected the cause of that creeping death. He had marked the truth: that Pierre Armagnac had been murdered by the design of Lucien Partridge. Armagnac, himself, had realized it; but his frozen lips had failed to tell.

Armagnac was gone. The contest lay now between two men: Morales and Partridge. Both were ruthless; both were fiends of crime. What would be the outcome?

Only The Shadow knew. His laugh told that he, too, would enter into this strange conflict!

CHAPTER XVI. THE NEXT NIGHT

TWENTY-FOUR hours had passed since the death of Pierre Armagnac. Two men were standing in Lucien Partridge's laboratory. One was the old man; the other was the faithful Vignetti. The Corsican was watching the completion of an experiment.

Lucien Partridge turned to Vignetti with an evil grin. He pointed to a test tube which contained a small quantity of a fine, grayish powder.

"There lies death, Vignetti," declared the old man.

The Corsican grinned in fiendish fashion.

"This is what I have wanted, more than gold," chuckled Partridge. "He who has gold must be able to deal death. My false gold brought me real gold. The death that I have given has been real death.

"But only with those gloves have I dealt death. Those gloves, deeply covered with the powder that gives the creeping death to those who would spoil my plans. Now, with this new powder, I can send death. Send it, Vignetti! Send it, anywhere—throughout all the world! Ah! What a vendetta this will be!

"Kings—presidents—men of wealth and fortune! They shall be my victims. You will help me, Vignetti. This powder, worked into harmless letters, will kill those who touch it. Not instantly—no, Vignetti, that would not be wise—but after a time, when no one can know the cause!

"Death will rule, Vignetti! Death as I deliver it! Soon we shall begin. With gold, I shall be the master of life! With my powder, I shall be the master of death! Such men as Armagnac—I shall not have to wait for them to visit me. I can send death to them!"

The old man's face was a rhapsody of evil. A curious elation dominated him. His eyes were staring far away; his tone was reminiscent.

"Li Tan Chang!" he remarked. "His own invention brought him death. That night in Peking, when you were prompt with the knife, Vignetti. You suspected the approach of Li Tan Chang's creeping death. After all, it is an Oriental malady; but that wise Chinaman was the first to use a means to deliver it.

"What would he think if he were alive to-day! You prevented my death, Vignetti. I learned the secret. Now I have developed a more potent poison. Where it required much of Li Tan Chang's formula to work through the flesh, a small amount of mine will serve the purpose!"

The old man emptied the contents of the test tube upon a sheet of paper. Partridge was wearing laboratory gloves. Yet he used the utmost care as he slid the powder into a small, square box.

"I shall put it safely away," he said. "We will not need it for a while, Vignetti. To-morrow. I shall prepare my list of those whom I would like to die. Men who have never seen me; men who have never heard of me; but all men who some day might try to obstruct my plan to rule the world!"

Vignetti nodded. He knew what was in his master's mind. Partridge, speaking his medley of English and Italian dialect, continued as he walked toward the library.

"You shall help me, Vignetti," he declared, "with this new method of death. Chance letters, mailed from here and there; all will carry the death that up to now I gave by hand.

"When people visit me, the old method will be best. It is much better that such people die far away. But for those who do not come—for those I want to die whom I do not meet—we will send this new powder!"

The old man put the box away in a table drawer. He brought out an envelope and opened it. The envelope contained a list which bore the names of many persons. Lucien Partridge chuckled gleefully as he studied this line of intended victims.

"Vignetti thinks it a vendetta," he said softly, after noting that the Corsican had gone. "Ah! It is a vendetta; but such a one as the world has never known!

"The Romans had their lists of prescribed victims; those who were to die. But my list! Ah, all will surely die, unbeknown! Chaos will rule! Dynasties will perish; republics become ungoverned masses; great

enterprises will fail!

"Men will be afraid to command. They will look for a leader. Then, as dictator for all the world, I shall rise as the master of all autocrats. Who else could do the same? I shall have the wealth of Croesus; the power of Napoleon; vast territory beyond the dreams of Alexander. The ruler of all the world!"

The old man sat in silence. His lips moved happily. Across his face flickered changing emotions that showed the turn of his eccentric mind. One moment benign, another moment fiendish, his expressions were the extreme in contrast.

VIGNETTI entered the room and interrupted the old man's thoughts with a short announcement.

"Mr. Cranston is here," he said.

A new expression came over Partridge's face. This was one of perplexity.

"Cranston," he said thoughtfully. "Yes, we received his telegram to-day. It referred to the New Era Mines. Urgent business, so he said. I must see him, Vignetti; but I doubt that he can know much. However—I expect you to be ready -"

Vignetti nodded and left to usher in this guest who waited at the gate.

A few minutes later, a tall man attired in evening clothes entered the library. Lucien Partridge arose to greet his visitor.

"Mr. Cranston?" he questioned.

"Yes," came the reply. "My name is Lamont Cranston."

Lucien Partridge was oddly impressed with the appearance of his visitor. Never, throughout his long life, had the old man met such an unusual personage.

Lamont Cranston possessed a face that was enigmatical. One could not have divined his age from his features. He seemed young, yet old; quiet, yet purposeful.

His face was chiseled like that of a sculptured statue; at the same time, it possessed a masklike quality that betrayed no emotions. Two sharp, piercing eyes glowed on either side of Cranston's hawkish nose; yet there was neither suspicion nor unfriendliness in that steady gaze.

Even in his voice, Cranston exhibited a remarkable contrast. His tones were deliberate and easy; still they carried an even note that made each syllable stand out distinctly by itself. Lucien Partridge felt himself dominated by the personality of this amazing individual.

So keenly was the old man studying his visitor that he did not observe a peculiar phenomenon that accompanied Lamont Cranston. Across the floor, spreading like the spectral shape of a gigantic bat, lay a huge shadow. As Cranston turned toward the chair which Partridge indicated, that shade took on the aspect of a long, thin form, topped by a broad-brimmed hat.

Perhaps the changing shadows were due to the peculiar lighting of the room. Whatever the case might have been, the final shade still remained after Cranston had seated himself. It was then that Partridge turned an inquiring gaze toward his visitor.

"I HAVE been wondering why you wished to see me, Mr. Cranston," Partridge remarked. "It is not often that I receive visitors."

"So I have understood, Mr. Partridge," returned Cranston, in an even, smooth tone. "Clifford Forster—Lawrence Guthrie—both were friends of mine. I know that they have visited you."

A faint trace of suppressed worry appeared upon Partridge's countenance. The old man quickly recovered from his betrayed emotion.

"Yes," he responded. "Both have been here. Poor Forster—I understand that he is dead."

"Yes," returned Cranston, "Forster is dead. But I am surprised that you have not mentioned Guthrie also. He died since Forster."

"Guthrie—dead!"

"Yes, he died—like Forster—on a train in Canada."

An expression of feigned regret appeared upon Partridge's face. He hastened to make a cunning statement.

"Both were acquaintances of mine, Mr. Cranston. Merely acquaintances, you understand."

"So the world believes," responded Cranston, with the faintest trace of a smile. "But I happen to have obtained information of a different sort."

"Which is -"

"That both Forster and Guthrie were concerned in some enterprise which caused them to deal with you—an enterprise that also involved the New Era Mines."

"Where did you receive such information?" questioned Partridge coldly.

"Through my intended purchase of stock in the New Era Mines," responded Cranston. "There I learned of certain negotiations upon which the success of the mine depended."

"Forster evidently had contracts and other documents. These were not found after his death. However, I was able to trace a connection with Guthrie and one with yourself. That is why I have come to see you; in the hope that you can tell me all the details."

"Mr. Cranston"—Partridge's eyes were gleaming in a friendly manner—"there was a slight connection between both of those men and myself. I have not made the fact public, because our slight negotiations were intended to be kept private."

