



MURDER MARSH

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CHAPTER I. FROM THE PAST

TRAFFIC was light on the East Side elevated. When the three-car local stopped at a dimly lighted station, a lone passenger stepped to the warped boards of the platform. The train rumbled away while the man was shuffling slowly toward the turnstile exit.

The night was warm, yet the passenger wore an overcoat, with collar turned up around his neck. He peered suspiciously back and forth as he shambled toward the steps that led to the street. He pulled the front of his grimy hat farther down upon his forehead.

Though the evening was young, this suspicious man encountered few passers as he reached the street. The thoroughfare beneath the elevated was almost deserted. It gloom, its cracked, dirty paving, the heavy pillars of the elevated structure—all had the effect of thinning traffic in the street.

As for pedestrians, they could find but little of interest in the dilapidated, poorly lighted stores that lined the sides of this forgotten street. A good spot for a holdup, it lured only those who might have been in the game themselves. Shambling figures, who paused to lurk by blackened building fronts, were the only ones that the man from the elevated spied.

This was to his liking. Clutching the front of his coat, he scruffed along beside the curb. As he reached a

corner, he paused, looked about; then hastily crossed the side street and resumed his shuffling gait beneath the fringe of the elevated structure.

AT the second corner, the suspicious man stopped in front of a dingy brick building. Several stories in height, this edifice loomed above the smaller houses that surrounded it. Apparently, it had once been well-kept; at present, it showed signs of disrepair. Despite the shading of night, its tall front revealed cracks and patches of crumbling corner bricks.

The muffled man was not interested in a survey of the building. His suspicious eyes noted the sign that hung above the entrance to the place:

HOTEL SPARTAN

Satisfied, the arrival edged close to the building and peered through a grimy plate-glass window. Inside, he saw a dingy lobby, where half a dozen men were slouched about in battered chairs. He observed a hard-faced clerk standing behind a cracked desk of imitation marble. The observer grunted.

This was the place that he sought. The way was clear. For his inspection had satisfied himself that none of the slouchers in the lobby were stool pigeons or detectives. The Hotel Spartan was noted as a rendezvous for mobsters who were in the money and who were not at odds with the law. Those whom the muffled man had seen, appeared to be natural habitués of the place.

Dropping his slouch, the muffled man entered the hotel. He walked boldly across the lobby, staring straight ahead as he approached the desk. His hand, however, still held his coat collar closed. Reaching his objective, the newcomer growled a few words to the clerk, who nodded and pointed toward the stairs.

"He's waiting for you," informed the clerk. "Go on up. Room 306."

The muffled man needed no further statement. He stalked quickly toward the stairs and tramped upward on the frayed carpeting. A few of the loungers glanced curiously at his departing figure. Then his arrival seemed to be forgotten.

Yet among the nondescript group assembled in the lobby of the Hotel Spartan, there was one who had closely watched the muffled man. This fellow had a firm, square face that marked him as different from the usual gangster type. His features lacked the coarseness so prevalent in the underworld.

It was his air of self-assurance that enabled this individual to frequent such places as the Hotel Spartan. As he arose and strolled through the lobby, his eyes showed a steely glint as they turned toward staring mobsmen. That firm gaze was sufficient. No one would have thought of challenging its steady-faced owner.

Moreover, the loungers in the lobby recognized the man. He was Cliff Marsland, known in the underworld as a mobster de luxe. He was no ordinary gorilla. He was capable enough to head a mob of his own; but Cliff was noted because he preferred to work as lieutenant to big-shots. His presence in the Hotel Spartan was not unusual. This was a natural place for a man of his ilk to form contact with those who might need his valued services.

Cliff Marsland had another calling—one that he kept secret. Leaving the Hotel Spartan, he strolled a few blocks and entered an old drug store. In a phone booth, he made a call. A quiet voice responded:

"Burbank speaking."

"Marsland," informed Cliff. "Report on Luke Zoman. Man answering his description came into the Hotel Spartan. Clerk sent him up to 306. Room occupied by Squeezer Dyson."

"Report received," came Burbank's voice. "Follow plan as given."

"Instructions received."

When Cliff Marsland left the drug store, he took a side street. He was heading for an alleyway in back of the Hotel Spartan. There he could be in readiness for what might follow. For Cliff had performed his secret duty—one that was sure to produce results. Through Burbank, Cliff Marsland had reported to The Shadow.

Unknown to associates in the underworld, Cliff Marsland was an agent of the mysterious master whose power was feared by men of evil. Scourge of the badlands, The Shadow, strange being of the night, was ever ready to battle against fiends of crime. His black-gloved finger seemed to feel the pulse-throbs of trouble in the underworld. His secret records held the names of criminals whose affairs needed watching. Cliff Marsland's report had proven that one of these was Luke Zoman.

CLIFF had made a good conjecture when he had picked the muffled man as Luke Zoman. Up in Room 306, the arrival had removed his coat and hat. In the light of a dingy room, his features showed a pug nose and a scarred cheek. These and his bloated, puffy lips marked him as the man The Shadow wanted.

Seated with Luke Zoman was a shrewd, rat-faced fellow: "Squeezer" Dyson. Crafty worker of crime, Squeezer made his headquarters at the Hotel Spartan. He was a crook who had mobsters at his bidding. He was also one whose cleverness in cooking up alibis had kept him square with the law.

"You look kind of scared, Squeezer," Luke Zoman was commenting. "Maybe you don't like it because I dropped in here. You wasn't that way in the old days, Squeezer."

"Maybe not," agreed Squeezer, gruffly. "But I've learned plenty, Luke, since you went up to the big house. It ain't a bad idea to stand in with the bulls. That's the way I play it nowadays."

"I get you. A guy like me—just out of stir—ain't a welcome visitor. Well, don't get cold feet, Squeezer. I didn't come down here with no brass band. There wasn't nobody saw me except some of those mugs in the lobby. I figured they was all right."

"They ought to be, Luke. Some of them belong to my mob. The rest of the boys are in rooms on this floor. I don't take no chances, Luke. If any phony guys was down in that lobby, some of my mob would have tipped me off."

"You got a mob, eh?" Luke chuckled. "Different from six years ago, when I took my trip up the river. That's great, Squeezer. You're just the bird I want to see."

"Yeah?" Squeezer shifted uneasily. "Whatta you figuring on pulling, Luke?"

"You know." Luke rose to his feet and stalked across the room. "There's a bimbo I'm going to get—and I need a pack of gorillas to do it."

"Judge Claris?"

"Yeah. Judge Claris." Luke snarled the name with venom. "He put me in stir and he's going to pay for it. Him and anybody that happens to be around. I want a mob that's ready to back me up—gorillas who can scam for cover. You and your outfit are the bunch I need."

"Forget it, Luke," argued Squeezer. "What's the good? You won't get nothin' out of it but trouble."

"I'll take the trouble."

"The bulls will be laying for you. Don't forget—you threatened Claris when he put you in stir. You said you'd get him when you came out. Maybe -"

"That don't mean nothing, Squeezer. Every judge gets threats like that. I went on good behavior in the big house. I'm supposed to be reformed. Claris ain't thinking about me. The bulls have forgotten the threats I made. Six years is a long time, Squeezer."

"Maybe you're right about the bulls, Luke. But there's one guy ain't going to forget the threats you made."

"Who's that?"

"The Shadow."

Luke Zoman stopped short. He stared coldly at Squeezer. He seemed to detect awe on his companion's ratlike face. Then, with a disdainful leer, Luke delivered a harsh guffaw.

"The Shadow!" he snorted. "Say—it wasn't The Shadow who put me in stir. What does he know about me?"

"He knows plenty about everybody," retorted Squeezer. "Say— there's been times when you guys in the big house was safer than us birds that was out. The Shadow's been smearing some mighty sweet rackets while you was in stir."

"So it's him you're scared of, eh? Going to let me down? An old pal of mine"—Luke's tone was sarcastic—"but you ain't pal enough to help me get even with that mug Claris, that ought to have been rubbed out six years ago."

"Listen, Luke." Squeezer's eyes flashed angrily as the rat-faced mobleader came to his feet. "I ain't lost any of my nerve. I'm still a pal of yours. I'm willing to back you even if your ideas are goofy."

"But it ain't good sense for me to help you bump Claris. It means I've got to scam along with you. I got enough dough to pay off my mob for helping me. I got enough to scam along with you. But where's the gravy? I can grab off dough here in New York, but nowhere else."

"If there was cash in bumping Claris, I'd chance it. But he's got nothing in his house. It's just an idea of getting even—and it leaves us flat at the finish. That's why I'm arguing with you."

"Talking like yourself now, Squeezer," declared Luke, with a grin. "That's what I wanted to hear. So if there was dough at the end of the trail, you'd be with me?"

"Sure thing, Luke."

"Well, the dough will be there. Go through with this along with me. Scam when I scam. Stick close, like a pal. There'll be plenty in it for you."

"How much is plenty?"

"One hundred grand!"

SQUEEZER DYSON stared. His face showed his incredulity. An offer of one hundred thousand dollars,

coming from a man just out of Sing Sing, was more than he could understand.

Luke Zoman grinned. "One hundred grand," he repeated. "That's what I'll pay you, Squeezer. That's how much I'm willing to cough up to get even with Judge Claris. Are you on?"

"For a hundred grand?" Squeezer laughed hoarsely. "Say—I'd bump a whole jury along with a judge to get hold of that dough. Sure—I'm with you—only -"

"Only what?"

"Where's the dough coming from?"

"Is that all you want to know?"

"That's all!"

"You're with me if I put you wise?"

"I'm with you—and the mob, too."

A leer showed on Luke Zoman's face as the ex-convict stalked to the window. Luke made sure the sash was locked. He lowered the shade clear to the bottom. He beckoned Squeezer Dyson toward a little table in the corner. From his pocket Luke pulled out an envelope.

A letter slid from the frayed end of the envelope. With it came three or four small newspaper clippings; also an object that looked like a white card, about the size of a postal. This object was the first that Luke picked up. He turned it over as he handed it to Squeezer. The rat-faced mobleader stared.

The picture was that of an oddly shaped mansion that stood upon a raised mound that looked like an island in a blackened sea. Beyond the building was sloping land that raised to a ridge of wooded mountains.

"That's where the dough is coming from," asserted Luke Zoman. "Half a million—all mine—waiting in that house. What's more, I don't make a move to get it; yet it's in the bag, Squeezer—and a hundred grand is yours, if you stick with me on this Claris deal."

Squeezer Dyson was staring at the picture. His face showed interest; also doubt. Luke Zoman leered. He saw that his companion was ready to be convinced.

"You want the low-down, eh?" quizzed Luke. "Well listen, pal, and I'll hand it to you. Take a good look at that picture, bo. It means a hundred grand to you."

While Squeezer, half nodding, sat staring at the picture, Luke picked up the clippings and the letter. He threw a suspicious glance toward the door; satisfied that no one was listening, the ex-convict began the explanation that was to convince his pal.

CHAPTER II. THE SHADOW'S CLUE

"REMEMBER, Squeezer"—Luke Zoman's first words came in a warning tone—"I'm letting you in on something just to prove it's real. We was pals before I went to the big house; but this was something I didn't wise you to even then."

"Spill it, Luke," nodded Squeezer.

"What's more"—Luke's tone was savage—"it had a lot to do with why I went up the river. The bulls

would never have got me if they hadn't been tipped off. That picture in your mitt is the reason why I was in stir."

"You mean the house?"

"I mean the guy that lives in it." Luke laughed. "I should say the guy that used to live in it. Thaddeus Culeth. That was his moniker. The smoothest crook in the business—and the dirtiest. He's dead now" - Luke tossed the clippings on the table—"and there'll be no more double-crossing from him. He kept his mug shut while he lived; he died without squawking to nobody."

"What was his game?" queried Squeezer.

"His game?" snarled Luke. "Double-crossing. The real game was ours. Mine and—but never mind the names of the other guys. I ain't telling them to nobody."

Luke paused to lick his dry, puffy lips. He fingered the clippings on the table. He laid them in a little stack; then clutched the letter that he was holding.

"There was six of us," stated Luke, "and we pulled some big jobs. Cracking banks, pulling blackmail, working other rackets that made dough. And old Thaddeus Culeth was the brains of the outfit. Living there in his old house, like he wanted to be away from the world."

"In the middle of a lake, eh?" questioned Squeezer, tapping the blackened foreground of the photograph.

"That's no lake," corrected Luke. "It's a swamp. The only ways to get at it are from an old road that cuts through from the right and another road that goes across the swamp. Hits the edge of the high ground, that second road does.

"Well, we used to sneak in and out of Thaddeus Culeth's place. We brought in the swag. He held it. That old geezer hatched up new jobs. Sent us out on them. And all the while, he was stowing away the gravy. Wanted a million before he made the big cut.

"We was saps. We fell for the game. Then came the double cross. A job went wrong. One of our outfit got bumped. We didn't figure nothing phony until a second job was queered. Another guy was rubbed out. That left four of us."

"Was Culeth in back of it?"

"Sure. We figured that after the second job went blooey. So Jimmy" - Luke caught himself—"one of us says he'd go and talk to Culeth. He did. We was to hear from him later. We didn't."

"You mean Culeth got him?"

"That's the way it looked. There was only three of us left. We began to do some tall figuring. It wasn't safe to walk in and see the guy no longer. We couldn't squeal on him. It would have put us out of luck and he was too well covered. He could have cleared himself."

"What did you do?"

"We stayed away. Separated. That's when I came to New York. We decided to meet later on and spring a surprise on the old double-crosser."

"Why didn't you gang the place?"

"That joint?" Luke snorted as he pointed to the photograph. "Say— old Culeth was too smart for that.

He had three strong-arm boys in the house. A lot of dogs around the place. There was a secret tunnel we used to use. We figured he'd plugged that after Jimmy—after the one guy went in to call for a show-down.

"No. We decided to lay low for a while. We knew Culeth for what he was. A miser. We knew he'd be hanging on to the dough. But he was foxier than we thought—Culeth was."

"How?"

"HE found out where two of us was. Tipped off the bulls to both of us. That's how they happened to grab me here in New York. Judge Claris sent me to the big house. Ten years—it got cut to six."

"And the other guy?"

"He got a worse deal than I did. They nabbed him for murder. He's doing life out in Joliet."

"But you said there was three."

"Yeah" Luke Zoman leered. "Three of us left. Two of us went in stir. But the third guy didn't. He was sitting pretty. Culeth couldn't get him."

"Why not?"

"Because Culeth didn't know him!" Luke's voice rang with triumph. "He belonged to the outfit, but he had never been in to see Culeth. He was our ace in the hole."

"Did he go after the dough?"

"No. That was where he was foxy." Again Luke crinkled the letter. "Here's how he figured it, Squeezer. There was two of us left to split. Me and this one guy Culeth didn't know. So this fellow—the ace—decides to wait a while.

"He was counting on me coming out of the big house. But he was counting on something else. Thaddeus Culeth was an old gazebo. He wasn't due to live many years more. So this boy waits. He doesn't show his hand. That keeps Culeth worried. Then this comes along."

Luke picked up the first clipping. It was an item from a small-town paper stating that Thaddeus Culeth, well-known citizen, had been stricken with paralysis. The next clipping spoke of Culeth's grave condition. The third stated that Thaddeus Culeth had died.

Luke took the clippings and tore them to pieces. He dropped them in an ash tray and applied a match. While the bits of newspaper were burning, the ex-convict opened the letter that he had been holding.

"This was waiting for me," he stated. "General delivery; I got it this afternoon. It had the picture and the clippings along with it."

"From the ace?"

"Yeah. He's in the town of Rensdale, where the old house is located. They've been going over Thaddeus Culeth's estate. Only the house and a few thousand bucks. That's all."

"Then the dough is still safe?"

"You bet it is. In the old house. Now you see why this old pal of mine—the ace—was smart. He's been playing straight for the last six years. He's an educated guy—and he knows how to make the most of it."