"Here, in my laboratory, I have made experiments in the refinement of gold. Lawrence Guthrie learned of it. He included Clifford Forster to consider taking an interest in those experiments. Our friendships were in the making. Clifford Forster visited me here, some time before he died. Lawrence Guthrie also called to see me on occasions."

"Did he come here after Forster's death?"

"I am not sure"—Partridge was speculative—"indeed, I scarcely think so, Mr. Cranston."

"I must tell you an important fact," said Cranston, in a kindly tone. "Lawrence Guthrie was suspected in the death of Clifford Forster. Hence Guthrie's death has caused much comment."

A look of vague understanding seemed to trouble Lucien Partridge. Noting it, Lamont Cranston hastened to add further remarks.

"Knowing that your name was connected with both men," he resumed, "I thought it best to call on you—to learn if, by any chance, either of these two had ever evidenced an enmity for the other."

"You are a police official?" quizzed Partridge.

"No," asserted Cranston, "I am merely a financier who is interested in the success of mining enterprises. Due to my proposed purchase of New Era stock, I am naturally concerned with the underlying affairs of that company.

"I have discovered traces of facts that I have told to no one. Indeed, there is no connection whatever between myself and either Guthrie or Forster.

"I came from New York last night. I registered at the Westbrook Inn under an assumed name. I do not want my presence here to be known to any one. I waited until evening to call on you.

"After dining at the hotel, I was taxied here. I must go back to the inn to get my luggage and leave on the late train for New York. But I was desirous of making your acquaintance, for the reasons that I have mentioned."

"I understand," nodded Partridge. "Well, Mr. Cranston, time is too short for us to discuss these matters now. If you had come earlier in the evening—but it is nearing midnight. If I were sure that you alone knew of Forster's connection with Guthrie -"

"I alone know that fact," interposed Cranston.

"Then," continued the old man, "I might be able to do something for you. Could you arrange matters so that you could return here—say within a week or ten days?"

"Gladly, Mr. Partridge."

"That would be excellent. You must allow me time to consider matters; to locate correspondence which I had with Guthrie and Forster. Say nothing about this matter until you hear from me."

LAMONT CRANSTON arose and bowed. He extended a card that bore his name and address. Vignetti entered and aided the guest to don his coat and hat.

"I left the car waiting outside with the driver," explained Cranston. "So I shall leave you now."

"One moment, Mr. Cranston," remarked Partridge hastily. "You have time to see my laboratory. It is only a few steps away."

He led the way, with Cranston and Vignetti following. The shadows of the three merged; but that cast by Cranston seemed to obliterate the others as they entered the lighted laboratory.

Partridge spoke to Vignetti; the Corsican obtained his master's smock, and brought a pair of gloves from the rear section of the table drawer.

"An excellent laboratory," commented Cranston, gazing about him.

"Yes," replied Partridge, as he donned the smock and pulled on the gloves. "I always experiment at night."

"Then I shall bid you good night," said Cranston courteously, as he turned toward the door.

"I shall go with you to the car," offered Partridge.

Cranston, tall and imposing, preceded Partridge across the hallway and along the walk to the iron gate. As Partridge spoke to him, Cranston did not appear to hear the old man. He kept on and reached the car. Partridge, with Vignetti at his heels, hurried to the open window of the sedan.

Lamont Cranston pushed a package aside. He lifted something from the seat beside him. Lucien Partridge, wishing him good speed, could not see his hands in the dark until the moment came for the final parting.

"Good night," said the old man, extending his gloved hand, just as Cranston ordered the driver to proceed.

"Good night," responded Cranston, as he reached to accept the clasp.

A curious smile was creeping over Partridge's features as he extended that fatal hand, which bore the poisoned powder upon its glove. The clasp was made, unnoticed by the driver. Suddenly the car shot forward; Partridge was forced to release his clutch. He stepped back, to catch a glimpse of Cranston leaning from the car, waving a belated good-by.

A sharp oath came from Lucien Partridge's lips. The cry was echoed by a growl from Vignetti. For in that last flash, Partridge had seen something which he had not noticed during the handclasp.

He knew now why Lamont Cranston's hands had not been visible in the car. The discovery made him wild with rage. Upon entering the sedan, Cranston had donned a pair of long black gloves!

Partridge's handshake that bore the creeping death had gone to naught! Glove had met glove. Lamont Cranston—otherwise The Shadow—had frustrated the shrewd purpose of the fiend!

CHAPTER XVII. THE SHADOW ON THE CLIFF

A TREMENDOUS fury had possessed Lucien Partridge. He realized that he had been thwarted by a man whose subtle craftiness was more potent than his own.

Not an irate word; not the semblance of a threat had passed between him and Lamont Cranston. The old man had intended to send forth another unsuspecting victim. Instead, Cranston had outwitted him; yet, in turn, had left no evidence that he had suspected the old man's design.

Partridge was in a quandary. Was Cranston merely a chance visitor, who knew no more than he had said? Or was he a shrewd investigator who had come to learn the secret of Partridge's application of the creeping death?

In view of their conversation, the first surmise must be correct. But, instinctively, the old man sensed that Lamont Cranston had come to learn one single fact; that forewarned, he had been forearmed.

In either case, it would be dangerous for this man to live. Knowing of Forster's connection with Guthrie, and the double connection between those men and Partridge, Cranston was a menace to the old man's schemes. Either unwittingly or by design, he could spoil Partridge's mighty dreams of life, death, and wealth.

Something must be done to intercept him before he could manage to leave Westbrook Falls. Fitzroy—Forster—Guthrie—Armagnac—none of these compared with Cranston as a danger. Turning, his face still livid with rage, Partridge spied Vignetti. His wild expression became an insidious sneer.

"Vignetti!" he exclaimed. "This is your chance to-night. Remember Li Tan Chang! That man who has gone"—Partridge pointed down the road - "take him as you took the old Chinaman. Death! By the knife!

The vendetta!"

The Corsican needed no further urging. Only one road led to the inn. Vignetti had a car available. He knew the road well. He could easily overtake the man who had eluded his master's clutches.

Three minutes later, Lucien Partridge was smiling grimly as he watched the tail light of Vignetti's car disappearing around the turn in the road. This would be bold work to-night; but Lucien Partridge did not fear the outcome.

A subtle killing would be best. Vignetti might engineer such a deed. But even if the Corsican should attack Cranston in the open, the deed would not reflect upon Lucien Partridge. Vignetti never failed with the knife. No matter what might happen, his passion for the vendetta would cause him to maintain silence.

The fact that Lucien Partridge's servant had madly slain in cold blood could never be construed as a crime on the part of the kindly faced old man. That face was not kindly as Partridge turned back toward his mansion; but when he came into the light, the old man was smiling with a benign expression.

MEANWHILE, Vignetti was speeding to the pursuit. Driving wildly along the road, the Corsican was striving to gain upon the car ahead. Within a mile, he caught sight of the tail light up ahead. He kept on behind the sedan, waiting for a spot where vengeance might be possible.

As they neared the bridge, luck favored Vignetti. A large, battered truck was standing in the center of the road. The sedan was forced to stop. Vignetti, drawing up slowly behind it, covered every bit of the car with his headlights. He saw the driver get out and approach the truckmen.

Stopping his car, Vignetti leaped out and crept forward. This was his opportunity. Cranston was in the back seat of the sedan. He could attack and kill while the driver was expostulating with the truckmen. Then he could turn and drive away before he was noticed.

Vignetti placed his hand upon the handle of the door. He slowly turned the knob. He opened the door. He saw a form leaning in the darkened corner.

With a savage leap, Vignetti sprang forward with his knife. His swift thrust entered that huddled shape. The blade passed through a nonresisting object and buried itself into the cushions of the seat.

Vignetti sprawled upon the floor of the car. His stroke had gone through nothingness!

Rising to his knees, the Corsican quickly withdrew his knife. He struck a match and held it cupped in his hands.

What he had mistaken for a human being was nothing more than a coat, topped by a hat upon its collar. The dummy object was stuffed with a sheet of wrapping paper!

Bewildered, Vignetti leaped from the sedan and closed the door behind him. He rushed up to the driver, who was returning from his argument with the truckmen. The fellow seemed surprised to see Vignetti.

"What's the matter?" he questioned.

"That one—where is he?" Vignetti's words were uttered in broken English.

"In the back seat of the car," was the response. "I spoke to him when I got out."

"He spoke to you?"

"I spoke to him. He didn't answer."

"No—not now is he there."

The driver opened the rear door of the sedan. He saw the coat and hat. He reached out, and the garments dropped as he touched them. He looked at Vignetti, puzzled.

"What're you doing here?" he questioned.

"Mr. Partridge—he send me," explained Vignetti. "He say important for this one to come back. Back to see. I open door. Man not there. Where?"

"It beats me!" declared the driver, as he rummaged around the back seat. "This is his hat and coat all right. This paper—say that must be off the package he brought with him. Left his hat and coat and took the package. It beats me!"

"He no pay?"

"Sure he paid me—plenty. I made a deal to take him up to Partridge's and back. But I can't figure when he got out. You didn't see him?"

"I no see."

The driver shrugged his shoulders. The truckmen were moving their vehicle to the side of the road. The driver jumped in the front seat and went by.

"Lucky you got by, cap," one of the truckmen called to him. "We're stuck here for a while. Guess we're going to get started, but it will be tough if we bust again before we get to the bridge. This road is too blamed narrow."

Vignetti was not interested in the truckmen's troubles. He was wondering what had become of Lamont Cranston. He realized suddenly that the man must have left the sedan within a mile of Partridge's place.

FUMING, Vignetti hurried back to his own car, and managed to turn it around in the narrow road. He sped on toward Partridge's and shot along the road beside the gorge. Watching on both sides, he sought any sign of a person in the darkness. He saw no one. When he pulled up in front of the gate, he saw that Partridge had gone inside.

Running to the house, Vignetti encountered his master. In a wild outburst of Italian dialect, he told his story. Lucien Partridge evidenced a sour expression.

"That man is dangerous, Vignetti," he declared. "He suspected you as well as me. We must be alert to-night. Come."

He led the way to the gate. There, the old man listened, as though expecting to hear a sound amid the dark. The lights of Vignetti's car showed the road toward the gorge. The old man remained in statuesque pose, staring in that direction.

Whatever Lamont Cranston had done, he had certainly not returned to this spot. Yet Partridge's surmise that the visitor was still in the vicinity was not an incorrect one. For while the old man waited at the gate, a tall, silent figure was approaching the edge of the river chasm, around the corner from the range of the automobile lights.

The night was dull and cloudy. Even at the edge of the gorge, the tall black figure was scarcely visible.

The rays of the moon were obscured by fleeting clouds.

Lamont Cranston had become The Shadow. Calling Vignetti's turn—deceiving the driver who thought he still had a passenger—the specter of the night had dropped from the sedan, leaving the hat and coat that he had worn. The package which he had opened had contained the outer garments which he now wore—the long black cloak and the broad-brimmed slouch hat.

Reaching beneath his cloak, The Shadow drew forth four disklike objects. Flat surfaces that bent as he twisted them, he attached these articles to his hands and feet.

Stooping, The Shadow thrust his head and shoulders to the very edge of the dim cliff. Then, inch by inch, foot by foot, he let his body go over the precipice a few yards from the extended end of the iron fence that bounded Lucien Partridge's domain.

A few minutes later, a momentary clearing of the clouds showed a black form clinging to the sheer wall of the great gorge! Suspended over nothingness, The Shadow was creeping along the cliff, past the projection of the barring fence!

The moonlight passed. The only sign of The Shadow's progress was the slow, squidgy sound of the rubber suction cups that he had attached to his hands and feet.

Like a fly upon the side of the wall, this amazing personage was feeling his way past the barrier that prevented entrance into Partridge's domain!

No human fly could have clung to that sheer surface of granite. Even with the suction cups, it was a task of the utmost danger. Had one hand or foot failed to force a purchase, death would have been the result, for the upper edge of the cliff was overhanging at the spot where The Shadow now rested.

At times that clinging, moving figure swayed. The strain was terrific. Yet The Shadow kept on, until he was clear of the fence, which to touch would have caused death or given the alarm. Then up the precipitous wall he went, nearer and nearer to the top.

The clouds cleared suddenly. The moon was directly overhead. The Shadow did not move. The strange light caused his vertical body to cast a long black line straight down the wall of the cliff.

For The Shadow, himself, was the nucleus of that strange shadow, a narrow patch of black, many feet in length. Had Alfredo Morales been watching from across the gorge, he would not have believed that shade to be a living being.

The sky darkened. The Shadow, secure amid the blackness of night, moved upward. He passed the fringe of the cliff. On the very brink, regardless of his proximity to the mighty drop, he paused to remove the suction disks that had served him so well in this amazing journey.

Rising, the being in black stepped over the insulated wire that connected the ends of the electrified fence. Then his tall form merged with the darkness of the lawn.

The most formidable barrier to Lucien Partridge's domain had been conquered. The one spot from which the old man had believed he was perfectly protected was the very spot that The Shadow had chosen for his entry into this sphere of action.

The moon was shining again, but its cold rays revealed no living form upon the tree-sprinkled lawn. The Shadow was somewhere; but his presence could not be detected.

Out of darkness The Shadow had come; into darkness had he returned!

CHAPTER XVIII. THE HAND OF DOOM

"PUT the car away, Vignetti."

Lucien Partridge uttered the order in a querulous tone. He had begun to realize that it would be useless to stand here expecting Lamont Cranston to return.

The Corsican entered the car and backed it. The headlights gleamed across the road and suddenly revealed a man who was standing on the other side. The stranger made a motion as though to dodge the illumination; then changed his mind and walked boldly into the light.

It was not Lamont Cranston. The man's stature showed that fact. The stranger was shorter than Cranston, stockier in build, and swarthy of complexion.

"Who is there?" demanded Lucien Partridge.

"Mr. Partridge?" came the gruff reply.

"That's my name," responded the old man. "What do you want?"

The man came close. He made no sign of greeting—which was fortunate, for Partridge still wore the fatal gloves. Instead, he merely stated his identity in an apologetic tone.

"My name is Vic Marquette," he said. "I came up here to see you, but I lost my way. I wasn't sure whether or not this was the right place."

"Marquette?" questioned the scientist harshly. "I don't know the name. What is the purpose of this visit?"

"A friendly call, Mr. Partridge," asserted Marquette calmly. "I've been trying to find you, because I've got something to discuss with you. Perhaps this will identify me better."

He drew back his coat to reveal his secret-service badge. Partridge saw the metal gleam in the light from the car. He bowed courteously, in his characteristic role of friendliness.

"Come right into the house, Mr. Marquette," he said. "I shall be glad to talk to you there."

They went into the mansion, through the hall, to the laboratory. There, Partridge carefully removed his gloves, drawing each one off with the aid of the other, his hands touching nothing but the wrists. He doffed his smock, and laid it beside the gloves.

"I was beginning an experiment," he remarked. "It was interrupted by the return of my servant, Vignetti. I sent him down to the station on an errand which he failed to perform. A trustworthy man, Vignetti, but, like all of them, he lacks perfection."

Vic Marquette was studying the old man carefully. Lucien Partridge smiled and motioned to his visitor to come into the library. Ensconced there, Partridge looked questioningly at the secret-service man.

"I GUESS you wonder why I'm here," began Marquette. "Well, I'm going to give you the details, Mr. Partridge. There's something phony taking place in this vicinity; and as near as I can make out, it may be directed against you. Have you any enemies, Mr. Partridge?"

"Enemies?" The old man's echo denoted surprise. "I have only friends. This amazes me."