All he's got to do is step in and pick up the gravy."

"Are you going to help him?"

"Me?" Luke laughed. "Say—I ain't showing my map nowhere near the town of Rensdale. Do you think I want to queer the game? This fellow is a real ace—a square shooter—and when he grabs that million, I'll get my half."

"I get you. Nobody knows the ace is a crook, eh?"

"And nobody suspects it. He could get away with anything—murder included. Maybe he'll have to; but he'll get that dough."

"But if somebody wises up that there's dough in the old house -"

"He'll beat them to it. He'll be on the ground. Listen, Squeezer: Thaddeus Culeth never talked to anybody—not even to his servants. There was a guy named Twindell worked for him; maybe Twindell suspected that Culeth was pulling some funny business, but it's a sure bet that he didn't have the real low-down.

"Twindell could be bought, maybe. Or maybe he's just as dumb as he looks. There won't be much trouble from him. If he knows nothing, all right. If he knows something, he'll be scared to talk."

"What about relatives?"

"The only one was Culeth's son—young Austin. He and the old man had a fight, back before Thaddeus Culeth double-crossed us. The kid cleared out. Went abroad. Died in Africa of the fever. The guy that's coming in for the estate is a distant relative—young fellow named Hector Lundig—who never saw Thaddeus Culeth."

"Where did you get this dope?"

"Here in the letter." With these words, Luke tore the message and dropped the pieces in the ash tray. He set fire to them as he had the clippings. He watched the letter burn to ashes.

The conversation between the two crooks had been a brisk one. The pause that followed seemed long. Luke Zoman crumpled the ashes that had represented clippings and letter. He shook them into a wastebasket and wiped his hands with a grimy handkerchief.

LUKE ZOMAN had drawn the shade at the window. The act had seemed an unnecessary precaution at the time. Yet events outside of the Hotel Spartan were proving that the deed was one of some importance.

The window of Room 306 opened on the rear alleyway. From the darkness below, a strange, squidgy sound was marking the ascent of a living form.

A blackened shape loomed beside the locked window. It clung batlike to the surface of the brick. A hand freed itself from a rubber suction cup. Deft fingers pressed against the window sash—upward. The sash did not move.

A blackened wedge of thin steel was thrust between the portions of the sash. The lock gave noiselessly. The steel disappeared; the hand pressed the sash silently upward. No breeze was stirring; the strange hand from the darkness raised the window to its full extent.

Fingers lifted the bottom of the shade the fraction of an inch. Burning eyes peered into the lighted room. Keen ears listened. The Shadow had arrived; knowing the location of every room in this old hotel, he had chosen the window of Room 306.

"One million dollars," Luke Zoman was saying. "Half of it mine. I can count on the guy that's getting it. One hundred grand to you, Squeezer, if you help me rub out Judge Claris. Are you on?"

Squeezer was staring at the photograph on the desk. There was something about Thaddeus Culeth's old house that impressed him. Luke Zoman's story sounded good.

"I'm on," spoke Squeezer. "Ready when you say the word."

"To-night, then," returned Luke. "Your mob is here. Pick the guys you want. Pay 'em off on the way."

Squeezer considered. He was standing near the table. Again, he glanced at the picture of the old house in which Thaddeus Culeth had lived.

"One hundred grand," prompted Luke. "You've got the dough to pay your mob. I know you don't keep no bank account. Those gorillas of yours don't know where Judge Claris lives. They'll think we're busting into some millionaire's house."

"But the get-away -"

"Every body scrams. You and me together. We can get to Mexico before they trace us."

"You're sure about this pal of yours?"

"Say—I told you he was an ace. What do you think he sent me the letter for? He's been waiting for me to get out of stir."

"All right." Squeezer's tone was firm. "Stick here, Luke. I'll call the mob. They're just down the hall."

Squeezer stepped toward the door. He placed his hand on the knob. Luke was watching him with eager, gleaming eyes. Ten seconds more and this room would be thronged with mobsmen, ready for orders. Then came a sound that made both Luke and Squeezer turn in alarm.

A HAND had plucked the bottom of the window shade. With a snap, the blind went springing upward. At the same instant, blackness seemed to surge in from the night. As the two crooks wheeled, they saw that blackness take the shape of a living form—a being cloaked in black. Burning eyes peered from beneath the brim of a slouch hat. Looming automatics held the startled crooks at bay.

The Shadow had heard the plans to slay Judge Claris. He had learned that the plot lay only between these two men. He had resolved to forestall crime at its beginning—before Squeezer could assemble his band of mobsmen.

"The Shadow!"

The gasp came from Squeezer's pale lips. A whispered laugh was The Shadow's answer. Stark terror seized Squeezer Dyson as he stared into the muzzles of the automatics. The rat-faced crook saw that Luke Zoman was standing sullen; but he could not copy his companion's example. Luke—six years in stir—had not learned of The Shadow's prowess as had Squeezer.

Death. Squeezer feared it. The Shadow was a relentless foe to crime. He gave no quarter to murderers. Squeezer knew that The Shadow had heard mention of killing Judge Claris. To The Shadow, those who

planned murder were the same as murderers. At heart, Squeezer Dyson was yellow. Like a rat, he thought that squealing could save his skin.

"Don't shoot!" pleaded Squeezer, as he faced the menace of those burning eyes. "I'll tell—I'll tell everything. It—it means a million bucks if you don't kill me -"

A vicious snarl came from Luke Zoman. His secret on the point of betrayal, the man became a fiend. Like a flash, he pulled the unexpected—the one course that could stop Squeezer Dyson's plea. With a sudden leap, Luke hurled himself upon The Shadow.

The black-garbed master did not fire. He wanted to hear Squeezer talk. He knew that a shot would bring the yellow mobleader's crew. Ready for Luke's attack, despite its unexpectedness, The Shadow delivered a terrific swing with his left-hand automatic. The blow was aimed for Luke Zoman's skull.

Blind luck saved the ex-convict. Luke thrust a hand upward. Pure chance enabled him to grip The Shadow's wrist. With amazing strength, Luke stopped the downward swing and shot his free hand toward The Shadow's throat. His surge sent the cloaked fighter up against the window.

For an instant, it appeared as though Luke was going to precipitate his foeman through the opening. Only by a quick twist did The Shadow avert that catastrophe. Dropping his left automatic, he wrenched free of Luke's grasp and went sprawling into a corner of the room.

Luke pounced upon the gun. Quick as a cat, he gained the weapon and brought it up to aim. Seeing Luke's action, Squeezer Dyson came to life and shot a hand to his pocket to pull a revolver. He thought that he and Luke had The Shadow on the spot. But neither reckoned with The Shadow's skill at quick recovery.

THE SHADOW had dropped one automatic that he might use his hand to stay his fall. With that free hand, he caught the pipes of a radiator in the corner. With a powerful twist, he pulled his body up from the floor; his right hand, swinging into view, brought the muzzle of its automatic squarely toward Luke Zoman.

A burst of flame spat from The Shadow's gun before Luke could press the trigger of the weapon which he had seized from the floor. With the roar from The Shadow's automatic, Luke crumpled. The Shadow did not pause to fire a second shot. Still twisting, he swung his aim toward Squeezer Dyson.

The rat-faced mobleader had completed the draw. He fired a first quick shot. The bullet clanged against the radiator, inches from The Shadow's shoulder. Then came a second burst from the automatic. Squeezer, like Luke, slumped to the floor.

Again, The Shadow gave no heed to the man whom he had dropped. Rising, he sprang to the door of the room. He yanked the barrier open. Automatic in hand, he was face to face with a mobster who had hastened to the hall at the sound of gunfire. The dim light of the dingy corridor showed revolvers flashing as these gorillas recognized the arch-enemy of gangdom.

Searing bullets whistled from The Shadow's automatic. One gangster dropped. Another staggered. Others dropped to cover, firing as they sought to avoid The Shadow's shots. Bullets chipped wood from the doorway where The Shadow, framed in spectral outline, was standing his ground.

Footsteps on the stairs. New shots, fired from the gloom, were directed not at The Shadow but at the snarling mobmen. Another crook fell. Cliff Marsland had found opportunity to slide in through the back passage of the old hotel. He had come to aid The Shadow.

Squeezer's gorillas had retreated, leaving their trio of fallen comrades in the hall. They had slammed doors to serve as barricades. With a hissed command for Cliff to stand guard, The Shadow stepped back into the room where he had felled Luke Zoman and Squeezer Dyson.

Gasping on the floor, Squeezer stared upward. He still feared death. He tried to cough out words that he thought would bring him mercy. With an effort, he pointed to the table in the corner. The gesture was his last. Squeezer Dyson collapsed, dead.

The Shadow turned to the table. He plucked up the photograph that lay there. He fixed his burning eyes on Luke Zoman. The ex-convict was on hands and knees. His wavering fingers were clutching at the automatic that lay beside him.

"Speak." The Shadow's voice came in a sinister tone. "Tell of the crime that you have plotted."

THE threat of death lay in that weird whisper; yet Luke Zoman remained defiant. His fingers had gripped the solid steel of the automatic handle. With hatred glaring on his face, the ex-convict sank to his left elbow. His bloated lips spat an oath as his right hand tried to aim the automatic.

Like a figure of adamant, The Shadow stood motionless. His keen eyes sensed what was coming. Luke Zoman's last defiant effort was too much. Before he could raise the weapon that he held, the ex-convict delivered a choking cough. He fell face forward on the floor. Like Squeezer Dyson, Luke Zoman was dead.

Footsteps pounded on the stairs. Cliff Marsland's automatic barked a flashing challenge. Arriving mobsters scurried back to cover. In the room, The Shadow stooped and plucked the automatic from Luke Zoman's nerveless fingers. Hidden lips hissed a command.

Cliff sprang into the room and turned out the light. He groped through the darkness toward the window, where he heard the sounds of metal clamping against the woodwork. An object was thrust into Cliff's hand. The Shadow's agent gripped a handle that was shaped like a stirrup. Holding firmly, Cliff swung himself from the window.

Stout wire, strong as cable, hummed from a reel as Cliff slid downward into the blackness of the alleyway. When Cliff released the handle, the wire sizzed upward. Then came squidgy sounds from the wall.

Police whistles. They were close at hand. Then came a whisper from the darkness. The Shadow had arrived. Sirens were whining as new whistles shrilled. Prompted by a whispered voice, Cliff plunged into darkness, following The Shadow's lead. Doorways in deserted buildings; passages between old houses— all seemed to appear in spots where they were needed.

Blocks from the old hotel, The Shadow hissed a final command. Cliff Marsland stepped into a parked coupe. The motor responded. The Shadow's agent drove off to safety. He was unaccompanied. The Shadow had chosen to go his own route, through the covering darkness that was his habitat.

LATER, a light clicked in a darkened room. The Shadow had reached his sanctum. The photograph of Thaddeus Culeth's old mansion appeared beneath the glow of a bluish lamp. Keen eyes studied the picture that bore no statement regarding the location of the house.

The light clicked off. A laugh whispered weirdly through solid darkness. Hollow mirth carried a foreboding note. The Shadow had gained a clue to coming crime. Though the present balked him, the future would bring The Shadow to the mysterious house in the marsh.

CHAPTER III. HEIR TO THE MANOR

WHILE The Shadow, in his sanctum, was studying the photograph that served as clue to coming crime, people in the town of Rensdale were discussing the very house that the picture had portrayed.

Though unknown outside of the district where it was located, the old house in the marsh was a familiar object to those who dwelt in the secluded region near Rensdale. The building had been a landmark for many years. Hence, eager listeners were gathered by the desk in the Hotel Rensdale while a pasty-faced young man chatted loudly with the proprietor.

This young man was Hector Lundig, sole heir to the estate of Thaddeus Culeth. He was gleefully telling David Prell, the hotel proprietor, about the stroke of luck that had come his way.

"I'm selling the old mansion," boasted Lundig. "The deal is settled. Twenty-thousand berries in four installments. Added to the few thousand I got in cash, that fixes me for a trip abroad. Boy! Wait'll I show those pikers in Monte Carlo. I've always wanted to see that place."

David Prell nodded. He was a solemn-faced man who took the hotel business seriously. He was not interested in Hector Lundig's future. As a resident of Rensdale, Prell wanted to know more details regarding the old Culeth mansion.

"Who's buying the house?" he questioned.

"A fellow named Wildemar Brent," announced Lundig. "Going to move in right away. He's welcome to the place."

"He's crazy," commented a bystander.

"Don't I know it?" snorted Lundig. "Say—that old dump gave me the creeps the moment I saw it. I've stayed away from the place. Got to go out there, though, to-night. Philo Halthorpe is coming here with Wildemar Brent. Who!" The young man made a grimace. "Think I'll go up and take a couple of swigs. Got to brace my self for a trip out to that spooky place."

Lundig strolled toward the stairs. Prell spoke in a low tone to the bystanders, as he nudged his thumb toward the departing figure.

"A couple of swigs," repeated the proprietor. "That means he's going to get soused."

WHILE the bystanders nodded and chuckled, a keen-faced, broad-shouldered man entered the lobby. The newcomer was wearing riding breeches and leather puttees; his khaki shirt gave him a military appearance. He was smoking a pipe, which he removed from his mouth as he spoke to Prell.

"Hello, Dave," was his greeting. "Why the confab?"

"Sort of a post mortem, Mr. Rokesbury," responded the proprietor. "We've just been listening to a lot of empty-headed talk from Hector Lundig."

"Sorry I missed it," declared Rokesbury. "Don't be too harsh with Lundig, though. He'll show more sense when he grows up. What was he talking about— Monte Carlo?"

"Yes. He's going there at last."

"On that few thousand he gained as Thaddeus Culeth's heir?"

"That—and more. The old house is being sold."

"You don't mean it! For how much?"

"Twenty thousand dollars. Quarterly installments. I reckon. Fellow named Wildemar Brent is buying it."

"Who is Wildemar Brent?"

"Didn't recall him when Lundig mentioned the name," declared Prell. "But it's kind of come back to me. Wildemar Brent has stopped at this hotel off and on; what's more, he's taken cottages during the past few summers. Sort of a bug on nature study."

"I think I know the fellow you mean," nodded Rokesbury. "I saw him a bit last summer, when we were building the new bridge over the Tallahannock Creek. Stoop-shouldered man, about forty years old. Walks with arms swinging; always looks like he was talking to himself."

"That's the fellow!" exclaimed Prell. "Well, it would take a queer duck like him to buy that old Culeth house. Queer duck"—Prell chuckled—"well, ducks like water. He's a duck all right, Brent is, and the swamp ought to suit him."

"Lundig is fortunate." Rokesbury paused to puff at his pipe. "That mansion is a white elephant. I don't blame Lundig for being elated at its sale; I don't blame him for wanting to go abroad. But he ought to stay away from Monte Carlo."

"He ought to stay away from the bottle," declared Prell. "He's celebrating the sale right now—up in his room—and when a man drinks alone, it's bad."

Rokesbury nodded his agreement.

"A fellow like Lundig ought to appreciate his luck," grumbled Prell, "but he doesn't. First of all, he oughtn't to have come into that money."

"Why not?" inquired Rokesbury.

"On account of Austin Culeth," responded Prell. "He was a likable young chap. Different from old Thaddeus. An only son, Austin was, and a good son. But he had a bad father. That's why he went away."

"He died, didn't he?"

"That's what we heard, a couple of years ago. The fever got him, in Africa. Then, a month or so ago, when old Thaddeus Culeth was stricken with paralysis, Philo Halthorpe sent out a call for all relatives."

"Halthorpe being Thaddeus Culeth's lawyer."

"That's right. But you know the story, Mr. Rokesbury. Austin Culeth was dead. No one else could be located except this young upstart, Hector Lundig. When he arrived, he lived here in my hotel, waiting like a vulture for old Thaddeus Culeth to die. Easy money for him; but he was plenty disappointed when he found the estate only amounted to a few thousand dollars."