"Well," declared Marquette bluntly, "there are some dangerous people not far from here. I found that out, nearly to my sorrow. In meeting them, I inferred that they were none too friendly toward you. So that's

why I'm here to-night."

Partridge was nodding in a dazed sort of way. This idea that he might have enemies appeared to perturb the old man. It gave new confidence to Vic Marquette.

Since he had made his bold gesture, he felt convinced that no danger could be lurking here. As a secret-service man, looking into the affairs of persons who were inimical to Lucien Partridge, he felt a sense of strong security.

"Let me go back to the beginning," said Marquette, in an open manner. "First of all, one of my companions in the secret service died very suddenly, not so long ago. His name was Jerry Fitzroy. Did you ever hear of him?"

"Fitzroy?" Partridge did not appear to recognize the name.

"I worked with Fitzroy," resumed Marquette. "I learned that he had been to Westbrook Falls. So I came to this vicinity to investigate. I was watching for suspicious persons. I found one."

"Ah! Who was he?"

"I do not know his name. He was a bearded man who appeared to be a Frenchman. I saw him at the inn."

"A bearded man"—Partridge was thoughtful—"a bearded Frenchman. Was the beard very dark?"

"It was black."

"Ah! It may be the same one!"

"Which one?"

"The man whom Vignetti saw outside the grounds. I am an inventor, Mr. Marquette. I have chosen this remote and isolated spot so that no one will interfere with my work. I keep the place properly guarded. We are naturally suspicious of strangers. Such a man as you describe was unquestionably in this neighborhood."

"I am not surprised to learn that," declared Marquette. "I followed that man one night. His trail led to a cottage in the woods."

"Near here?" asked Partridge, in an annoyed tone.

"On the other side of the river," responded Marquette. "Near the hotel. When I approached the cottage, I was seized by two men who dragged me into the cottage. There were two men there. One was the bearded Frenchman; the other appeared to be a Spaniard. They demanded to know my business."

"You told them?"

"No."

"That may have been wise."

"Perhaps. Perhaps not. I thought that they intended to keep me a prisoner. Instead, they put me in charge of one of their men—a greasy-faced villain—who was ordered to shove me off a cliff into an old quarry."

"How did you escape?"

"Well, the fellow changed his mind. Under persuasion. I suppose that he reported that he had killed me. So it was wisdom on my part to avoid that cottage for a while. But I did not conclude my investigations. Instead, I followed a new lead that brought me here."

"That brought you here?"

"Yes. In quizzing me, one of the two men happened to mention the name Partridge. After I had escaped, I made inquiries, and learned that you lived in this vicinity."

"The expression of my captors appeared quite hostile toward you. So I thought that an interview between us might be to our mutual advantage."

MARQUETTE'S words caused Partridge to conjecture. The old man's thoughts approached alarm. He had not suspected that Pierre Armagnac had friends here.

The Frenchman's visit had been accepted by Partridge as a bluff; for he had doubted the statements which Armagnac had made concerning operations in foreign countries. Now, it appeared that others were associated with Armagnac's purpose; and they were still free to continue whatever work they contemplated.

For the first time, Lucien Partridge was apprehensive for his gold. He had detected Armagnac's interest in where the gold was kept; in fact, Partridge had led Armagnac to that spot so that he might study the Frenchman's reaction. But he had been fooled when he had believed that Armagnac had come here alone.

Partridge's thoughts turned to Lamont Cranston. He doubted that Cranston could be connected with Armagnac. Of one thing Partridge felt certain: that he had managed to keep his affairs segregated. No, Cranston was a menace from another quarter.

What of this man—Marquette? Unquestionably, he was a secret-service agent—the same as Fitzroy, who had come here to make cautious inquiries, not suspecting that Partridge was the brain behind a world-wide plot. Until now, Partridge had felt security in his ability to pass himself as a friendly, harmless old man.

A glance at Marquette convinced him that the ruse would still work so far as this one individual was concerned.

Armagnac, of course, could not have been deceived; but now Armagnac was dead—one less enemy with whom to contend. Cranston—there was no question about him. So long as he lived, Cranston would be a menace.

But Partridge was not dealing with Cranston at present. Marquette was the danger of the moment.

The secret-service man was waiting for Partridge to speak. So far, Partridge had evidenced no suspicion. Hesitation would produce suspicion.

Partridge realized that as long as his enemies came one by one, they were playing into his hands. Marquette, though unsuspecting, was an enemy; for he was seeking to trace the cause that had brought death to Jerry Fitzroy.

Marquette must be lulled. That was Partridge's dominating thought. Quickly the old man shifted other matters from his mind. He returned to the primitive plan that he had found so effective in the past.

Marquette knew too much. It would be best to dispose of him before he learned more.

In conformity to his usual practice, Partridge began to prepare his victim for the slaughter. He adopted a pose that indicated deep concern. When he spoke, he lowered his crackly voice as though speaking in the strictest confidence.

"Danger has always threatened me," he said. "That is because men have sought to steal the products of my inventive mind. Sometimes plots have been made against my life. This house of mine, with its great fence about it—this is no eccentric idea. It is my protection against those whom I know to be dangerous."

Vic Marquette listened intently. The old man's speech seemed truthful. Marquette knew that there were men across the river who were dangerous and inimical to Lucien Partridge.

He made a mental comparison between his adventure there and his reception here. On the face of it, Lucien Partridge appeared to be a persecuted man, apprehensive of the designs of men who were unquestionably villains.

"I am being preyed upon"—Partridge's words were vague and rambling—"by persons whom I have never seen; by men whose identities I do not know. Only some good fortune has kept me from disaster."

As the old man talked on in the same vein, Vic wondered if The Shadow might be the one responsible for the good fortune that had saved Lucien Partridge from harm. In his wheedling speech, the old man had luckily struck upon a trend of thought that was producing a strong effect upon Marquette.

"If I were sure"—Partridge's words were tinged with artfully feigned doubt—"that you were a friend, I would tell you of much that I have suffered. I must be cautious in what I say, for my enemies will stop at nothing.

"Would it be possible for me to meet you somewhere other than here? Some place where I am not afraid of spies—where I am not worried about my inventions?"

"Where would you suggest?"

"I can come to New York. All would be safe here, for I can trust the men who work for me. But it would not be wise for us to travel there together. Suppose"—the old man was thoughtful as he proposed the plan—"that you leave on the early-morning train; then I can come later in the day, bringing only Vignetti with me."

Marquette controlled a sudden suspicion that arose in his mind. He formulated a quick plan.

Let Lucien Partridge think that he had left Westbrook Falls. He could remain here, watching, to make sure that the old man would go to New York as he promised. Then Vic could follow.

THE secret-service man produced a card from his pocket and wrote the name of a hotel upon it. He handed the card to Lucien Partridge. The old man read the address.

"Meet me there," said Vic, "at ten o'clock to-morrow evening. I shall prove conclusively that I am the man I represent myself to be. By cooperating with me, you will be able to protect yourself against all who wish you harm."

This time, it was Lucien Partridge who was deceived. He saw no subterfuge in Marquette's statement. He was convinced that his visitor intended to go to New York on the early train. The old man glanced at the clock.

"It is nearly three," he said. "The Limited arrives in Westbrook Falls at four thirty. I shall have Vignetti drive you to the station."

Vic knew that he must accept the offer in order to avoid suspicion. That could work to his advantage. The ticket office would not be open. He would let Vignetti see him get on the train; then he would get off at the first stop, and ride back on a westbound local.

"Come," said Lucien Partridge. "I shall summon Vignetti." He led the way through the hall.

In the silence of that large mansion, Vic Marquette sensed that many men were present—guards who served Lucien Partridge and were in readiness for any attack upon this place.

They found Vignetti in the laboratory. Lucien Partridge gave a sign. The Corsican helped the old man don his smock. As he drew on his gloves, Partridge was talking in Italian; then he turned to Marquette.

"I am going back to work," he said with a smile. "I have instructed Vignetti to take you to the station. I shall say good-by."

A clock in the corner of the laboratory was pointing to five minutes of three. Lucien Partridge extended his gloved hand to bid Marquette good-by. The secret-service man stepped forward to accept the friendly clasp.

Lucien Partridge was smiling. Vignetti, behind Marquette, was leering. The secret-service man saw only Partridge—not the other. He sensed no danger in the old man's amiable parting action.

For Lucien Partridge's smile was lulling and kindly. It was the smile he always wore when he reached forth to deal the creeping death upon an unsuspecting victim!

Vic Marquette was ready to grasp the hand of doom!

CHAPTER XIX. THE SHADOW INTERVENES

AS Vic Marquette's hand was about to enter the deadly clutch of Lucien Partridge's poisoned glove, a startling sound broke the tense silence that existed in the old man's laboratory.

The strident ringing of a loud alarm came as an unexpected token of approaching danger. The ringing broke and was repeated; throughout the distant portions of the house, other bells jingled as in answer.

The effect of this interruption was instantaneous. Lucien Partridge paused, with hand outstretched, his eyes staring in amazement.

Vic Marquette, startled by the noise, dropped back instinctively, dropping his arm to his side. A surprised scowl appeared upon Vignetti's face as the Corsican looked quickly toward the door.

The sudden ringing of the bell had brought salvation to Vic Marquette. Because of it, he had escaped the handclasp proffered by Lucien Partridge. The timely intervention had temporarily freed the secret-service man from the menace of the creeping death.

Heavy footsteps were pounding down the stairs. Partridge's henchmen were answering the alarm. Their prompt response inspired the old man to action. Forgetful of Marquette's presence, he uttered a cry that explained all.

"The workhouse!" Partridge shouted. "Some one has entered there! The alarm! Hurry, every one—there is not a moment to lose!"

He motioned to Vignetti as he passed him in a rush to the door. The Corsican hesitated momentarily, his eye on Vic Marquette; then, observing that the secret-service man was heading for the door also, Vignetti joined in the mad rush.

Flashlights glimmered through the dark as the rescue squad burst from a side door of the house and dashed across the lawn toward the workhouse. Vic Marquette was in the center of the mad surge, unquestioned by the scientist's henchmen, who supposed him to be a friend of the old man.

Marquette let others pass him; at the rear of the crowd, his presence passed virtually unnoticed.

Lucien Partridge, springing forward with amazing agility, was the first to reach the goal. He stopped abruptly at the door of the workhouse, only to see that the steel-clad barrier was closed.

Vignetti arrived at his master's shoulder. The Corsican muttered excited words. Partridge, suddenly realizing their import, nodded. He tugged at his gloves, removing them swiftly, but with care. He let them fall upon the ground and dropped his smock with them.

Not for one moment did the old man take his eyes from the metal-sheathed door of the workhouse. His men, armed with revolvers, were scattering about the little building, prowling the edge of the cliff, peering amid the trees. The vague ringing of alarms, back in the mansion, had ended.

SOME one had tampered with that door—but where was the intruder? In a space of less than five minutes, the guards had swept through the area surrounding the shack. They were coming up now to report that they had discovered nothing.

Partridge was glaring at his men. Vignetti was close beside the old man. Marquette was standing a short distance in the background.

The situation was indeed an odd one. Whoever had tampered with the door of the workhouse had somehow managed to approach the little building without entering the grounds by way of the iron fence. That surrounding barrier was also protected by an alarm, which, through some mysterious cause, had not sounded.

The door of the workhouse was closed; its strong lock indicated that the intruder had been frightened away. He could not have escaped by way of the fence, with its electric wiring. He could not have descended the cliff. He could not have sought refuge in the big mansion, a hundred yards away, for the surging rescuers had come from there with remarkable promptness.

Lucien Partridge was dumfounded. He stood amid his men, wondering what orders to give them. In the midst of his dilemma, he chanced to spy Vic Marquette. The secret-service man was endeavoring to be inconspicuous.

Vignetti saw Partridge glance in the direction of the secret-service man. The Corsican's hand stole within his jacket. As Vignetti drew the gleaming blade of his knife into view, Partridge saw the action and uttered approving words in Italian.

Vic Marquette must die; and in the midst of this incredible situation, Lucien Partridge thought no more of artistry in dealing death. The old man had betrayed the location of his treasure vault. Marquette had heard his cry that had ended with the words: "The gold!" Now, the secret-service man had learned too much.

The thought was flashing through Partridge's mind that some one must have entered the grounds unseen when Marquette had been admitted. The secret-service man must surely have subordinates!

Now was no time for diplomacy. Marquette must die swiftly, by the knife. Such was Partridge's decision, and it conformed with Vignetti's intent. Kill the leader first. Then find the others and slay them!

VIGNETTI, crafty in his manner, turned his body so that the knife was hidden from Marquette. He sidled toward the secret-service man.

Marquette observed the action, and began to move away. This was exasperating to Lucien Partridge. With a cry of rage, the old man waved his arm toward Marquette, and shouted orders to his armed men.

"Get him! Kill -"

The command ended abruptly. Partridge stood like a statue. The other men, startled, gazed in surprise. Even Vignetti paused, while Vic Marquette, his hand drawing an automatic from his pocket, budged no farther.

From across the river had come the deep boom of a muffled cannon shot. The echoes of its dull blast seemed to reverberate through the air, commanding instant silence. Like the first shot in the beginning of a mighty bombardment, that report inspired awe among the men who heard it.

Something whistled in the air overhead as a huge projectile completed its tall arc above the listening men. Eyes looked aloft and instinctively turned toward the mansion, a hundred yards away. Time slowed to split-seconds as the missile completed its course toward destruction.

Then came the climax. With a crash, a huge bomb dropped from the night and landed squarely upon the doomed mansion.

A terrific explosion rocked the walls of the old frame structure. The entire roof of the doomed building was hurled high into the air. The walls spread outward, and seemed to scatter as though impelled by the mighty burst of flame that accompanied them.

Men staggered as the reverberation shook the ground. They fell helplessly. Chunks of hurtling debris were cast almost to the spot where these men had fallen.

Partridge—Vignetti—Marquette—all had lost thought of human enmity in this tremendous moment of amazement.

They and the others about them clutched the ground as though fearing it would cave in beneath them. Like a thunderbolt from the blue, the arrival of the bomb had stunned the entire group. All eyes were focused only on the wreckage of the mansion.

Alfredo Morales had planned well. His calculations had been correct. The bomb had struck the big house perfectly. Its effect had been instantaneous. No person within that building could possibly have survived.

The wreckage was a holocaust. Fire had broken out immediately. Long tongues of flame threw a gruesome light across the lawn, and showed the pallid faces of the men who still lay helpless.

Alfredo Morales had planned to deal destruction and death. That bomb, discharged from the mortar by Manuel, had done its work. But it had accomplished only one half of its purpose.

Destruction was complete; but death had not followed. Those whom Morales had doomed were not entrapped as he had designed. All those within the mansion had been drawn from the danger spot by the intervention of The Shadow.

He had used the alarm to bring them forth five minutes before the bomb had been sent on its way. Morales and his men were coming. Partridge and his men were here.

A loud, mocking laugh came from the door of the workhouse where the gold was kept. It was a laugh of triumph, yet its sinister tones were forbidding.

That laugh was more terrible than the crash of the devastating bomb. It inspired more awe than did the sight of the flaming mansion.

It was the laugh of The Shadow.

CHAPTER XX. ENEMIES BATTLE

LUCIEN PARTRIDGE was the first to stare in the direction of the workhouse. His action was copied by the others. Even Vignetti forgot his urge to slay Vic Marquette in his desire to see the source of that taunting laugh.