"Except for the house."

"Which Lundig didn't want. You know as well as I do that he hasn't been inside the place since he got here. Well—it's sold and he's lucky."

Rokesbury nodded. He yawned sleepily and glanced at the clock above the desk.

"Call me at eleven," he said to Prell. "I'm going to take a nap until then."

"Going back to the causeway?"

"Only long enough to check up on the night watchman. I want to make sure he's on the job. There is a lot of valuable equipment in that tool house."

TIME slipped by after Rokesbury had departed. David Prell, reading a book as he sat behind the desk, was surprised when he looked up at the clock to see that it was a few minutes after eleven. He despatched the lone, slouchy bell hop to awaken Rokesbury. Two minutes later, the man appeared from the stairway, still clad in riding breeches and khaki shirt.

As Rokesbury neared the desk, the front door opened. A tall, rangy, harsh-faced man appeared. He was followed by two others: one, a sober-faced individual who answered to the description of Wildemar Brent; the other, a young and attractive girl.

The harsh-faced man was Philo Halthorpe, the local attorney who had handled the estate of Thaddeus Culeth. He nodded to Prell and Rokesbury; then turned to introduce the people who were with him.

"This is Mr. Brent," announced Halthorpe, in a drawly tone. "Wildemar Brent, who is buying the old mansion that belonged to Thaddeus Culeth. This young lady is Miss Dorothy Brent."

"My niece," put in Wildemar Brent, in a solemn tone. "This is her first visit to Rensdale."

Prell smiled and nodded. Rokesbury bowed.

"This gentleman is David Prell," said Halthorpe, indicating the proprietor, then turning to the Brents. "And I should also like to introduce Nicholas Rokesbury. He is building the new causeway across the swamp"—Halthorpe made a quick correction—"across the lowlands by the old mansion."

Introductions completed, Halthorpe spoke to Prell. He was inquiring if Hector Lundig were upstairs. Prell nodded and replied in a confidential whisper. Halthorpe's face soured. Prell despatched the bell hop while Halthorpe turned back to talk to the Brents.

"Mr. Lundig is in his room," explained the attorney. "He should be with us in a few minutes. Then we can drive out to the mansion."

The bell hop returned. Prell beckoned. The fellow approached the desk and spoke in a low tone that only Rokesbury, puffing his pipe as he leaned on the counter, was close enough to hear.

"Crocked," was the bell hop's statement. "Wanted to bust a pitcher over my head because I disturbed him."

"Mr. Halthorpe," called Prell, "could I speak to you a minute?"

The lawyer approached the desk. Wildemar Brent and his niece could see Halthorpe's expression sour. They heard low, buzzing conversation between Prell and Halthorpe. Then Rokesbury quietly entered the discussion. Halthorpe's glower ended. The lawyer stepped away from the desk.

"Mr. Lundig had gone to bed," explained Halthorpe. "Evidently he forgot that we were coming here to-night. We can start out to the mansion. Mr. Rokesbury is making a trip to the causeway; he will bring Mr. Lundig in his car."

This was agreeable. Halthorpe glanced at Rokesbury, who nodded. Then the lawyer left with the Brents.

AS soon as the trio had departed, Rokesbury headed for the stairs. He reached the second floor and went to a room at the end of the hall. He banged at the door.

"Who's there?" The snarl came in Lundig's tone. "Keep away, I tell you."

"It's Rokesbury," was the firm reply from the man in the hall. "Open the door."

"All right, Nick," responded Lundig. "You're a good scout, Nick. Welcome here any time. Sure"—Lundig's voice was thick—"sure thing. Let you in, Nick, right away."

A key turned clumsily in the lock. Rokesbury entered to find Lundig standing tipsily in the darkness. Shoving the young man on his bed, Rokesbury opened the window. Then he swung back to Lundig, who was muttering indignantly.

"Sober up, you fool!" snapped Rokesbury. "I'm taking you out to the old mansion."

"Don't want to go out there," argued Lundig. "Spooky place. Whoo! Keep me away from there."

"Come along." Rokesbury dragged Lundig to his feet and forced the weakling to put on coat and vest. "Wildemar Brent is out there. Do you want to lose out on twenty thousand dollars?"

"Shay"—Lundig's voice had a quaver—"do you mean that, Nick? Twenty thousand that belongs to me?"

"It won't belong to you," asserted Rokesbury, "if you don't lose this jag. Come along—steady -"

Rokesbury's firmness had effect. Muttering, Lundig allowed his companion to drag him through the hall and down the stairs. Plopped into the seat of Rokesbury's coupe, the pasty-faced heir seemed to come to his senses.

"Whoosh!" he exclaimed. "Shay, Nick—I've got to get sober, don't I?"

"Keep your head in the open air," returned Rokesbury. "You'll be all right when we reach the old house."

Lundig closed his eyes. He rolled from side to side as the coupe sped along, but he kept his grip on the edge of the window. He was half sober when the car came to a stop. Blinking, Lundig stared out into the moonlight. They were in the shadow of the old house in the swamp. Walls of darkened stone loomed in ghostly fashion. Off beyond, Lundig could see the cleared spaces of the open hills; then wooded forest of the mountain ridge.

"What's that?" he questioned excitedly as a flashing light blinked its long shaft from the summit of a mountain.

"The automatic beacon," responded Rokesbury. "Marks the airway. You've seen it before."

"So I have," mumbled Lundig. "But those dark things on the hill. They aren't rocks—they're square -"

"Cottages where the squatters live," broke in Rokesbury. "Come on— get yourself together. We're going in."

He helped Lundig from the coupe. The pasty-faced man had steadied. He stared curiously as they entered a dark-paneled hallway. A cheery fire was burning in a huge fire place. Above the mantel a portrait showed between two electric wall brackets.

"Who's that?" whispered Lundig, hoarsely, as he stared at the handsome, but stony, face that seemed to glare from the frame. "Never been out here before. Place belongs to me but I don't like it. Who's that?"

"Thaddeus Culeth, I suppose!" returned Rokesbury. "Forget the picture. Here comes Philo Halthorpe."

Lundig steadied. The old lawyer approached and studied him. Satisfied that Lundig would pass inspection, he nodded to Rokesbury. Together they piloted the tipsy heir into a room that was fitted with large oak panels. Lundig stared at the wainscoting.

These panels were like frames, set in the wall. Each separate section was fitted with expensive tapestry. Mellow lights added to the effect; the scenes woven in the tapestries produced the semblance of a picture gallery.

HECTOR LUNDIG nodded as he was introduced to Wildemar Brent. He bowed in maudlin fashion and displayed a sickly smile when he met Dorothy Brent. He slumped into a chair at a large table in the center of the room; then began to stare at the tapestries. While Lundig blinked at figures of French lords and ladies, Halthorpe began to speak.

"The papers require only your signature, Hector," announced the lawyer. "You will receive twenty thousand dollars for this mansion, with its furnishings. Four quarterly payments of five thousand dollars each. Do you follow me?"

"Sure." Hector turned to the lawyer and nodded. "I'm going abroad with the money I've got now. You'll send me five thousand bucks every three months. Is that it?"

"That can be arranged."

"Suits me, then. I'm pulling out of this one-horse town to-morrow. Where's the papers?"

Halthorpe produced them with a pen. Lundig scrawled his signature. He grinned.

"The first payment will be in ninety days," explained Halthorpe. "Mr. Brent is posting a bond. You have sufficient money at present to leave Rensdale to-morrow, Hector. Come to my office in the morning."

Lundig arose. Rokesbury was signing papers as a witness. Another man had appeared; he was a tall, pale-faced fellow who wore a frayed and faded livery. He, too, was signing as a witness. Lundig blinked at the newcomer; then strolled out toward the hall. Philo Halthorpe overtook him, just as Lundig began to stagger.

"Sober yourself!" hissed the lawyer. "Get some fresh air. Get out to the car."

Lundig nodded and shuffled toward the door. Philo Halthorpe returned to the paneled room. Lundig stared back; then blinked again. The lawyer had gone into the room; the man in frayed livery was coming out. Halfway across the hall, the fellow paused. Spying Lundig by the outer door, he beckoned.

Mechanically, Lundig came back into the hall. The man in livery was motioning him to an alcove; Lundig went in that direction and stopped unsteadily in the little space beside a stairway.

"Who are you?" demanded the heir.

"Sh-h!" The warning came from cadaverous lips. "I am Twindell. I served your relation, Thaddeus Culeth."

"Twindell, eh?" chuckled Lundig. "Good old Twindell."

"Sh-h!"

Lundig became silent as Philo Halthorpe walked by with Nicholas Rokesbury. As soon as the pair had gone through the outer door, Twindell hissed into Lundig's ear.

"You said you were leaving to-morrow, sir," were the servant's words. "Did you mean that?"

"Sure, I did," responded Lundig, in a low growl. "But you can't tell what I'm going to do. Might stay on a few days longer. Wouldn't mind dropping out here again, after seeing the girl that's going to live here."

"Leave to-morrow." Twindell's voice was hollow. "Remember my advice, sir. Go far away. Never return to Rensdale; above all, do not come to this house before you leave."

"Why not?" challenged Lundig.

"It may mean death," responded Twindell, in a hoarse whisper. "There is danger here to any heir of Thaddeus Culeth. There is danger, even in the town of Rensdale."

With these words, the servant opened the door by the stairs and glided through the opening. As he closed the barrier, his hand made a gesture toward the outer door. He wanted Hector Lundig to leave.

The young man paused; then slouched into the hallway. Had he obeyed Twindell's order for a quick departure, his appearance from the alcove would not have been observed. His delay, however, had enabled eyes to see his action.

Wildemar Brent was stepping from the paneled room. He stopped as he observed Hector Lundig; then approached and extended his hand.

"Good night, Mr. Lundig," said the purchaser of the mansion.

"Good night," mumbled the heir.

As Hector turned toward the outer door, Brent's eyes keenly noted the door through which Twindell had passed. The sudden glow that showed in Brent's gaze was proof that he knew to whom Lundig had been speaking. Brent turned and walked back to join his niece in the paneled room.

A HAND gripped Lundig's arm. The young man turned to face Philo Halthorpe, who had come in from the outer door. The lawyer's voice was harsh.

"I thought you were outside," spoke Halthorpe. "Rokesbury is waiting for you in the car. Why were you loitering here? This house is yours no longer."

"No reason," grumbled Lundig. "I was just -"

He broke off and shambled toward the door. Philo Halthorpe gazed toward the stairs. He, too, observed the door through which Twindell had gone. At the same moment, the old servant appeared, crossing the hall. He was coming from a room which he could have reached by passing through that doorway. A gleam showed in Halthorpe's eyes. The lawyer swung about and went through the outer door.

Hector Lundig had joined Nicholas Rokesbury in the coupe. The motor was thrumming. Philo Halthorpe's tall, gaunt figure appeared in the glare of the headlights as the lawyer started to stalk along the side road that led from the house in the marsh. The coupe started forward.

"Riding to the town with us?" hailed Rokesbury.

"No," returned Halthorpe, his voice sour in the darkness. "I rode out with Mr. Brent. That was enough. I prefer to walk."

The coupe rolled ahead. Rokesbury piloted it steadily along the soft-shouldered roadway. As he guided the car, he spoke quietly to Lundig, who was slouched in the seat beside him.

"When you leave to-morrow," remarked Rokesbury, "I suppose you won't stop until you get to Europe. I don't blame you. I'd like to make the trip myself. But take my advice, Hector. Stay away from Monte Carlo."

"Don't worry," responded Lundig, with a short laugh. "Save your advice until later. It's going to be some time before I move out of Rensdale."

"After the way you've knocked the town?" queried Rokesbury, in surprise.

"I've changed my mind about this burg," responded Lundig. "What I like is excitement. Maybe I can find it here."

With that statement, the pasty-faced fellow slouched farther down in the seat. He closed his eyes and slumped into a groggy reverie while Nicholas Rokesbury, driving steadily ahead, pondered on what might have caused Hector Lundig's sudden change in plans.

CHAPTER IV. DEATH AT DUSK

THREE days had passed since Wildemar Brent had occupied the old mansion in the marsh. The purchase of the house had been a surprise to the populace of Rensdale; the fact that Hector Lundig had not departed was also a cause of perplexity. For Lundig had been boastful when he talked to the townsfolk. He had not been sparing in his criticism of Rensdale. Why he should remain here since the settlement of the estate was a subject that caused much speculation.

David Prell made little comment when the matter was mentioned to him. The proprietor of the Hotel Rensdale possessed good business judgment. Hector Lundig, with his love of the bottle, was not the type of guest whom he desired; but the young heir had money and was paying top price for his room. Hence Prell decided it was policy to hush any idle chatter that might make Lundig dissatisfied.

Late afternoon was the period when the lobby was usually deserted. Dinner was served from six to eight. The few guests were generally waiting for the doors to open. Only late-comers dined at the hour of seven, the time when Prell had his meal.

On this particular afternoon, it chanced that dusk had settled early. The lobby was gloomy, for a clouded sky obscured the later afternoon sun. Yet Prell, almost penurious in his ideas of economy, could see no reason for turning on the electricity, since the lobby was deserted.

Through force of habit, Prell was also staying at the desk. It was not quite seven, the exact time at which he always went into the dining room. Perched behind his desk, the proprietor of the Hotel Rensdale made a solemn, almost forlorn figure as he bided the last few minutes before meal time.

A figure slouched into the lobby. It was Hector Lundig. The man's pasty face showed wan in the dull light as Lundig half-staggered toward the desk and propped one elbow there while he stared at David Prell. It was obvious that Lundig had been drinking.

"If you're coming into dinner," warned Prell, "you'd better get fixed up a bit. There's only one hour before the dining room closes."

"Don't want any dinner," growled Lundig, thickly. "Goin' to do without it—thass what. Goin' to sleep off this jag—then I'm goin' out. Keepin' sober at night, drinkin' in the daytime. Thass what I'm doin'."

Nicholas Rokesbury entered the lobby while Lundig was speaking. He stopped at the desk and surveyed the young man with disapproval. Rokesbury was probably ten years older than Lundig; as Prell compared them, he wondered how much chance Lundig had of developing into a real man like Rokesbury.

"Drinking in the daytime, eh?" questioned Rokesbury. "Has it got you that bad, Hector? You'd better lay off the booze, young fellow."

"Ha-ha-ha," laughed Lundig. "Thass how I fool you. Keepin' sober at night, I am. So I can go out and walk—walk—walk. See what's doin' over by the old house I used to own."

"Have you been out by the causeway?" questioned Rokesbury, sharply.

"Sure I have," chuckled Lundig. "One night—two nights—three nights. Watchin' people—seein' people—thass what I've been doin'."

"Who, for instance?"

"That funny guy, Brent," snorted Lundig, steadying himself against the desk. "Every night, when the sun goes down, he goes out into the marsh. Kind of sneaks into the mist, he does. Guess he's after butterflies. Looked funny, he did. Pretended he didn't see me."

PRELL looked at Rokesbury and shook his head sadly. It was plain that the proprietor thought that Lundig, more than Brent, was eccentric.

"Then there was that goofy lawyer of mine," chortled Lundig. "Ran into old Philo Halthorpe twice, I did. Late at night, walking along the lane over near the marsh. Looked at me kind of funny. Guess he didn't know who I was in the dark."

"Who else did you see?" demanded Rokesbury.

"That watchman of yours," laughed Lundig. "Over on the causeway. Hollered at me through the fog, he did. I beat it. Guess he's still wondering who I was."

"That's all I wanted to know," returned Rokesbury. "Can you hold dinner for me, Dave?"

"Certainly, Mr. Rokesbury. Why?"

"Because I've got to go back to the causeway. The watchman told me prowlers have been around there. Thought they might be some of the hill-folk—the squatters—sneaking around to steal some of the equipment.