The door of the workhouse was open. Framed within it stood The Shadow. His tall, cloak-clad form was clearly revealed by the brightness from the burning mansion. To the startled eyes that saw him, The Shadow was a superbeing whose workmanship had brought these strange events to the domain of Lucien Partridge.

Silence gripped the men who watched. They knew that eyes were gazing at them from the cover of the broad-brimmed hat. They saw two black-gloved hands, each holding a powerful automatic.

They were twelve opposed to one—Partridge and his men—yet none dared move to attack this weird personage who had come to awe them.

The Shadow spoke. His words carried an eerie mockery. Those words, like the presence of The Shadow, caused men to quail. The Shadow's tones were addressed to Lucien Partridge.

"Murderer"—The Shadow's words were cold—"your doom has arrived. Your vile schemes are ended. Slayer of Fitzroy"—Marquette gasped as he heard the name—"of Forster—of Guthrie—of Armagnac—you failed to-night!

"Your failure spelled your doom. No more will you give the fatal handshake that lies upon the gloves beside you. The poisoned powder of the Orient will never again deliver the creeping death!

"Your laboratory is demolished. Your furnaces are ruined. Your plan to flood the world with synthetic gold will go no further. To you will not even belong the vast stores of real gold that lie in the vault beneath me. That gold is guarded—by—The Shadow!"

The voice ended its impressive tones. Not a man had moved while The Shadow had been speaking. The climax of the revealing words was the announcement of identity that brought chills of fear to those who listened.

To Vic Marquette, The Shadow's statement was of the utmost moment. It cleared the cloud of mystery that had befogged the secret-service man in his investigation. It brought a flood of understanding thoughts to Vic's brain.

This was the source of the synthetic gold that had entered the coinage of the world! This was where Fitzroy had come to investigate! Lucien Partridge was the man who dealt the creeping death!

Vic saw the gloves upon the ground. He realized that he, too, was to have been a victim!

Forster and Guthrie—Vic had read of them in the newspapers. He did not know the details of their connection with old Partridge; but he realized that all could soon be learned.

LUCIEN PARTRIDGE was on his feet. The old man was shaking his clenched fist at the figure in black. He cursed The Shadow with venom; then cried out the threat which was in his evil brain.

"You have spoken too much!" he shouted. "You shall die—you who call yourself The Shadow! You shall never leave the spot where you are standing!"

Choking with rage, the old man was about to order his men to the attack. He was sure that with their superior numbers they could conquer this menacing foe. Before Partridge could speak, The Shadow laughed again.

"You do not menace me," said the gibing voice of the black-clad being. "It is you who are menaced. Your enemies approach you at this very moment!"

With a taunting peal of mirth, The Shadow stepped back into the gloom of the little workhouse. The steel-clad door clanged shut.

A cry of triumph burst from Partridge's lips. The Shadow was retreating! There, in the little house, he was trapped! Now was the opportunity to blast The Shadow's refuge place!

Turning, Partridge waved his men on. His plan was to surround the little building; to riddle its wooden walls with bullets; to burn the shack with the doomed man within it. But before Partridge could speak, a shot rang out from across the lawn. A bullet whistled by the startled group of men.

Alfredo Morales and his crew had entered by breaking down the gate. They were coming for the gold. They had seen the group of men beside the work-house and they were opening an attack!

IT needed no command for Partridge's men to respond. They did not know the identity of these attackers. They did not care. They must fight to live. Scattering for cover, they returned the fire.

The lurid glare from the flaming mansion made a mighty spectacle of the startling skirmish that broke loose upon the lawn. Morales, though dumfounded to find men alive here, did not dare to hesitate. Partridge, his rage a fury, was determined to resist at all cost.

One of Partridge's henchmen fell dead at the old man's feet. Partridge seized his gun and leaped for cover. Behind a protecting tree, he joined in the gunfire that was crackling from all sides.

Partridge's force numbered a dozen men. Morales had brought approximately the same number. It was an equal conflict between two evil forces.

For once, The Shadow disdained to play a part in a hectic fray. He had brought about this situation. He had matched the opposing forces. It was not through pity that he had saved Lucien Partridge and his henchmen from the doom that Alfredo Morales had planned.

Instead, The Shadow had drawn them from the marked mansion so that they might oppose Morales. Craftily, The Shadow had brought trouble to both forces.

He had done nothing to prevent the firing of the bomb from the mortar. Thus destruction had come to Partridge's great house where crime was fostered. The Shadow had lured Morales into the conflict which now raged; thus had he ruined the Argentinian's plans.

The fray was becoming a fight to death. Those who were engaged deserved death. They showed no

mercy in their actions. Every time a man fell wounded, his enemies used his body as a target. No quarter was asked, and none was given. Both sides knew that death awaited them either way.

The conflict, equal at the start, suddenly changed. The tide was turning to favor Lucien Partridge. He and his men, although surprised at the outset, knew the terrain. The circumstances that had forced them to cover proved to their advantage.

The open space of the lawn was covered with the fallen forms of the men who had come with Morales. Shots were resounding from trees and bushes, discharged by Partridge's men. They were targets only when they fired. Between shots, they were difficult marks to reach.

The battle ended suddenly. Only Morales and three of his men remained, with bullets harassing them from every quarter. Jose was beside his master. A bullet laid him low.

Seeing Jose fall, Morales realized that disaster was upon him. With a cry to his men, he fled across the lawn, his companions close behind him.

The way had been closed by three of Partridge's men who had moved in that direction. They sprang out of hiding and leaped upon the fleeing men.

Morales shot one of his enemies dead; then he staggered and fell face foremost. His companions dropped a moment later. The men who had killed them riddled their bodies with bullets.

THE attackers were annihilated. Yet Lucien Partridge's forces had suffered heavily. Only a few remained unwounded, among them the old man and Vignetti. They were under cover, away from the territory close beside the workhouse.

One man had lain safe through the entire fray. He was Vic Marquette. The secret-service man had leaped for shelter beside the workhouse. He had fired no shots; hence his presence had passed unnoticed.

The flames of the mansion died suddenly, as though they were no longer needed. In the gloom, Vic Marquette emerged slowly from his hiding place. His plan was to reach the gloves and smock that Lucien Partridge had cast aside; to carry the gloves within the smock and escape with them as evidence.

But as Marquette moved forward, another man spied him. It was Vignetti. The Corsican, unwounded, crept out from the shelter of a bush to intercept the secret-service man.

Vignetti was not sure that it was Marquette he saw. Hence the Corsican did not fire. Instead, he carried his sharp knife.

A burst of flame from the dying embers of the old mansion threw a new glow upon the scene. Lucien Partridge spied Marquette. The old man fired. His bullet wounded the secret-service man. Partridge pressed the trigger again. There was no response. The last cartridge had been discharged.

Now Vignetti was leaping forward to finish the work that Partridge had begun. Marquette saw the menacing foeman. He raised his gun, but his hand trembled from a pain that gripped his shoulder. Vignetti knocked the automatic from Marquette's hand.

Down went Vic Marquette, with Vignetti above him. The Corsican's face was aflame with reflected light. It was the hideous face of a fiend.

Up went the gleaming knife. Vic Marquette was helpless. He closed his eyes as he saw the wicked blade ready to descend. Vignetti was poised for the fatal stroke!

CHAPTER XXI. THE SHADOW FIGHTS

BEFORE Vignetti's upraised hand could drive the knife blade down into the heart of Vic Marquette, a shot blazed forth from an unexpected place.

The door of the workhouse had opened. The Shadow's aim was trained upon the murderous Corsican.

The unerring hand did not fail. The bullet from The Shadow's automatic struck Vignetti's right arm. The wounded limb collapsed; the knife fell harmlessly upon the ground beside Marquette's body.

With staring eyes, Marquette saw what had happened. The timely rescue gave him his opportunity. It was one wounded man against another.