"So I promised to send out an extra man to-night. That meant more expense, but it seemed worth it. Since it was only Hector, here, I'll have to go out and explain it to the watchman. As for you, Hector"—Rokesbury's tone was disapproving—"take my advice and stay in nights. When those fogs come up, a squeamish watchman might not recognize his own brother before he fired."

The statement seemed to sober Lundig. The pasty-faced young man slouched away from the desk, mumbling that he intended to "sleep it off." Prell and Rokesbury watched him go upstairs. Then Rokesbury strode out and Prell went into the dining room.

THE proprietor was in the midst of his dinner when he heard a clanging of the bell on the lobby desk. Pushing back his chair, Prell walked out into the gloomy lobby. He saw a muffled man standing at the desk. Prell turned on the light. It revealed a bulky figure in an overcoat, with muffler wrapped about chin and nose. The stranger was staring through dark glasses.

"What do you want, sir?" questioned Prell, as he stepped behind the desk.

"A room," rasped the stranger.

Prell shoved over the register. He noted that the new guest was wearing gloves which he did not remove when he picked up the pen. The man scrawled a signature; then pointed to a bag that lay on the floor. The bell hop was off duty. Prell picked up the bag himself and led the way to the second floor.

There was an empty room two doors from Lundig's. Prell showed the stranger into it. He paused in the doorway while the man stood with his back to the light that Prell had turned on.

"There is time for dinner," began the landlord. "The dining room does not close until eight -"

"I've had my dinner," growled the new guest.

Prell nodded. He closed the door as he went out. Shaking his head, he went back to the dining room and gulped down the rest of his meal. It was quarter of eight when he went back into the lobby. He had left the place lighted; it was still deserted.

The door opened and Rokesbury appeared, back from the causeway. He looked at the clock; then at Prell. The proprietor smiled.

"Still time for dinner," said Prell.

"Go right in the dining room. Martha will serve you."

"Time to shave?" questioned Rokesbury, rubbing a growth of stubble on his face.

"If you want to," responded Prell. "But don't change your clothes. That would take too long. Try to get in the dining room before eight. That's all I ask."

"All right." Rokesbury turned as the door opened. One of his workmen had entered. "Hello—here's Jerry. What do you want, Jerry?"

"Came to get that box of dynamite, boss."

"That's right. I had forgotten it. There it is behind the desk, Dave. Remember, I put it there yesterday afternoon?"

"Dynamite!" Prell shied away from the box. "Have you gone crazy, Mr. Rokesbury? Leaving dynamite, here in the lobby?"

Rokesbury laughed as he pulled the box into view. He opened the lid, drew out a stick of grayish substance and held it under the proprietor's nose. He pointed to the word "Sample" stamped upon the stick.

"No kick to this stuff," laughed Rokesbury. "Some company thought we'd be doing blasting on the new causeway. They sent up this load of samples. Merely specimens of size and quality. I told Jerry to take it out to the tool house."

Prell smiled in relief as Rokesbury added the stick to the box. The proprietor was mopping his brow when Jerry hoisted the box and carried it out on his shoulder.

"Thought you had a bum guest, eh?" laughed Rokesbury. "Asking you to keep dynamite behind your desk. That's one you can tell to the gang, Dave."

Prell plucked Rokesbury's sleeve. The proprietor had gained a sudden thought. He pointed to the register and turned it so that Rokesbury could read the latest name.

"Simon Glosting," read Rokesbury. "Who is he?"

"I don't know," whispered Prell, "but I don't like his looks. I took him for some one who is dodging the law."

"Why?"

"He was wearing an overcoat and muffler. Dark glasses. Gloves. Didn't even take them off when he scrawled his name. Wanted a room, but no dinner. Talked in a funny voice, too."

"Where did you put him?"

"Room 212."

"Next to Lundig?"

"No. Two doors away. If you see the man, Mr. Rokesbury, give me your opinion about him. In the meantime—I hate to have to give this advice—keep your room locked."

"Why did you take such a guest, Prell?"

"I couldn't refuse him."

"He's upstairs now?"

"Yes."

"I'll let you know if I hear him moving about. I've got to hurry, Dave; it's getting close to eight and I need that shave."

Rokesbury went upstairs. Prell took his seat behind the desk. The bell hop arrived, ahead of time. He was due at eight o'clock. He nodded to Prell and took his seat on the lobby bench. One minute ticked by. It was almost completely dark outside.

Then came a sound that brought both Prell and the bell hop to their feet.

It was a muffled report from the second floor. For a brief instant, one thought clogged Prell's brain: that was the absurd belief that the sound was a dynamite explosion. Then the landlord came to life.

"Get up there!" he shouted to the bell hop. "That was a revolver shot!"

The proprietor yanked a big horse-pistol from beneath the desk. The sight of the weapon gave courage to the bell hop. The fellow scampered for the stairs with Prell at his heels. A door swung open as they neared the second floor. Nicholas Rokesbury, his face half-shaven, was coming from his room, a heavy candle-stick in his fist.

"Where was it?" blurted Prell.

"From down the hall," returned Rokesbury. "Lead the way, Prell. You've got a gun -"

The door of Lundig's room was open; so was that of the new guest, Simon Glosting. Prell dashed along the hall, the others at his heels. He stopped at Glosting's door. The room seemed dark and empty. Then came an exclamation from Rokesbury.

"Listen!"

It was a moan from the end of the hall. Rokesbury led the way, wielding the candle-stick. He shoved on the light switch at the door. He stopped short and pointed to the floor. There lay the form of Hector Lundig. The pasty-faced man was dying. One feeble hand was grasping a gleaming revolver.

"He's shot himself!" gasped Prell.

"I don't think so," put in Rokesbury. "It looks like murder to me, Prell."

With dying effort, Lundig had raised his head. Rokesbury and Prell stooped above him. Lundig stared; his glassy eyes recognized Rokesbury.

"Nick!" gasped Lundig. "Nick!"

"Who shot you, Hector?" questioned Rokesbury.

"The house!" coughed Lundig. "The old house. Nick—the house -"

Lundig's head fell. His body lay motionless. The heir to Thaddeus Culeth's estate was dead. David Prell was quivering at this sight of death. Nicholas Rokesbury, his face firm and vengeful, was rigid as a statue.

Then came a call from the bell boy. Prell turned nervously and cocked the horse pistol. Rokesbury grabbed the gun that lay beside Lundig's nerveless fingers. Together, the two men hurried in the direction of the call.

The bell hop had turned on the light in Simon Glosting's room. The place was in disarray. Blankets had been ripped from the bed. Torn fragments of sheets were in view. The trail led to the window, which was open. Staring downward, Prell and Rokesbury saw a rope, formed by strips of sheets tied together.

An overturned bag lay on the floor. Prell recognized it as the grip that he had carried upstairs for Glosting. The murderer, after losing his gun in Lundig's grasp, had evidently decided to abandon this piece of luggage, in order to make a get-away. The sheet-rope, obviously, had been prepared beforehand.

A grimy towel, a pair of new, square-toed shoes and two rough, red bricks were the only objects that showed within the bag. David Prell stared stupidly. So did the bell hop. It was Nicholas Rokesbury who supplied the spark that was needed.

"Get on the trail!" ordered Rokesbury. "Call Halthorpe. Rouse the town. I'll have my road crew track down this murderer!"

With one accord, the three men hastened from the room and dashed for the stairs, Prell leading with his cocked horse-pistol; Rokesbury second, with drying lather sticking to his half-shaved face. Their one desire was to begin the hunt for the killer who had delivered death at dusk.

CHAPTER V. WORD TO THE SHADOW

PHILO HALTHORPE was seated in his office. This was on the second story above a grocery store on the main street of Rensdale. With the gaunt, hard-faced lawyer was a pudgy, middle-aged man whose face wore a grouchy look. This was Merle Cray, the county detective.

"So you told your theories to the county prosecutor," Halthorpe was remarking. "Well, Cray, what did he have to say about them?"

"Told me to come back here and talk to you," growled Cray. "He says to me: 'Philo Halthorpe is on the ground. He's a good man. I want to hear his opinion.' So that's why I'm here this afternoon."

"I know Jack Forrest pretty well," chuckled Halthorpe. "We've been good friends ever since I came to this county, six years ago. I knew him before he was elected prosecutor. Well, Cray, what -"

Halthorpe broke off. The door of the office had opened. A wiry young man was standing there, hat over one eye, cigarette between his lips. He was a stranger to Philo Halthorpe.

"What do you want?" quizzed the lawyer.

"You're Philo Halthorpe?" came the easy reply.

"Yes," returned the lawyer, testily. "Who are you?"

"Burke's my name," responded the young man. "Clyde Burke, reporter from the New York Classic."

"Long way from home, aren't you?" snorted Halthorpe. "I suppose you've come up here on account of the Lundig murder?"

"You guessed it right," returned the reporter.

"Well," decided Halthorpe, "you've come rather late. The news of Hector Lundig's death was given out by wire. The murder is being investigated. I can see no reason why we should be annoyed by representatives of the press."

"It's no fun for me," acknowledged Clyde. "All the other sheets passed up the case. But the Classic wanted details and I've come here to get them. I'd rather get your opinions, Mr. Halthorpe, than go around collecting ideas from other folks."

"That's fair enough," agreed the lawyer, in a mollified tone. "Well, Burke, you picked a good time to walk in. This gentleman is Merle Cray, county detective. He is investigating the murder. Perhaps between us we can set you right."

Clyde Burke nodded. He calmly hung his hat on a hook in the corner. He took a chair close beside the desk and waited for what might follow.

"Go ahead, Cray," suggested Halthorpe.

"WELL," began the pudgy detective, shifting in his chair, "there ain't much to say under the circumstances. This young chap, Hector Lundig, came to Rensdale because he was the only heir to the estate of his uncle, Thaddeus Culeth."

"Wrong," put in Halthorpe, promptly. "Lundig was the only heir who appeared here. There were others whom we could not trace. One was Austin Culeth, the son of Thaddeus. He was reported to have died

in Africa a few years ago. I did not have extensive evidence of his death; but his failure to appear eliminated him.

"Moreover, Hector Lundig was not the nephew of Thaddeus Culeth. His mother was a second cousin to Thaddeus. The will provided a division of the estate among all relatives who established their claim within a certain time limit. Lundig alone appeared."

"All right," grunted Cray. "That's technical stuff. Let's get to bedrock. Lundig got his claim through, but he hadn't collected. He was hanging around town waiting for his money."

"Wrong again," interposed Halthorpe. "I offered Lundig the available funds. He intended to take them the day after the old house was sold. Then he decided to stay in Rensdale. He didn't want his money until he was ready to leave. So I held it for him."

"Anyway," resumed Cray, in a disgruntled tone, "Lundig was living at the Hotel Rensdale. Night before last, a suspicious character registered there under the name of Simon Glosting. This fellow had his face wrapped in a muffler. He was wearing dark goggles. Dave Prell, the proprietor, took him to a room two doors from Lundig's."

"At eight o'clock, a shot was heard. It was from Lundig's room. Prell ran up there. So did the bell hop. They were joined by a guest named Nicholas Rokesbury, who was shaving in his room at the end of the hall. They found Hector Lundig dying. He was hanging onto the gun that had been used to shoot him. He talked to Rokesbury. Said something about the old house. That was all. Then they found a rope made out of sheets, hanging from the window of Simon Glosting's room."

Cray paused to look at Halthorpe. The lawyer appeared satisfied with the account. Cray resumed his story.

"Glosting's bag was on the floor," said the detective. "In it was an old towel, a pair of shoes with square toes, and a couple of bricks to give it weight. Prell and Rokesbury gave the alarm. Then the search began."

"Prell called my home," put in Halthorpe. "Unfortunately, I was out. So Rokesbury, who is the construction engineer in charge of our new causeway, called out his men. They scoured the entire district. I encountered the searchers while they were at work. I was coming home from a walk through the countryside."

"Getting back to the search," declared Cray, "these fellows found footprints in a muddy road near the hotel. They followed them."

"Why?" questioned Clyde.

"Because they were big ones," answered Cray, "and square. One of Rokesbury's men found them and called his boss. Rokesbury thought they looked like the shoes up in Glosting's room."

"How far did they trace the footprints?"

"Well, they found them off and on, wherever there was mud. Finally, they spotted them in the soft ground on the edge of the big marsh. They took to the causeway, the footprints did. Then they cut off along the solid ground below the old house. After that they went back through the bog and on to the causeway."

"Odd," commented Clyde.

"Not at all," asserted Cray. "There's a tool house right where the causeway touches the edge of the high

ground. There was a watchman on duty. The murderer didn't want to be seen. The marsh was foggy—most always is on a dull evening—so it was easy to slip the watchman by making that sort of detour."

CRAY began to draw a diagram. It showed the marsh on the outskirts of the town. A long oval indicated the isle of solid ground on which Thaddeus Culeth's old mansion was located. The detective drew a line in from the right, to show the old filled road that came to the house. Then he streaked a straight line across the marsh to the left of the house. That stood for the causeway.

"Cray has given the precise details," put in Halthorpe. "Now comes the point on which he and I disagree. State your theory, Cray."

"The footsteps ended back on the causeway," declared the detective. "All through that marsh are paths of solid ground. They're tricky and hard to find, unless you've gone through the swamp in daytime. But a fellow that knows them—well, he could pick spots where the footprints wouldn't show.

"So I reckon that this murderer picked some place farther on and cut off through the swamp. He could have come back toward town. He could have hit over by the ground around the house. He could have reached the hillside where the squatters live."

"I affirm," said Halthorpe, "that the murderer kept on across the causeway. There is a road beyond. He could have stepped into an automobile there and made a complete escape from this vicinity.

"My theory is simple and obvious. If the murderer had chosen to take to the bog, he would have stayed clear of the causeway. His footprints in the marsh show that he was unfamiliar with the terrain. The fact that he took the risk of passing the watchman at the tool house is proof that the causeway was his sole route of escape."

"That's where he fooled you, Mr. Halthorpe!" exclaimed Cray, with a wise wag of his forefinger. "He wanted to make it look like he went over the causeway. So he blundered around to begin with. He took the chance of passing the watchman."

"Ridiculous," snorted Halthorpe. "The murderer is gone, Cray. You merely want to create the idea that he is still about so that you can splurge with your investigations."

"I'll admit," stated Cray, ruefully, "that I have found no further traces. There are no suspicious characters here in town—the first place where the murderer might have come in from the swamp. The people in the old mansion saw no prowlers—that was the second place where the murderer might have hidden. When I made a search up through the squatter cabins—the third place—I found no strangers there."

"What about the squatters themselves?" questioned Clyde Burke. "Aren't they doubtful characters?"

"No," asserted Cray. "They live by themselves. Funny people, who mind their own business. Men with beards and flat hats."

"Survivors of a sect called the Dalwars," explained Halthorpe. "They do not even associate among themselves. They are almost like hermits."

"I found that out when I questioned them," declared Cray. "Some of those old cottages were empty; others had people living in them. All had the same answer. They had seen no one. There was one other place I looked, too."

"Where was that?" questioned Halthorpe.

"In the old cabin, up by the airplane beacon," responded Cray. "It's been deserted ever since they put in the automatic light. I had a tough time getting up there. The place is empty."

"Only a fool would have taken refuge there," sneered Halthorpe. "Let me ask you something, Cray. What was the motive for this murder?"

"Robbery," snapped the detective. "The killer thought that Lundig had cash in his possession."

"GOOD," chuckled Halthorpe. "We agree on one point. Very well. Every one in town knew Lundig's business. They knew that I still held the funds of the estate. So no one here would have been fool enough to kill him."

"The people who bought the mansion have money of their own. With Lundig dead, they will have to pay the purchase price to the estate, which I represent. Twindell, the old servant who is still at the house, is faithful and pleased with his new employer. That makes another elimination."

"The hill-folk—the squatters who call themselves Dalwars—know nothing about what has gone on here in town. Moreover, they have no need for money. They ignore it. So all your points are shattered."

"Now consider my theory. Hector Lundig had a hectic past. He was a wastrel—a ne'er-do-well—who spent all he could lay his hands on. His past associations were doubtful. He came here with the avowed intention of getting money."

"I believe that some outside enemy came to Rensdale. This person, who used the name of Simon Glosting, could readily have thought that Lundig had already gained his money. That type of person, after murdering Lundig, would have cleared out of this region. The causeway offered sure escape, for it is not completed to the point where automobiles can use it. An accomplice was waiting with a car at the other end. He and Glosting fled together."

Halthorpe pounded his fist on the desk as a token of finality. Cray looked dejected. Clyde Burke, taking advantage of the silence that followed, put a question that had perplexed him. "Are you sure," asked the reporter, "that you trailed the footsteps of the actual murderer?"

"Yes," responded Cray. "We tried the boots that he left behind him. They fitted perfectly. The fellow must have had two pair of shoes exactly alike."

Silence followed. Clyde discreetly arose and strolled from the office. He had heard all that Cray and Halthorpe had to say. He knew that he could talk with the lawyer later. Reaching the street, Clyde went to the Hotel Rensdale.

Clyde had made the acquaintance of David Prell; in fact, the proprietor had advised him to see Philo Halthorpe. When he entered the hotel lobby, Clyde found Prell talking to an admiring group. Clyde listened while the man recited details.

"LUNDIG came in half drunk," recounted Prell. "Talked with me and Rokesbury. Told us how he'd been snooping around the swamp by the old house. How he'd seen Brent wandering in the marsh; how he'd met Halthorpe, late at night; how he'd run into the watchman on the causeway."

"What did Rokesbury say to that?" some one asked.

"It made him sore," continued Prell. "He had to run out to the causeway to tell the watchman he wouldn't need a helper—that it was only Lundig who had been sneaking around. Well, Lundig went upstairs and Rokesbury left. I went into dinner. Then the bell rang here on the desk. It was this Simon Glosting. I showed him to a room; then I went back to dinner."

"After I came out, Rokesbury arrived back from the causeway. One of his men was here, to get a box of dynamite that they had left by the desk."

"Dynamite!" exclaimed two listeners.

"Sample stuff," said Prell, with an air of superiority. "No kick in it. Just fake junk. Rokesbury went upstairs and began to shave. Louie came in for bell duty. Then we heard the shot."

"I'll bet you were scared."

"Not with this hoss-pistol," bragged Prell, bringing the weapon up from beneath the desk and cocking it. "Rokesbury had nerve, too. He grabbed one of those big candle-sticks from his bedroom. He was right with me when we found the body."

The doors were opening for dinner. The throng broke up. Some patrons went into the dining room; others departed. Prell nodded to Clyde Burke.

"Did you see Philo Halthorpe?" he questioned.

Clyde nodded.

"Well," mused Prell, "you just heard my story -"

He paused at the sound of footsteps from the stairs. Nicholas Rokesbury appeared. Prell beckoned; the engineer approached and the proprietor introduced him to the reporter. Clyde felt Rokesbury's warm, healthy clasp. His eyes met the engineer's frank gaze.

"I'd like to hear your story, Mr. Rokesbury," said Clyde. "Would you mind?"

"I haven't much to tell," replied Rokesbury, in a sober tone. "I liked young Lundig, despite his faults. He had been here quite a while. When he died, he spoke to me—well, as some one would speak to a friend.

"Suppose you come into dinner with me, Mr. Burke. We can chat at the table; but let's be brief on the subject of Hector Lundig's death."

Clyde agreed. He went with Rokesbury into the dining room. While they were eating, Rokesbury gave details that were similar to the statements made by Prell. When he had finished, Clyde dropped in a remark.

"This old mansion," said the reporter. "Would it be possible to stop out there—to meet this man Brent and his niece? I should like to learn their opinions of Hector Lundig."

"They only saw him once," remarked Rokesbury, "and that was when Lundig was barely sober. But I should be glad to take you out there to-night—for a personal reason."

A smile showed on Rokesbury's steady lips. The man was prompt to explain it.

"The visit," said Rokesbury, "would give me another opportunity to meet Miss Brent. She is a very charming young lady."

"How soon can we go?" questioned Clyde.

"Say half past eight," responded Rokesbury.

IT was nearly seven when Clyde strolled out into the gloomy lobby. Another dulled sun was setting; Prell had failed to turn on the lights. Clyde caught a statement that Prell was making to a man by the desk.

"That room of Lundig's is closed," the proprietor was saying. "Nobody's going in there. Not for a month, anyway. Perhaps I'm superstitious -"

Clyde had a room on the third floor. He went to it. At a table, he began to write an account of all that he had heard in Rensdale. The reporter used a pen that delivered ink of vivid blue. He wrote in a strange code that looked like shorthand. He folded each sheet the moment that its ink had dried.

Clyde was an expert reporter. He did not omit a single detail that he had heard. Finished, he tucked the folded sheets in an envelope. He sealed the packet and left it on the table. At the door of the room, Clyde turned the light off, then on; then off again. Locking the door, he strolled down to the lobby.

A FEW minutes after the reporter's departure, a soft sound came from the window. A weird, hazy outline showed in the gloom of dusk. A figure came stealthily into the room. It was The Shadow. Here, in Rensdale, the mysterious master had come to gain the report of Clyde Burke. The reporter was one of his secret agents.

Deft fingers opened the envelope. A flashlight directed a tiny beam upon the first written page. Steadily, The Shadow read the report that his agent had made. Every detail remained within his keen brain. As he finished the page, The Shadow watched the coded writing disappear. Clyde Burke had used the special vanishing ink that The Shadow required in all communications of this sort.

Page after page, The Shadow completed his perusal. Blank sheets and envelope dropped into a waste basket. The Shadow's cloaked form swished toward the door. With a blackened, keylike instrument, gloved fingers opened the lock.

Like a specter from darkness, The Shadow moved through the dimly lighted corridor. He descended stairs to the second floor. He followed another passage to the door of the room where Hector Lundig had been slain.

The lock yielded to The Shadow's craft. The tall form merged with the darkness of a room where blinds were drawn. The door closed; its lock clicked. A soft laugh came in whispered tones within the room of death.

The Shadow had noted the final lines in Clyde Burke's report—a reference to Prell's statement that this room would not be opened. The Shadow had made use of that circumstance. For the present, this shunned room would be his abode. Here he could remain, unseen, unknown, within the town of Rensdale.

Such was the way of The Shadow. While his agent, Clyde Burke, conducted investigations in the capacity of a newspaper reporter, he, the master, would seek findings of his own. Yet there was something in The Shadow's laugh that seemed to go beyond the murder of Hector Lundig.

That was Clyde Burke's plan to visit the old mansion. The mention of the house in the marsh—culled from a newspaper clipping that had reached The Shadow's hands—was the motive behind The Shadow's presence here.

For The Shadow knew that the home of Thaddeus Culeth—now the residence of Wildemar Brent—was the mystery mansion that he sought. The Shadow was following the clue to crime that he had gained despite the sealed lips of Squeezer Dyson and Luke Zoman.

CHAPTER VI. AT THE MANSION

PROMPTLY at half past eight, Nicholas Rokesbury appeared in the lobby of the Hotel Rensdale. Clyde Burke was awaiting him. Together, they went out to the front driveway and entered Rokesbury's coupe.

"I'm going to make a double trip of it, Burke," stated the engineer. "I want to go out to the causeway and look things over before we visit the mansion."

"The causeway runs close by, doesn't it?" inquired Clyde.

"Yes," responded Rokesbury, "but there's only rough ground between. I don't care to come prowling up to Culeth's—I mean Brent's house."

They rolled through the silent lanes of Rensdale. The sky had been clearing since dusk; bright moonlight showed itself through the thick-leaved trees. Then the coupe came suddenly to an open patch. Before him, Clyde Burke caught his first view of the marsh.

The swampy ground spread out like a broad, fog-laden lake. Rising mist hung close to the boggy ground, forming a white blanket in the moonlight. Staring toward the swampy lowlands, Clyde caught sight of the old mansion, as it loomed with graystone turrets from the isle of solid ground. An involuntary exclamation came from the reporter's lips.

"What is it, Burke?" questioned Rokesbury, as he stared along the road ahead.

"Nothing," responded Clyde. "Just a surprise—that was all. The marsh looks like a sea of steam; and that flashing beacon on the mountain was rather startling."

"The place impressed me when I first came to Rensdale," returned Rokesbury. "That was before I worked on this job. After we started the causeway, the marsh lost all its glamour. Soggy, dismal ground—that's all it is when you come in contact with it."

Clyde had avoided all mention of the old mansion. There was reason for his omission. Deep in his inside pocket, Clyde held a reproduced photograph of that very house. It was one that he had received from The Shadow—a copy of the picture which the master fighter had found on Squeezer Dyson's table. Clyde knew now what The Shadow had already divined—that this was the mystery mansion that marked the end of a quest.

"Here's the causeway," remarked Rokesbury, turning the car along a rough patch of road. "We can drive out a few hundred yards. After that it's only rough fill."

"How did you place the rock base?" questioned Clyde, as the coupe thumped along the first portion of the unfinished causeway.

"Had to use caterpillar treads," returned Rokesbury. "We wanted to give the cracked rock a long while to settle. That's why we laid the base clear across the swamp. Well—this is as far as we go."

Rokesbury stopped the car at a spot where only crushed rock showed ahead. No surface had as yet been applied. Clyde could see spots where the fill had sunk unevenly. While Clyde studied the rough causeway, Rokesbury turned off the motor and delivered a low, shrill whistle.

THE call was answered. Soon a lantern swung through the clinging mist. The stubby face of the watchman appeared at the window on Rokesbury's side of the car. The boss talked with the worker. Satisfied that his man was ready for the night's vigil, Rokesbury managed to swing the car about. They started back toward solid ground.

This time, Rokesbury chose a road that ran along the edge of the swamp. Clyde watched the swirling mist as it rose steaming from the bog. The vapor was gradually clearing. Patches of quagmire showed mucky by the fringe of the road.

Skirting the swamp, Rokesbury neared a point almost directly opposite the center of the causeway. Here he slowed the car, picked an opening among the trees and drove carefully along a rough road. Clyde could see ahead to the narrow strip of old highway that led out to the mansion. The car jounced into a slight skid; Rokesbury yanked it straight and gave it gas. As the coupe responded, Clyde caught sight of a long, stooped figure leaping to the bank to avoid the car. Then they had passed the man and Rokesbury, grunting from his sudden effort, was driving out over the marsh.

"Did you see that fellow who jumped for the trees?" questioned Rokesbury, as he shifted the car into second.

"Yes," returned Clyde. "He thought we were going to hit him."

"Recognize him?"

"No. Who was he?"

"Philo Halthorpe."

"What was he doing here?"

"He's a great walker," stated Rokesbury. "Has no car; won't get into one except on special occasions. Claims that brisk hikes in the night air account for his strong constitution."

"Sounds like bunk to me," declared Clyde. "Most hikers go out in the daytime. I can't see any benefit from swamp air, either."

"I imagine that Halthorpe prefers the high ground," said Rokesbury. "He may have been going toward the hills over yonder. He would have to skirt the swamp to get there."

"Are those cabins?" questioned Clyde, indicating black squares on the hillside.

"Cottages—or shacks," replied Rokesbury. "Where the hill-folk live."

"Dalwars," recalled Clyde. "I heard Halthorpe mention them."

"Squatters," defined Rokesbury. "Harmless people who keep to themselves. An odd bunch of fanatics. Ran into some of them a few years ago, when we were repairing the old aqueduct. Well, Burke. Here's the old haunted house."

The coupe had reached the side of the manor in the marsh. The house did look ghostly, close at hand. The clearing fog all about; the sweeping flashes of the airway beacon; the stillness of the damp atmosphere—all produced a creepy effect.

AS Clyde and Rokesbury clambered from the car, a light turned on above the side door. This was on the side of the house toward the hill. The light shone from an alcove and it made a brilliant gleam. As the two men approached, the door opened and Dorothy Brent stepped into view.

"I thought I recognized your car, Mr. Rokesbury," said the girl, with a pleasant smile. "You are the first visitor we have had— except, of course, Mr. Halthorpe."

"Was he here to-night?" asked Rokesbury.

"No," responded Dorothy. "Last night. He walked out here to tell us about the unfortunate death of poor Mr. Lundig."

"That reminds me," said Rokesbury, "that I should have introduced my friend. Miss Brent, I would like to have you meet Mr. Clyde Burke, of the New York Classic. He is in town investigating the death of Hector Lundig."

The girl smiled; but her face looked troubled. Clyde, peering toward the opened doorway, saw a cadaverous face staring from the hall within. He knew that this must be Twindell, the old servant. The man's pallid countenance showed a frown. Clyde wondered if it was because Twindell had overheard the introduction.

"I hope," said Dorothy, in a low tone, "that you will not try to interview my uncle, Mr. Burke. He detests notoriety. He seemed very much upset when he heard of Hector Lundig's death. He predicted that reporters might be here."

"He did?" questioned Rokesbury.

"Yes." Dorothy hesitated; then decided to go on. "He said that he was sorry that the dogs had been sold; that the other servants—beside Twindell—had been discharged when Thaddeus Culeth died. He thought that he might have to use force to drive newspaper men away."

"We won't tell him of Mr. Burke's profession," laughed Rokesbury. "By the way, where is your uncle?"

"Out in the marsh," replied Dorothy.

"In all this fog?" inquired Rokesbury.

"He prefers the mist," explained the girl. "He began to investigate the swamp the first night we came here. He picked paths in the daylight; he has been following them at night -"

Dorothy paused. A powerful electric lantern was coming through the mist. It was followed by a human figure. Swinging his light, Wildemar Brent came stamping along the solid ground. He extinguished the lantern as he came within range of the glow above the door. Blinking, he craned his long neck forward to survey the visitors.

"Who are these men?" he demanded in a querulous voice.

"You remember Mr. Rokesbury, uncle," replied Dorothy. "This is a friend of his. Mr. Burke."

"Yes, I remember Rokesbury," said Brent, harshly. "What brings you here to-night, sir?"

"I was out on the causeway," replied Rokesbury, calmly. "I wondered how you folks were enjoying your new home. I thought that I would stop by."

"A long drive around from the causeway," commented Brent. "I do not care for intrusion. I chose this house because it was isolated."

"And because of the swamp," added Dorothy.

Brent glared at his niece as though he thought the added statement unnecessary. Dorothy, however, showed no fear of her uncle's wrath. She seemed to think that a further explanation was desirable.

"Uncle Wildemar is very much concerned with subjects that interest him," stated the girl. "He does not realize that people may think it queer because he follows such pursuits as tramping through swampy

ground. Don't you think, uncle" —Dorothy smiled wistfully as she turned toward Brent—"that you should tell Mr. Rokesbury of your scientific studies?"

"Totally unnecessary," quibbled Brent. "But since you appear prepared to divulge the subject yourself, it is as well that I should speak. I have long desired to own this house, Mr. Rokesbury; for I have envied its location. After Thaddeus Culeth died, I lost no time in buying the mansion. This bogland"— Brent indicated the surrounding terrain with a broad sweep of his arm—"is ideal for one who is in search of the ignis fatuus."

"The ignis fatuus?" questioned Rokesbury.

"Commonly known as the will-o'-the-wisp," replied Brent. "The ignis fatuus is a luminous appearance—a pale, bluish-colored flame—that varies in size and shape. It is frequently seen in swampy places, or over grave yards -"

"The marsh lights!" exclaimed Rokesbury: "I have heard of the phenomenon. They have been seen hereabouts, Mr. Brent."

"So I understand," remarked the stoop-shouldered man. "That is why I wanted to live here. The ignis fatuus is one natural marvel that science has never explained to satisfaction. I am determined to learn its cause."

"Does it appear at night?"