With a mighty heave, the secret-service man threw the Corsican from him. Vignetti's left hand made a desperate clutch. The two men locked in a struggle.

Marquette's plight was apparent. Despite the fact that he had gained a temporary advantage over Vignetti, the outcome still was hopeless.

At the door of the workhouse, safely away from gunfire, The Shadow could pick off Vignetti at the first opportunity. On the other hand, Lucien Partridge and his few remaining men, hidden in darkness, could direct their fire upon Marquette.

Tense moments followed. Whichever won the struggle, Vignetti or Marquette, the other would be prey to an avenging shot. Seemingly, both were doomed.

Partridge and his men were afraid to shoot at the writhing forms for fear of striking Vignetti. The Shadow, who could easily have clipped the Corsican, desisted because Vignetti's death would mean the end of Vic Marquette!

The struggling men kept on their weakened battle. Neither one seemed capable of gaining an advantage. Both had reached a defensive stage.

Figures were slinking through the dark, keeping away from the workhouse door where they knew death lurked. Partridge and the others were wary; and they were taking sure positions from which they could slay Vic Marquette, should he overpower Vignetti.

The gleaming eyes of The Shadow pierced the darkness. They seemed to sense the logical spots where the foemen were located. Then, as the situation reached its most crucial stage, The Shadow acted!

He chose a moment when the flaring mansion dulled spasmodically. Like a weird phantom, he swept silently from his place of safety. So perfectly did The Shadow choose his time that he had virtually reached the fighting men before Partridge and his minions saw him.

A chance burst of flame from the mansion revealed the tall, advancing figure. A being of black—a stalking form—with a long, grotesque shadow stretched across the lawn. That was the sight that the watchers saw!

Marquette and Vignetti were struggling side by side. Each was working desperately. The Corsican had clutched his knife again, holding it in his left hand. The secret-service man, likewise utilizing his left hand, was vainly endeavoring to bring his automatic into play.

THEN The Shadow was upon them. With one swift motion, he propelled Vignetti clear of Marquette's body. Vic saw only the rolling form of the helpless Corsican. He fired his gun point-blank, his elbow

resting on the ground. Three shots resounded in quick succession. Vignetti lay still.

Marquette was rising to his knees when he heard a voice hissing in his ear. The words were plain. The Shadow was ordering him to the shelter of the workhouse. With hands of steel, The Shadow gripped Marquette and plunged him on his way to safety.

The act was none too soon. A fusillade of shots burst forth from encircling spots. Partridge's men were blazing at the spot where two targets had been, but only one remained, now that The Shadow had hurled Marquette from the danger zone.

The Shadow staggered, but did not fall. Instead, he swerved in his course and zigzagged across the lawn, forming an eccentric course that defied accurate fire.

He was wounded; that was plain, for he had been unable to protect himself while aiding Vic Marquette. But now he was possessed of an uncanny faculty that enabled him to elude new bullets.

A wild shot was aimed at Vic Marquette, who was scrambling to the workhouse. That shot was answered—by The Shadow!

Turning, his body merging with the ground, The Shadow had raised his left hand. With eagle eye he had spotted the exact place from which the shot had flashed. His perfect aim sought out the man who had delivered the shot. That marksman was felled by The Shadow's bullet.

Again, the black-clad hand pressed the trigger. This time a bullet sped toward a foeman who was dimly outlined in a fringe of dull light. The second enemy fell.

Now The Shadow's course had changed. He was invisible as he skirted the lawn, lost in the dying rays of flickering light. Men fired wildly. Each flash received a prompt response.

With his right hand useless, The Shadow was working with his left alone. Both hands were trained to perfect accuracy.

When this strange contest had begun, Lucien Partridge and five henchmen were still capable of battle. Five marksmen were aiming for The Shadow. Partridge, alone, was not firing.

Now, in reply to wildly directed shots, The Shadow had fired five times. Every bullet had found a mark. There was a pause. The form of The Shadow was momentarily revealed. Two spasmodic shots came from the only henchman of the five who had not been incapacitated or killed. One man alone had suffered only a minor wound.

Those shots were futile. They were also fatal to the man who delivered them. Deliberately, The Shadow aimed and his unerring finger dispatched a leaden messenger that found its resting place in the heart of the skulking foeman.

Silence followed, while Vic Marquette, now sprawled upon the floor of the workhouse, stared forth upon the field of battle. He caught one flash of The Shadow's form as it glided into darkness and seemed to sway uncertainly.

SINCE the beginning of the conflict, The Shadow had received no wounds other than those which had first been inflicted on him. In retaliation, he had fought one-handed against the surrounding odds. His strategy, his marksmanship; both had been unfailing.

His twisting course had taken him toward the edge of the cliff. As Marquette gazed, he fancied that he saw the blackened form loom uncertainly against the dawn-flushed sky. For early day was breaking upon

the scene of carnage.

Marquette's vision was not at fault. The Shadow had neared the cliff. Now, from the last bush in a clump of shrubbery, Marquette saw another form emerging—a form that crouched as it was silhouetted in the early light.

Vic shouted a warning. It was unnecessary.

The Shadow, too, had seen that lone form threatening him. With uncanny precision, he had directed his course toward the only spot where danger still lingered. The one man who had kept wise silence in the battle was waiting the close approach of The Shadow.

That man was Lucien Partridge.

Marquette saw the old man's hand swing upward. Then The Shadow was upon Lucien Partridge. With time too short to beat the old man's aim, The Shadow had leaped with a mighty spring.

Partridge's gun was discharged upward as The Shadow's left hand struck the old man's arm. Then the two were locked in grim embrace.

The Shadow and the fiend had met!

CHAPTER XXII. ON THE BRINK

THE verge of the cliff was clothed in dawning light. There, two figures had united in a struggle that would mean death to one or both. One hundred feet beneath, the river foamed its way through the gorge, between rock-studded banks.

The Shadow, strong and indomitable, was fighting with a man who was no longer young. Yet Lucien Partridge possessed surprising strength. More than that, he owned the fury of a fiend.

Crippled by wounds, The Shadow possessed but a fraction of his normal strength. Spurred by mad desire for revenge, Lucien Partridge was a demon in human form.

The bodies swayed backward and forward. At times they seemed to sidle toward the edge of the cliff. First one would urge the other backward; then the situation would change completely.

If Vic Marquette could aid The Shadow, the struggle would be ended. This equal fight could not persist; for The Shadow's strength was waning more rapidly than that of Lucien Partridge.

Despite his wounds, Vic tried to come to The Shadow's rescue. He managed to raise himself to his knees with the help of his one good hand. His gun was absent. He had dropped the automatic in his wild scramble for the workhouse.

Gaining his feet, Vic plunged forward through the doorway. His haste was his undoing. He lost his footing and sprawled crazily upon the ground. When he tried to rise again, his left wrist failed him. He could do no more than writhe painfully forward, in snakelike course along the ground.

The contestants were not aware of his approach. Their struggle was slow-moving. The Shadow was yielding. Slowly, inch by inch, Partridge was forcing him to the edge of the cliff.

Vic's strength failed him as he arrived close by. Gasping, the secret-service man lay helpless on the ground, vainly striving to regain lost strength. He could see the profile of Lucien Partridge, white against the blackness of The Shadow's cloak.

The old man was possessed with a mighty fury. His breath was coming in fierce spasms. Hideous curses were writhing from his livid lips.

Beneath the black slouch hat, Vic could see the glow of two burning eyes. He knew that The Shadow was striving desperately to overcome the old man's amazing power. But still the two moved closer and closer to that threatening brink that towered above sickening depths!

WITH the edge of destruction scarcely more than a foot away, The Shadow gained new vigor. The last vestiges of his waning strength asserted themselves as he held his fierce adversary at bay.

While the two were locked in motionless pose, Vic Marquette urged himself nearer and nearer, staring weakly at the forms that were bathed in the reflected rays of the rising sun.