"Generally a short while after sunset. Sometimes later. It hovers a few feet above the ground; sometimes it is fixed; sometimes it travels. It has been known to glow until dawn. Sometimes it vanishes and reappears at definite intervals."

"Amazing!" exclaimed Rokesbury.

"This solid ground is not suited to the ignis fatuus," declared Brent. "Hence I intend to search through the marsh itself, night by night. I have already discovered paths; Twindell has told me of those with which he was familiar."

"Your boots show that you have escaped the bog itself," remarked Rokesbury.

"Quite so," agreed Brent, in a rather testy tone. "Yes, I am making progress. Concerning the ignis fatuus itself, some hold that it is due to phosphureted hydrogen gas—a tenable theory. Others say it is caused by the combustion of methane, or marsh gas. I disagree with that supposition, for the simple reason that methane is not spontaneously combustible. Marsh gas could produce a weird flame; but it would first have to be ignited. Hence the ignis fatuus cannot -"

BRENT broke off. He stared steadily at Clyde Burke. The reporter was listening intently; something in his manner made Brent suspect him as a newspaper man.

"Are you here to interview me?" demanded the stoop-shouldered naturalist. "Is this a pretext—this visit here? Are you trying to pry into my scientific researches? To lampoon me in the press?"

"Mr. Burke is a friend of mine," put in Rokesbury promptly. "I brought him out to inspect the causeway."

Wildemar Brent shrugged his shoulders. He seemed only half convinced. He turned abruptly toward the door of the old mansion.

"Come, Dorothy," he ordered. "Too much of this swamp air is unhealthy. I have inhaled it long enough for

to-night."

The girl followed her uncle into the house. Twindell closed the door. Bolts clattered. The light went out in the alcove. Nicholas Rokesbury laughed softly.

"That means good-bye to us, Burke," remarked the engineer. "Let's take the hint and drive back to the hotel. Keep this out of your newspaper story, as a favor to me. I don't want to get in wrong with Miss Brent. Forget about the— what was that name Brent called the marsh light?"

"The ignis fatuus," responded Clyde, as they stepped into the coupe. "Commonly called the will-o'-the-wisp."

"That's it," affirmed Rokesbury. "Well—try to keep it in small print."

"I'll stick to the murder story," promised Clyde. "I'm here to dig up harrowing details—not scientific data."

The coupe rolled slowly toward the narrow road. All was silent outside the gray-walled mansion. But as the tail light of Rokesbury's car dwindled in the thinning mist, motion occurred from beside the old house. A soft swish sounded in the darkness.

AN invisible figure slowly circled the mansion. The long, sweeping beam of the airway beacon gave one fleeting glimpse of its shape as the form moved toward the fringe of the marsh. A being clad in black-draped cloak—slouch hat—the guise of The Shadow.

The tiny beam of a miniature flashlight glimmered at intervals along the boggy ground. With uncanny skill, The Shadow picked a solid path off through the mushiness of the lonely swamp. The tiny glimmer faded. Unseen, The Shadow had been a witness of the meeting between Wildemar Brent and his unwelcome visitors.

Late that same evening, Clyde Burke, returning to his hotel room, found an envelope upon the table. He opened it and read a brief cryptic message in blue ink that faded when his perusal was completed.

The night telegraph operator was on duty in the little Rensdale station when Clyde Burke walked in at midnight. The reporter handed him a wire to the New York Classic, to be sent at press rates. He also gave the man a night letter to a New York investment broker named Rutledge Mann. This was a personal message that referred to sales of small securities in which Clyde Burke, apparently was interested.

Actually, that night letter was a coded message from The Shadow. For Rutledge Mann, the investment broker, was the contact man through whom The Shadow could summon new agents to perform his bidding.

CHAPTER VII. FIGURES OF NIGHT

LATE the next afternoon, a trim coupe came whining upward on the far side of the mountain that loomed beyond the town of Rensdale. Its driver found a twisting, rocky road. With his car in second, he took the bumps until he neared the summit of the ridge. The road became impassable. The driver chose a clearing and the car rolled out of view behind a clump of heavy-leaved trees.

The man who alighted from the coupe was a clean-cut young chap who was businesslike in his procedure. He opened the rear of the coupe, took out a heavy box and a rolled-up pack, then stretched out a broad-centered leather strap that formed a loop above them.

Hoisting the joined box and pack, he thrust his forehead into the loop. Supporting the weight with head and shoulders, the young man clambered up the steep, rocky slope to the top of the ridge.

This arrival on the mountain was Harry Vincent, trusted agent of The Shadow. He was following instructions given him by Rutledge Mann. He was carrying his heavy burden with the aid of the familiar tump-line, used to transport luggage across portages between lakes in the Canadian wilds. This form of luggage-hauling made it possible for him to carry the huge load in a single trip.

Harry came puffing to his objective. He was at the foot of the air beacon on the mountain. A small shack was located close to the tower. Harry pushed open the door and eased the box and pack from his back.

His next act was to open the box. From it, he produced the necessary equipment for a short-wave radio. Using the spreading posts of the beacon, Harry set up the apparatus. Inside the shack, he adjusted earphones to his head. He spoke into a microphone. A pause; then a voice came in response.

Harry Vincent had opened communication with Clyde Burke. The agent on the mountain was connected with the agent in the hotel. Through this communication, The Shadow could maintain a double vigil.

His call completed, Harry produced a pair of field glasses from the box. He left the shack and pushed through the underbrush until he discovered an overhanging rock. From this point, he could see the ground below.

FIRST came the sloping hillside. The cabins of the squatters were tiny, block-shaped objects. Then the hillside ended in the spread-out swamp. Wildemar Brent's new home rested like a toy castle in the midst of a brackish plain. The road from it; the causeway across the marsh— both looked like thin lines furrowed through the bog.

The sun was setting over the mountain. Harry focused his glasses on the causeway. He saw the figure of a lone man standing by the tool house. This was the watchman posted for the night. Lowering the glasses, Harry let his gaze sweep to every portion of the panorama. A tiny, crawling figure caught his attention.

This was on the hillside. A man had come out from a clump of trees. He was moving downward toward an isolated cabin. His very manner of approach showed that he did not wish to be seen by any who might be looking up the hill from below. Harry raised the glasses.

Through the powerful lens, he sighted a tall man clad in somber garments of dark gray. This fellow was wearing the flat, wide-brimmed hat that was characteristic of the Dalwars. His face turned so that Harry could see it. The Shadow's agent spied a bearded countenance, blacker than the hat which the fellow wore.

The door of the cabin was on the upper side of the house. Harry watched the Dalwar unlock it and enter. The door closed. Harry looked off below, following the open space that stretched from cabin down to marsh.

Another figure attracted his attention. It was coming from the mansion. Harry used the glasses to discern a sober-looking individual who was moving toward the marsh. He saw the man pick his way along an invisible path. This was Wildemar Brent, setting forth on his sunset search for the ignis fatuus.

Dusk blotted Brent from Harry's view. The airway beacon began to blink, high above Harry's head. It had started automatically. Its sweeping rays flashed against the darkening sky. Tiny glimmers were showing from trees beyond the marsh. These were lights from the town of Rensdale.

Cloud banks had been gathering through the day. Though they did not mar the sunset, they blotted out

the moonlight. Only occasionally did the silver glow come struggling through the clouds. Yet Harry could at times make out thin patches of white mist upon the broad bog.

Hours passed. On occasions, Harry caught faint traces of a tiny dot of light upon the bog. This was Wildemar Brent's lantern. The naturalist was using it but intermittently. Evidently he did not want the glare to interfere with any sighting of the ignis fatuus.

When the spot of light did appear, it bobbed up in most surprising places. Brent seemed to be learning most of the pathways through the quagmire that most persons regarded as impassable.

The mansion was dark; Harry decided that the inside lights were probably subdued. Suddenly, he traced the lantern moving toward the house. A light came on within the alcove. Harry raised his field glasses and managed to distinguish a closing door. Evidently, Brent had returned.

Another hour. Harry patiently maintained his vigil. He was rewarded. A spot of light came suddenly from the alcove of the mansion. Its glare was focused directly up the hill toward the squatter's shack that Harry had observed.

Blink—blink—blink—

The light sparkled like a coded signal. Then it went out altogether. Producing a flashlight of his own, Harry went back to the shack beside the airway beacon. A few minutes later, he was talking to Clyde Burke.

Until he had seen the blinks from the mansion, Harry had given but little thought to the bearded man who had entered the squatter's shack. Under present circumstances, the appearance of that prowler had become important. Harry reported all that he had seen from the rock.

DOWN in his hotel room, Clyde Burke wrote a message to The Shadow. He sealed it in an envelope, strolled down to the second floor and thrust the billet under the door of the closed room. This was in accord with new instructions. The message lay untouched after Clyde had delivered it. The Shadow would read it later. For the present, he was elsewhere.

LIGHTS were out in the house in the marsh. All had retired. Wildemar Brent was sleeping in a secluded room on the first floor. Dorothy had chosen an upstairs room on the side of the house toward the causeway—a room which also had a window above the alcove on the hillside of the house. Twindell occupied a far room on the same floor.

Half an hour had elapsed since Harry Vincent's call to Clyde Burke when Dorothy Brent awakened from a sound slumber. Struggling moonlight was coming through the window toward the causeway. Its glimmer ended as a cloud intervened.

Croaking of frogs—the dull, monotonous sound was all that the girl could hear. Yet Dorothy had a sense that all was not well. Rising, the girl donned dressing-gown and slippers. She tiptoed to the hallway. There she could hear the crackle of dying embers in the fire place below. Then came a sound that was plainly the closing of a door.

Wildemar Brent was a sound sleeper. Dorothy knew that the noise could not have awakened him. Twindell's room was in a remote spot of the house. Bravely, Dorothy descended the stairs. She knew that if she reached the ground floor, she could call her uncle.

Halfway down, Dorothy paused. From deep below in the cellar, she fancied that she heard a tap-tap-tap. The sound came in constant repetition. Intervals; then the tapping. Slowly, the girl reached

the foot of the stairs. She moved toward a passage that led to a doorway into the cellar.

Then came footsteps, from the cellar stairs themselves. Dorothy stood petrified. She did not know where to find a light switch. She heard the footsteps pause at the door. Low whispers seemed to follow. Roused by increasing fright, the girl sprang back toward the hall. Screaming, she stumbled toward one of the doorways that led to her uncle's room. An answering call responded. It came from another passage. It was Wildemar Brent, hurrying toward the hall. Frightened for her uncle's safety, Dorothy dashed back in that direction.

Lights came on. They glowed in the side brackets of the hall. Dorothy saw two persons; one was her uncle, clad in pajamas. The other was Twindell. The cadaverous servant was wearing shoes, trousers and shirt.

"What's the matter?" demanded Wildemar Brent, as his niece clutched the side of a doorway.

"I—I heard something," gasped Dorothy. "Like a tapping—from the cellar."

"Help her in here, sir," suggested Twindell, pointing toward the room with the tapestried panels. "There is a couch where Miss Brent can rest."

The servant went ahead. He turned on the mellow side brackets. Dorothy followed, half supported by her uncle. The girl refused the couch; she sat upon a chair just within the door.

"I believe I heard the same noise, sir," declared Twindell, turning to Wildemar Brent. "I began to dress, thinking I should look about a bit. I opened the door of my room. I heard Miss Dorothy scream."

"The noise was a tapping?" inquired Brent, staring from beside the big table.

"Yes," said Dorothy, with a nod.

"A tapping, sir," agreed Twindell. "Of course, I must remind you that this house is full of strange noises."

"To what do you attribute them?"

"I can't say, sir."

Dorothy had recovered from her fright. She felt annoyed because she had screamed in such terrified fashion. Her lips were firm as she spoke.

"It was not the tapping at first," declared the girl. "The noise that came in the beginning was like the closing of a door -"

Like an echo to her statement, Dorothy heard a repetition of the very sound that she was describing. For an instant, she stood stock-still. She was positive that the sound had come from the top of the cellar stairs. Acting upon sudden impulse, Dorothy sprang into the end of the long hall.

This time she saw a door closing. It was the outer door of the house, at the other end of the hall. The girl was just in time to see the barrier shut. The door opened inward into the hall; some person, sneaking from the cellar steps, had drawn the outer door shut behind him!

"Come quickly!" called Dorothy, as she rushed through the hall. "Quickly, uncle! Some one just went out!"

THERE were tiny, grilled windows at the sides of the massive floor. Dorothy was the first to reach them. A surge of moonlight had arrived. Staring, the girl glimpsed a figure that was hastening across the

driveway.

A huge, slouched form, with a head that wore a broad flat hat. The head turned at the instant that Dorothy saw the figure. The girl caught a glimpse of a black, bearded face. Then the fleeing man had reached a clump of bushes by the edge of the swamp. His figure disappeared from view.

"I saw him!" exclaimed Dorothy. "I saw him!"

"Who?" demanded Wildemar Brent, coming up behind her. "Where?"

"A man—with a beard. Going into the swamp."

"Turn on the outer light, Twindell."

The servant obeyed. Wildemar Brent stared through the grilled window. He could see no one. He grunted as he shrugged his shoulders.

"Your imagination, Dorothy," he declared.

"But the door is not bolted, uncle," returned the girl. "I am sure some one could have gone out this way."

"What! The door unbolted?" Brent was furious. "What does this mean, Twindell."

"I am sure I bolted it, sir." The cadaverous servant was nervous. "I have bolted that door every night for years."

"Humph. This is one time you failed. You think the man came from the cellar, Dorothy?"

"Yes." The girl was still peering through the pane. "The door must have been unbolted for him to have gotten through so quickly."

"Bolt the door, Twindell," ordered Brent. "Then go about and make sure that all the windows are locked."

"No need for that, sir. If the man came through a window, he must have entered by your room."

"How so? What about these other windows?"

"They are solid grillework, sir. Old Mr. Culeth had them made so. All the windows on the ground floor, sir. That is, except those in the little room that you chose to occupy. That door was always kept locked, sir."

"Look, uncle!" exclaimed Dorothy, as Twindell was closing the bolts on the big door. "I see some one—beyond the drive—by that tree -"

"Which tree?" Brent peered through the other window.

"The one just on the edge of the light. The largest one."

"Look more closely," suggested Brent, with a depreciating laugh. "What you are viewing is nothing but a shadow. No human being could stand so motionless."

The girl stared for a full minute. At last she turned away from the window and smiled weakly.

"It was my imagination," she confessed. "All that I saw there by the tree was a shadow. But the man that went into the marsh -"

"Was also your imagination. You have been hearing things and seeing things. Come. Let us forget this folly. But remember, Twindell, the bolting of the door must not be neglected in the future."

"I understand, sir."

The cadaverous servant watched Dorothy go upstairs to her room. He saw Brent go back to his room on the ground floor. Twindell picked up a log beside the fire place; with surprising strength, the old servant tossed it on the fire, so that the heat might absorb the damp marsh air that had penetrated the ground floor.

The old servant's face was strangely solemn. It was more pallid than usual. It seemed to quiver as the man turned out the hall light. Then Twindell noted that he had not extinguished the light that shone above the outside alcove. He pressed the switch. The light went out. By the glow of the fire, Twindell stalked slowly up the stairs.

BLACKNESS had enveloped the old mansion with the extinguishing of that outside light. A soft swish sounded in the darkness close by the tree toward which Dorothy Brent had stared. The girl's first impression had been correct. She had seen more than a shadow. She had seen The Shadow.

By remaining motionless, the black-garbed visitant had deceived the observers from within the house. Cloaked by darkness, this silent watcher was free to move. Noiselessly, his invisible figure traveled toward the marsh. No glimmers from the tiny flashlight aided The Shadow to-night. He had learned the paths that he wanted through the bog. His soft, whispered laugh was caught by the clammy remnants of the mist that spread across the swamp. The Shadow's course remained untraceable.

ONE hour later, just as the distant chimes of a steeple clock were tolling midnight, The Shadow's silent form was standing by the roadway that skirted the side of the swamp. Dull moonlight showed the contour of the road. The Shadow, invisible beneath the blackness of a thick-leaved tree, discerned a striding form. His keen ears caught the soft thud of footsteps in the thick dust of the road.

The pacing man strode by. Moonlight revealed the set features of a hard face. The midnight hiker was Philo Halthorpe. The lawyer was ending one of his late evening walks. He was heading toward.

The last chime ended. Halthorpe had turned a bend in the road. Creaking frogs alone disturbed the stillly silence of the countryside. Then came the repetition of an eerie, whispered laugh, that might have been the echo of a ghostly voice.

The Shadow, unseen, had seen. He had witnessed the flight of the bearded squatter who had come from the house in the marsh. He had observed Philo Halthorpe, pacing the deserted road. Silently, cloaked in darkness, The Shadow turned back into the bogland. Paths which he had discovered amid the impassable mire were to form his shortcut back into town.

The Shadow's work was ended for the night. He was to find repose within the closed room at the little hotel—the room that only he had entered since murder had struck within its walls.

CHAPTER VIII. NEW VISITORS

SHORTLY before five o'clock the next afternoon, Dorothy Brent appeared outside the house in the marsh. The day was clear; the thick quagmire had lost its murky look. Nevertheless, Dorothy avoided the bog as she walked swiftly over the rough ground toward the causeway, a quarter mile away.

This portion of the mansion's ground was barren. An old, disused well was covered with boards. Deserted dog-kennels had been broken down. Scrubby bushes made the path as difficult as the bog

itself.

Most of the workers had left the causeway; the few who remained were talking with Nicholas Rokesbury. The enterprising engineer always remained late on the job. Dorothy had noted that fact from her window. The group was breaking up as Dorothy reached the causeway. Rokesbury turned as he heard the girl call to him. Sweeping his campaign hat from his head, the construction engineer came down the edge of the stone embankment.

"How do you do, Miss Brent," greeted Rokesbury. "Why did you come to all this trouble? You could have sent Twindell down to get me."

"I'm supposed to be in the house," replied Dorothy. "Uncle is cranky to-day. Worried about what happened last night."

"What was that?" questioned Rokesbury, anxiously. "Nothing serious, I hope."

"Only a prowler," replied Dorothy. "Twindell left the door unbolted. The man entered the house."

"A robber?"

"Only one of the hill-folk, I think. He hurried away when he knew we were looking for him. I heard tapping, in the cellar."

"Did you look down there?"

"No. The man made his escape while I—well, I screamed and uncle helped me into the room with the tapestries. While we were there, the man ran out."

"And your uncle?"

"He attributes it all to my imagination. He didn't want me to leave the house or tell any one what happened. To make matters worse, the county detective called to-day."

"Merle Cray?"

"Yes. A stout man. Uncle wouldn't let him in the house. He made Twindell bolt the door. But Cray shouted that he was coming back."

"All this sounds serious, Dorothy—pardon me, Miss Brent." Rokesbury reddened and became apologetic, but the girl merely smiled. "I don't like to think of you—alone—in that house."

"I'm not alone. My uncle -"

"He's a pretty querulous chap, Dorothy." Rokesbury, in his seriousness, did not notice that he had used the girl's first name. "As for Twindell—he is old—and from what you say, he forgets to bolt the door. Frankly, I don't like it."

"But"—Dorothy paused, then looked troubled—"what's the use of my trying to pretend? I'm frightened—really frightened, Mr. Rokesbury. Yet uncle would be terribly angry if I said I don't want to live in the old house. He's my closest relation and he has been very kind since my parents died. And yet I -"

"Don't worry." Rokesbury smiled as he placed his brawny hand gently upon the girl's arm. "I have an idea."

"To make it safer there?"

"Yes. I'll tell you about it to-night."

"To-night?"

"When I come out to your uncle's house."

"But he may refuse to see you."

"I don't think so. Of course, I won't bring Burke along. Leave it to me, Dorothy. My plan will work. To make it sure, you had better go back to the house before your uncle happens to look for you."

NICHOLAS ROKESBURY dined with Clyde Burke at half past six. The two men, both in their early thirties, had become good friends. While they were eating, Rokesbury spoke in a confidential tone.

"I can trust you, Burke," he said. "I want to tell you something in confidence, before you hear rumors about the matter. Keep it out of your stories until I say the word. It may mean a lot to me."

"All right," agreed Clyde, thinking of *The Shadow* and forgetting the *Classic*. "What's it about?"

"A prowler got into the old mansion last night. Miss Brent was badly scared. Twindell, the servant, either left the door unbolted or deliberately opened it. Wildemar Brent thinks Dorothy is imagining that something happened."

"Did Miss Brent see the prowler?"

"Yes. She said he looked like one of the squatters from the hill. She may have been mistaken on that point. But she certainly saw some one. I've got to help her."

"How can you?"

"By putting on a night shift at the causeway. We're behind schedule. It can easily be arranged. I always take personal charge of night shifts when they start. We can keep an eye on the house all through the night."

"A good idea."

"Say nothing about it, Burke. I'm going out to see Wildemar Brent to-night. It would be poor policy to take you along after the suspicions he had about you. But I'll tell you all that happens, after I come back. There may be a hot argument."

"Between you and Brent?"

"No. Between Brent and Cray. Dorothy says the detective was around to-day. Brent wouldn't let him in, but he's coming back to-night."

AFTER dinner, Clyde prepared a report for *The Shadow*. He thrust it under the door of the locked room on the second floor. Strolling to the lobby, he saw Rokesbury leaving for his visit to Brent's.

OUT at the mansion, Wildemar Brent and his niece were seated before the fire place in the great hall. The naturalist was in a grouchy mood. He had caught a chill which he attributed to his arousal on the previous night. Hence Dorothy had managed to persuade him to stay away from the marsh this evening.

"No chill can stop me from my search," Brent was growling. "It is not fear of the marsh air that keeps me

in to-night. I don't want to meet that detective. He may be prowling around outside. They are persistent beggars, those detectives."

The door bell clanged. Twindell started to answer it. Brent waved him back. Dorothy arose and went to the door herself. She turned on the light and peered through the window. She began to unbolt the door.

"Don't let that detective in here!" shrieked Brent, excitedly. "I'll have nothing to do with the fool! Bolt the door, Dorothy! I command you."

"It's only Mr. Rokesbury," responded Dorothy. "He is here alone. You were discourteous to him the other night, Uncle Wildemar. It is only fair to let him in."

The girl opened the door. Rokesbury stepped inside. While Dorothy was bolting the door, the engineer strolled forward with a cheery greeting to Brent, who glowered in return.

"I have a report that will interest you, Mr. Brent," remarked Rokesbury, quietly. "The marsh lights were seen last night."

"Where?" questioned Brent, eagerly. His aloofness had turned to enthusiasm.

"On the other side of the causeway," answered Rokesbury.

"Hm-m. I must go over there," decided Brent. "I have not covered a great deal of that bogland in my search for the ignis fatuus. Who witnessed the phenomenon, Rokesbury?"

"My watchman. He observed intermittent flickers between nine o'clock and eleven. He was scared half out of his wits. It was fortunate that I had told him to be on the lookout."

"Why did you tell him that?"

"To aid your research."

"Thoughtful of you, Brent. These reports are valuable. Sit down beside the fire place."

Rokesbury complied. Wildemar Brent broke into a discussion of the ignis fatuus. Rokesbury listened with keen interest, nodding his understanding. The door bell rang while Brent was talking.

"The detective," snarled the naturalist, pausing in his discourse. "Keep him out."

"It's a stranger," informed Dorothy, peering through the window. "He has come in the old cab from the station. A tall, elderly man, with large spectacles."

"A disguise," barked Brent. "Refuse to answer. Do not let him in."

"It can't be Cray," remarked Rokesbury. "He couldn't make up like a tall man. Cray is pudgy. Besides, he's too dumb to put on a good disguise."

The door bell sounded again. Wildemar Brent became curious. He ordered his niece to unbolt the door. Dorothy obeyed. Peering through the crack, she asked the stranger's name. She received a card in response.

"For you, uncle," said the girl, bringing the card to Brent.

THE naturalist read the pasteboard by the firelight. His face showed sudden keenness. He waved his niece toward the door.

"My word!" he exclaimed. "I've heard of this chap, Professor Darwin Shelby, Fellow of the Royal Academy! He prepared an admirable thesis on the ignis fatuus! Come in, professor!"

Wildemar Brent had risen as he pronounced the last words. He was standing with his hand extended to greet the tall, owlish man who had entered. Professor Shelby smiled and nodded as he peered through his thick-lensed glasses.

"Mr. Wildemar Brent?" he inquired.

"Yes, professor," replied Brent as they shook hands. "You are indeed a welcome guest. Tell me, what has brought you here?"

"The same quest that caused you to choose this mansion for your home," responded the professor.

"What an admirable location, Mr. Brent! What a superb spot from which to undertake the study of the ignis fatuus!"

"You have heard of my humble research, professor?"

"Indeed I have. But do not call it humble, Mr. Brent. It is a glorious contribution to the cause of science. I have come here, my friend, that I might ask a favor."

"What is that, professor?"

"Permission to act as your assistant in the endeavors that you have undertaken."

Brent's face gleamed. The owner of the mansion swelled with pride. This humble request from a noted scientist appeared to be the greatest thrill of his lifetime.

"I shall not intrude when you do not desire it," promised Professor Shelby. "I can take lodgings in the village and there await your instructions -"

"You will remain here, professor!" exclaimed Brent. "Here, in my home. You shall be the teacher—I, the pupil. No, no! I insist. That can be the only arrangement. You are the master."

"My luggage is at the inn," said the professor, with a bow. "I have engaged quarters there for to-night. But to-morrow -"

"I could not think of it," interrupted Brent. "Twindell, send that hack down to the Hotel Rensdale. Have the driver bring out Professor Shelby's luggage. At once, Twindell."

The servant moved to obey. Brent invited Shelby to a seat before the fire. The professor smiled as he took his place. Brent sat down beside him. They began to chat concerning the elusive will-o'-the-wisp. While Rokesbury strolled over to talk with Dorothy, the door bell rang again.

"It's the detective this time," declared Dorothy, looking through the grilled window. "But you will have to let him in, uncle. Philo Halthorpe is with him."

A sour expression appeared upon Brent's face. The naturalist waved his hands in resignation. Twindell, who had returned after despatching the cab, was prompt in unbolting the door.

WILDEMAR BRENT was ill-at-ease when the new visitors entered. He did not know whether to invite a private conference or to let them talk in front of Professor Shelby. He decided on the latter course, apparently desiring to show a gesture of complete friendship toward Shelby. Introductions were completed. Merle Cray began to speak.

"Sorry to trouble you, Mr. Brent," said the detective, in an apologetic tone. "But I've been sort of worried about this old house, all alone in the marsh. You see, I think the fellow that got Hector Lundig might still be hereabouts. I've scoured the town; I've searched the hills. No luck. Maybe the man I want might be around these grounds."

"Ridiculous!" exclaimed Brent. "There is no hiding place near here."

"There's the swamp," argued Cray. "What's more, this house is a funny old place. Might be some way for a man to get in and out. So I want to stay here a while. It's for your protection, Mr. Brent."

"I won't allow it!"

"It can't be helped, Brent," put in Halthorpe, with a sour look on his hard face. "Cray is set on this plan. I've done everything I could to argue him out of it. He threatened to swear out a search warrant if you refused him entry to-night. That's why I came along with him. It was in your interest."

"I represent the law," announced Cray, gruffly. "What Mr. Halthorpe says is right. I was just trying to put it easy to you, Mr. Brent. But if you refuse to let me stay here, I'll act in the name of the law."

"Very well," agreed Brent, suddenly, as he chanced to glance at Professor Shelby. "Have your way about it, Cray. There are plenty of rooms in this house. Twindell will give you one on the second floor."

"I'd sooner sleep down here," insisted the detective.

"Take my room then," returned Brent. "I have a chill and it's too close to the marsh air."

"Perhaps, Cray," said Rokesbury, quietly, "your presence here would be unnecessary. This house will be well-guarded from now on."

"How do you mean?" demanded Cray.

"I am starting a night shift," replied Rokesbury. "My men go on the job to-night. I shall be in charge. I came out this evening to inform Mr. Brent. I thought that he was entitled to know what was going on, since we are working close to his house."

"A night shift, eh?" questioned Cray. "That's good."

Dorothy threw a grateful look toward Rokesbury, who smiled in return. The girl realized that this must be the plan that Rokesbury had thought out for her benefit.

"Just the same," added Cray, "I'm staying in this house. My bag's out in my car. I'll pull the bus up in back; then I'll come in and get located."

"I'm going back to town," stated Rokesbury, as the detective left. "The night shift goes on the job within two hours. If any one wants me, I'll be on the causeway."

He turned to Halthorpe.

"Can I drive you into town?" Rokesbury asked the lawyer.

"No, thanks," responded Halthorpe, dryly. "I shall stay here a while. Then I intend to take one of my evening walks. It preserves my physique"—the lawyer tapped his firm chest—"and keeps me from growing old."

Rokesbury smiled as he said good-night to Dorothy. He drove away and headed straight for the Hotel

Rensdale. He met Clyde Burke in the lobby. Drawing the reporter to one side, the engineer gave a brief summary of all that had occurred at the house in the marsh.

After Rokesbury had left for the causeway, Clyde Burke went to his room. He prepared a written report for The Shadow. He tuned in on his short-wave set and held a low-voiced conversation with Harry Vincent. Descending to the second floor, Clyde tucked his envelope under the door of The Shadow's chosen room.

The arrival of Professor Shelby—Rokesbury's beginning of the night shift—Cray's presence at the old house—Halthorpe's statement that he intended to take an evening hike—all these facts were in Clyde Burke's report.

Whatever might be impending at Wildemar Brent's, The Shadow alone could divine. His agent had supplied him merely with stated details. The rest remained with The Shadow.

CHAPTER IX. MIDNIGHT MURDER

DYING embers from the grate cast a faint, wavering glow through the great hall. Silence reigned within the house on the marsh. All the occupants of the mansion had retired at eleven o'clock. It was now nearly midnight.

Stealthy footsteps broke the quiet. Creaking boards told that some one was descending the stairs from the second floor. A creeping form reached the hall and moved toward the corner, ground-floor room where Merle Cray was sleeping. The detective's snores were audible from the opened door of his room. The prowler returned to the hall.

His creeping figure came within the firelight's glow. The man was Twindell. The old servant was attired as he had been on the preceding night. Slowly and with much care, Twindell crept to the front door and drew back the bolts. Opening the barrier, he stepped out into the night.

Twindell was sheltered by the outside alcove. The projection of the house hid him from the view of any who might be watching from the causeway. Twindell knew that the night shift had gone on duty. That fact did not trouble him.

The servant produced a flashlight. Holding the lens toward the distant hill, he blinked the light. His signals came in quick repetition. A pause; then they flashed again. Pocketing the light, Twindell stole back into the house. He closed the big door but did not lock it. Sneaking to the door at the top of the cellar steps, he stood in the darkness, listening intently.

Outside the old mansion, stillness was complete. Yet there was movement there. After Twindell had closed the door, a figure emerged from the blackness beside the stone walls of the ghostly house. Faint moonlight, streaking through the clouds, revealed a momentary glimpse of The Shadow.

The cloaked form began a circuit of the mansion. Passing the alcove, The Shadow reached the side toward the causeway. Lights were gleaming through the mist. Distant blows of sledge-hammers were audible through the night.

The fog had cleared from the marsh; but it seemed to cling to the scrubby, thick-bushed sector that lay between the house and the causeway. Even the broken-down dog kennels were lost from view. Sound could penetrate the clustered remnants of the fog. So could the powerful lights on the causeway. But even the keen eyes of The Shadow could discern no objects through that white swirling blanket.