If The Shadow could only hold out! That was Marquette's impelling thought. He knew that he was feeble; yet his slight strength might prove the weight that would swing the balance.

A few feet more! Vic Marquette collapsed with a hopeless gasp. He had arrived too late. Before his staring eyes, the struggle had come to a terrible conclusion.

The Shadow, yielding under the terrific strain, sank backward, and his tall form bent as Partridge sprang to the attack. The black-clad figure dwindled to dwarfish size as it slipped over the very edge, impelled by Partridge's swift, triumphant thrust.

The Shadow was gone!

All that Vic Marquette could see was the figure of Lucien Partridge, momentarily stooped headforemost, bending clear over the edge of the cliff. The old man's pose made it appear that he was watching the course of a body plunging into the depths.

His hands were just above the abyss; and as Marquette heard the gloating cackle that the old man uttered, he saw the hands swing wildly. They were clutching in the air as though endeavoring to grasp some solid substance for support.

The cackle turned to a frenzied cry as Partridge failed to regain his balance. The old man's head toppled forward. Vic saw his hands make a wild grasp at the edge of the smooth precipice. Then, with a long scream, Lucien Partridge plunged headforemost to destruction!

The scream died in the distance. Vic could not hear the fall of the body. The end of the struggle had sickened him. He could not feel enthusiasm because of Lucien Partridge's fate. The fact that The Shadow had first gone over that terrible brow was appalling.

Vic Marquette lay helpless and miserable, knowing that the futility of his own effort had abetted this result. Had he been able to come to the rescue; had he not weakened and fallen through the doorway of the workhouse, he could surely have saved the man who had saved him.

To Vic Marquette, hours of misery were packed into that one unending moment that followed the death plunge of Lucien Partridge. With eyes still staring, the secret-service man gazed toward the brink of the precipice, trying to visualize the last moments of that now ended struggle.

A groan escaped Vic Marquette's lips. It was a groan of despondency. The secret-service man closed his eyes; then opened them to meet the increasing light of dawn.

Again Marquette groaned while he gazed with hypnotic stare toward the edge of the cliff. Then, unconsciously, the groan became a gasp.

Unbelieving, like a person who is witnessing the seemingly impossible, Vic Marquette stared in amazement at the very brink of the death cliff.

He was stupefied by what he saw.

CHAPTER XXIII. THE SHADOW TRIUMPHANT

A **BLOTCH** of blackness lay upon the edge of the cliff. Unmoving, it had escaped the notice of Vic Marquette. It had appeared to be nothing more than a shade cast by the angled light of early day.

But now that patch of black was moving. Long, thin, and straight, it developed as an arm! Fingers moved; fingers that were digging into the roughened granite that lined the verge of the precipice.

With a cry of restored hope, Vic tried to wriggle forward. But that moving hand needed no aid. With incredible skill, it was working its way upward. Now a black object showed over the edge. Vic saw the head of The Shadow!

The body followed. Soon the form in black was back to safety. The head was bowed as the tall figure arose and swayed forward.

Vic Marquette blinked as though witnessing a vision. The tall form moved slowly away. Vic tried to follow it as it approached the lawn; then, before he could turn, he realized that The Shadow was gone.

Impelled by strange curiosity, Vic urged himself closer to the edge of the cliff. There, the explanation of the marvel came to him.

The entire edge of the precipice formed an overhanging curve, beginning with a rapidly sloping angle that formed itself into a dizzy, vertical drop:

When Lucien Partridge had thrust The Shadow downward, the black-clad fighter had taken the only advantage that he still possessed. He had yielded momentarily, to lie, terribly close to danger, against the last possible surface that afforded safety.

The Shadow's collapse had been by shrewd design. It had turned Partridge's fierce impetus into a force that had proven to be the old man's undoing.

Thrusting The Shadow downward with all his vigor, Partridge had given no thought to his own safety. By releasing pressure suddenly; by shifting his body precariously to one side, The Shadow had opened the way for the old man's death plunge.

Had The Shadow been unwounded, the task of regaining the security of the flattened brink would have been a matter of comparative ease. But with only his left arm serving him, The Shadow had chosen to rest, unmoving, with his body just on the verge of temporary safety.

Thus had The Shadow returned to life. In the triumph of justice, he had won all. The work of The Shadow would continue. There would be other fiends for him to conquer, now that Lucien Partridge was no more.

INCREASING dawn, the knowledge that The Shadow was alive—these factors seemed to bring a new strength to Vic Marquette. He managed to rise to his knees, and with foolhardy boldness he approached the edge of the cliff as closely as he dared.

Far below, spread-eagled upon the rocks of the bank beside the foaming stream, Vic saw the vague form of what had once been a human being, even though it had possessed the heart of a vile fiend.

That was all that remained of Lucien Partridge, the shrewd, evil old man who had visioned himself the dictator of all the world. Now his dreams of wealth were ended forever.

Partridge's false gold would be made no more. The vast wealth that he had accumulated would be restored to the world from which it had been taken—a gift of The Shadow's genius.

Vic Marquette rested wearily. He thought of Fitzroy—of the poisoned gloves—of these enemies who had attacked Lucien Partridge to-night. All these details would be reconstructed. He, Vic Marquette, could solve them now, with the aid that had been afforded by The Shadow.

Vic knew from past experience that after The Shadow had triumphed, hidden matters always came to light. His mind was in a presaging mood - and his surmises were correct.

Although Vic did not know it, the documents that The Shadow had taken from Clifford Forster's desk were already on their way to Marquette's headquarters. The Shadow had anticipated the events that had transpired here.

Thoughtfully, the secret-service man stared in the direction which The Shadow had taken. He saw no sign of the black-clad form.

He knew that The Shadow's wounds could not be sufficiently serious to prevent his safe departure. Yet Vic still sought to pierce the shadowy portions of the terrain that surrounded the edge of the battle-scarred lawn.

Bodies of dead men were scattered everywhere. These men had died because they had deserved death. Creatures of evil who had served against justice, their futile conflict had been designed by The Shadow's desire for retribution.

Vic thought of Lucien Partridge lying far below. To the most terrible of all these evil men had come the most horrible death that any of the crew had suffered.

APPROACHING sounds came vaguely to Vic's ears. He heard the siren of a distant automobile. For a moment he did not understand. Then his mind cleared.

The terrific explosion had been heard throughout the countryside. Rescuers were on their way, hurrying to see what tragedy had occurred at Lucien Partridge's.

The State police were coming. They would take charge. Vic would receive help, even though that aid might be belated.

Looking across the lawn, Vic saw the ruins of the smoldering mansion. The lawn was clear now, and a white object caught the secret-service man's attention. Partridge's laboratory smock, with the gloves beside it!

He must warn the rescuers not to touch them. They must be kept as evidence —the gloves to be analyzed for the poison that they contained.

The creeping death! No more would the insidious malady run rampant, striking down helpless, unsuspecting victims at the desire of an archfiend.

Deaths had been avenged here, upon this body-strewn lawn. But Vic realized that those deaths were but few compared to the ones that had been averted by The Shadow's might!

How many more would Lucien Partridge have slain? Vic Marquette could not surmise. He knew only

that he had been saved thrice by The Shadow: once, by the quarry across the river; a second time, when the alarm had sounded; last, when The Shadow had boldly risked death that Vic might reach safety.

The siren was shrill now. The police were nearly here. The task was ended. Vic Marquette listened gladly to the welcome sound. Then, as the noise lulled momentarily, he heard another sound.

A weird, uncanny echo seemed to come from somewhere not far away— somewhere off beyond the lawn. Vic Marquette recognized that sound. It brought proof that The Shadow had still remained nearby until he was sure that help had come for Vic Marquette.

For that sound, with its tones of eerie mirth, could have come from no lips other than those of the strange phantom in black.

It was the triumph laugh of The Shadow!

THE END