Any one approaching the house from the side toward the hill could not possibly be observed from the

causeway, even should the workmen turn a powerful searchlight on the mansion. The Shadow sensed that Twindell had recognized this fact. This had been a good night for his signals toward the hillside. A secret visitor would soon be due at the old house.

For The Shadow knew—from observation—that Twindell had delivered the blinks on the preceding night. He had learned that Twindell was in contact with the mysterious bearded prowler from the hillside. There was still time before the man would arrive in response to Twindell's flash. The Shadow kept on around the house.

SOFTLY, the cloaked investigator passed the massive, tiny-paned windows of the ground floor. At last he came to the far corner of the mansion. He stood beneath the windows of the room where Merle Cray was sleeping. These were ordinary windows. Cray had opened one of them. Listening, The Shadow made sure that the detective was still asleep. Continuing on, he reached the side of the house toward the hill.

This trip had required some time; yet The Shadow knew that the bearded prowler could not yet have arrived. The cloaked form merged with the darkness of the house. The Shadow's keen eyes watched toward the bushes that fringed the marsh.

Inside the old house, Twindell had moved from his place beside the cellar door. Softly, the servant stole up the steps to the second floor. He crept through the hallway, listening outside the doors of rooms where people were sleeping. He wanted to make sure that no one was awake.

Both Twindell and The Shadow had satisfied themselves that Merle Cray was sound asleep. They had surmised correctly. Yet chance was to play its part. During this short interval while The Shadow was on the far side of the house and Twindell was sneaking along the second floor, the detective happened to awake.

Perhaps some trivial noise had disturbed Cray's slumber. Possibly the discomfort of his clothing—for Cray was fully clad except for coat and vest—was the cause of the detective's awakening. Whatever the reason, Cray sat up and blinked. It took him half a minute to realize where he was.

Awake, the detective decided upon action. Plucking a revolver from the pocket of his coat, he held the weapon in readiness as he crept from the little corner room. He found a passage to the end of the great hall. Keeping away from the glow of the firelight, he decided to investigate the nearest room—the one with the paneled tapestries.

Cray opened the door with utmost stealth. He blinked a flashlight. The room was quite empty. Leaving the door open, the detective stole back into the hall. He chose a blackened passage beside the stairway. His hand encountered a door. Cray felt a bolt. It had been drawn back.

This was the entrance to the cellar steps. That door had been tightly bolted when Cray had retired. The detective knew at once that some one in the house had opened it. He decided that the person must be in the cellar.

Cray softly opened the door, closed it behind him without noise, and began a cautious descent. He did not use his flashlight, but he held it in readiness; also his revolver.

Soft creaks on the stairway from the second floor. Twindell was coming down. The servant stole toward Cray's room. Hearing no sound, he moved back into the hall and lingered just out of the small sphere of light cast by the embers in the grate.

OUTSIDE the old house, The Shadow stood silent by the wall. His keen ears caught a faint sound from

the marsh. His burning eyes saw a movement near the closest bush. Then dull moonlight revealed the figure that stepped into view.

Coarse clothes hung from a tall form; a flat hat covered the arrival's head. The Shadow glimpsed a thick black beard. It was the squatter from the hillside.

The man was cautious as he approached the house. He opened the door and stepped inside. The barrier closed behind him. The Shadow followed. Like a specter, he came momentarily in view, then blackened with the front of the heavy, dark door. His hand tried the knob.

The door did not budge. To-night, the intruder had evidently sprung a bolt, in fear of the very condition that had arisen: namely, a person who might try to enter after him. The Shadow's laugh was a soft whisper, lost in the gloom. Swinging to the wall, the cloaked investigator gripped the rough stones and began a swift upward ascent toward an opened window.

Like a human fly, he made the ascent without the aid of his rubber suction cups. The Shadow entered through the opened window. A bed stood in the corner of the room; but no sleeper could have heard the sound of The Shadow's passage. Softly opening the door of the room, The Shadow glided into the hall.

He reached the stairs and paused there. Twindell was coming out into the hall below. The servant was creeping to the front door. Evidently he had decided that the bolt was a dangerous precaution. There was no sign of the bearded man; but the direction from which Twindell had come indicated that the intruder had gone down into the cellar.

The Shadow lingered while Twindell was returning. He was ready to follow as soon as the servant went to join the man whom he had summoned from the hill. Then, with total unexpectedness came the muffled reports of a revolver. The shots were from the cellar.

A door thumped the wall as it shot open from the darkness of a passage on the ground floor. As The Shadow, springing downward, reached the hallway, the bearded man, gun in hand, came dashing from the passage. An automatic showed in The Shadow's gloved fist as the cloaked investigator swung into the sphere of the dying firelight.

As the bearded man shot a gleaming glance toward the sinister form that had swept into view, another figure came leaping from the darkness of the passage. With savage fury, Twindell hurled himself upon The Shadow. The bearded man dashed for the outer door. He yanked it open while The Shadow was grappling with the servant. A shot roared from the automatic. It went wide, for Twindell was gripping The Shadow's arm.

A SCREAM came from the second floor. Dorothy Brent had reached the top of the stairway. The girl snapped a light switch. On came the brackets of the lower hallway. For one brief instant, Dorothy saw Twindell struggling with a blackened form. Then the two went twisting from her view.

Bravely, the girl started down the stairs. Her pace was hesitating. Hence she did not see the finish of the struggle in which Twindell was engaged. At the far end of the great hall, The Shadow overcame the servant's frenzied strength. With a quick twist, he sent Twindell sprawling to the floor. The servant's head jolted against a chair. Twindell lay half-groggy, while The Shadow swept off through the passage that led to Merle Cray's corner room.

Dorothy Brent reached the lower hall. The girl was excited and bewildered. She saw Twindell rising weakly from the floor. Forgetting all danger, Dorothy hastened to aid the old servant. She helped Twindell to a chair. It was a full minute before the man recovered from the effects of the struggle and the jolt.

Shuffling footsteps. Dorothy turned. Her uncle had arrived, clad in slippers and dressing gown. He was holding a .32 revolver. Either excitement or his chill caused his hand to shake. In quavering voice, Brent demanded to know what had happened.

"I don't know," declared Dorothy. "Twindell can tell us. Who fired those shots, Twindell?"

The servant was lapsing into new grogginess. Dorothy looked about. She saw the outer door, still opened. She pointed as she exclaimed to her uncle:

"Some man was struggling with Twindell! He must have fled through the outside door!"

Brent shuffled along the hall. As he reached the door, he heard a hail through the night. He turned on the light above the entrance. Then figures came dashing into view. Nicholas Rokesbury, a trio of workmen at his heels, had come over from the causeway. Dorothy, staring from beside Twindell, gave a sigh of relief as she saw the newcomers enter with her uncle.

As Rokesbury and his men stamped into the hall, another person appeared. It was Professor Darwin Shelby. Half dressed, the tall man had come downstairs. He was standing at the foot of the steps, blinking through his large-lensed spectacles.

"What has happened, Dorothy?" demanded Rokesbury. "Has any one been hurt?"

"I don't think so," replied the girl. "I think that Twindell is all right."

The servant was rising as the girl spoke. Yet his stare remained blank. Rokesbury ordered his men to search the ground floor. A result came promptly.

"Open door here, boss," called a worker who was flicking a flashlight. "Leads down into the cellar."

Wildemar Brent was closer than Rokesbury. The naturalist moved toward the cellar steps, clutching his .32. Rokesbury followed close behind. Dorothy boldly joined him. Brent pressed a light switch. They descended into the illuminated cellar, followed by Professor Shelby and Rokesbury's men.

A sharp exclamation came from Brent as the owner of the mansion reached the bottom of the steps. The others stopped and looked in the direction of Brent's pointing finger. They saw a body, arms outstretched, lying face upward on the floor.

No one spoke. All recognized that pudgy form and the fat, double-chinned face. The dead man was Merle Cray. A useless revolver glistened from his fat hand. Cray had found no chance to use it. Here, in the depths of the stone-walled cellar, the detective had been murdered at midnight!

CHAPTER X. THE SHADOW'S SEARCH

Two hours had elapsed since the finding of Merle Cray's dead body. A solemn group was seated in the great hall of the mansion. One person, alone, was on his feet, stalking back and forth. This was Philo Halthorpe, brought from his home by one of Rokesbury's workers.

"Until the county prosecutor arrives," declared the rugged lawyer, "I shall remain in charge at this house. I am acting under the prosecutor's order. I telephoned him from my home.

"My one regret is that I had not returned from my hike when your man arrived at my house, Rokesbury. I was tramping over on the other side of town. I walked farther than I had planned. Hence my lateness in returning.

"However, I am authorized to take statements. Let me hear them, while they are fresh in your minds. You, Twindell"—the prosecutor turned to the old servant—"shall speak first."

"I was in my room, sir," stated the old servant. "I am a very light sleeper. Old Mr. Culeth trained me to be, sir. I heard what seemed to be shots, from far below. I hurried into some clothes and rushed downstairs. I encountered the intruder. I grappled with him. He fired a pistol, sir."

"At you?"

"While I was struggling with him. I was clutching his arm. He was unable to point the revolver toward me. Then the lights came on; he flung me to the floor. I struck my head. When I recovered, Miss Dorothy was beside me."

"Did you see the face of your assailant?"

"No, sir. There was only the firelight, before Miss Dorothy pressed the light switch. That was when the man flung me to the floor. He was a powerful fellow. That is all that I can state with surety."

"Your statement, Miss Brent," ordered Halthorpe.

"I must have heard the shots in the cellar," said the girl. "I know that something awakened me. I arose from bed and wondered if I should call some one. Then came the loud shots from this hall. I rushed to the stairs and turned on the light."

"Did you witness Twindell's struggle with the intruder?"

"Only the finish of it. I saw a black form grappling with Twindell; then they staggered from view. When I gained nerve enough to come down the stairs, Twindell's assailant was gone."

"Your story, Mr. Brent."

"Shots awakened me," said the naturalist. "They must have been the ones fired in this hall. My chill seized me. I was slow in getting downstairs. I saw Dorothy trying to revive Twindell."

"You, Professor Shelby."

"I am a sound sleeper," declared the guest. "I do not recall hearing any shots while I was in my room. But I heard shouts outside; and came downstairs just as Mr. Rokesbury was arriving with his men."

Halthorpe turned to Rokesbury. The engineer did not wait for his question.

"We heard the shots clear over by the causeway," declared Rokesbury. "They were faint and distant; but we knew they were from this direction. I thought that they must have come from outside the house. I hurried over with three men."

"Why did you think the shots were from outside?"

"Because shots from in the house would have been muffled. We found the explanation when we reached here. The outer door was open. That is why we happened to hear the shots that were fired in this hall."

"THESE statements are conclusive," decided Halthorpe. "It is evident that some intruder entered the house and went down into the cellar. Merle Cray must have heard him. The detective went to investigate. The intruder killed the detective and fled."

"The door must have been unbolted for the man to enter. The swiftness of his escape is further proof of

that fact. What have you to say about it, Twindell?"

"I bolted the door, sir," stated the servant. "Mr. Brent saw me do so. I called Mr. Cray's attention to my action. He was here when I retired, sir."

"Ah! Cray was here in the hall?"

"Yes, sir."

"Alone?"

"Yes."

"The answer is then obvious," decided Philo Halthorpe, in a tone that brooked no opposition. "Merle Cray must have unbolted that door himself. I fancy that he heard some sound outside the house and went to investigate.

"Then"—the lawyer paused as he described a mental picture—"Cray came back and looked about on this floor. The open door to the room with the tapestried walls indicates that Cray went in there. During that interval, the intruder must have entered. He went to the cellar.

"Looking about, Cray found that the cellar door was unbolted. So he descended. The lurking man shot him dead; then fled up the steps. During his escape, he encountered Twindell. He fled in haste and left the door open after him."

The rugged lawyer paused to stare about at the seated group. His face showed a solemn look.

"I must admit," declared Halthorpe, "that Cray had some reason in his theories. It is possible that the man who slew him was also the murderer of Hector Lundig. With that assumption, I can see a motive. The murderer feared Cray's investigation. He came here with the avowed intention of slaying the detective.

"He may have deliberately made noises outside to lure Cray from the house. Perhaps he wanted the detective to follow him into the swamp. It appears that he was afraid to fire his gun too close to the house, for fear of bringing men from the causeway. When Cray left the door unbolted, the murderer saw his opportunity. He entered and lured the detective to the cellar."

All remained silent while Halthorpe paced back and forth. The lawyer's harsh smile showed that he was pleased with his well-fitted theory. Turning to the group, Halthorpe declared:

"Let us look about in the cellar for a short while. We may find evidence there. Any who choose may come with me; the others may retire. After that, I shall walk back to town. When the prosecutor arrives, I shall tell him to wait until morning, before he visits here. My report will satisfy him."

Wildemar Brent went back to bed, as did Dorothy. Twindell and the professor accompanied Halthorpe to the cellar. So did Rokesbury and his three men. Cray's body had been removed to the little bedroom on the ground floor. The door had been locked.

WHILE Halthorpe eyed the floor of the cellar, Rokesbury ordered his men to search through side passages and coal bins. Halthorpe seemed annoyed by this procedure. He remarked that it was unnecessary; and he appeared upon the point of stopping it. However, he let the search go on for half an hour. No clues located, the lawyer ordered all to leave.

Professor Shelby and Twindell retired after the others had gone. They saw to it that the big door was bolted. Halthorpe tramped back toward town. Rokesbury went over to the causeway; but he left two

men on guard outside the house.

Dismal silence surrounded the old mansion in the marsh. The stolid workmen tramped back and forth about the building. They did not approach the walls. Hence, after an hour of their search, they did not note that eyes were watching them.

A FIGURE had shrouded itself beside the gray wall. Moonlight had faded; the flashes of the airway beacon did not strike the mansion. After a workman had passed by, the figure moved upward, unseen against the rough stone wall. It was The Shadow.

Passing through a silent room, the weird investigator reached the hallway and descended to the ground floor. He came to the side passage and noiselessly unbolted the cellar door. The Shadow descended in the darkness.

A tiny flashlight twinkled here and there. It moved through passages and into bins. It flashed upon stone walls and rough wood sides of boxlike compartments. The twinkles were intermittent; then, in a secluded spot, the flashlight steadied for a minute.

The light blinked out. A soft laugh shuddered through the hollow confines of a bin. There was motion in the darkness. Scraping sounds, the swish of a cloak. Then complete silence.

As dawn was nearing, the pacing workmen had become lax in their vigil. They were slouching about near the old mansion. They did not observe the blackened figure that moved through the silence of the bog. Nor did they see The Shadow fade totally from view, as he moved across the solid ground near the house.

His investigations were completed, within and without. Specter of the night, The Shadow had made findings of his own. Blackened walls of the mansion became grayish as dawn appeared upon the marsh. The figure of The Shadow had disappeared.

CHAPTER XI. SPYING EYES

Two days had elapsed since the murder of Merle Cray. The county prosecutor and the coroner had approved Philo Halthorpe's theory that the murderer had come to get the detective. It was believed that the killer must have fled along the old road that led to the mansion, there to escape in a waiting automobile. No further trouble was anticipated.

Wildemar Brent's chill was over. Enthused by the presence of Professor Darwin Shelby, the naturalist had begun a new search for signs of those mysterious lights known as the ignis fatuus. It was after sunset; Brent and his esteemed guest had both taken to the marsh.

Twindell answered a ring at the door. It proved to be Nicholas Rokesbury. The engineer smiled as he saw Dorothy seated in front of the fire place. He entered the great hall and sat down beside the girl. Twindell went upstairs.

"Where is your uncle?" queried Rokesbury, of Dorothy. "Out on the marsh with the professor?"

"They are both out on the marsh," laughed the girl, "but not together."

"Scientific jealousy?"

"Not at all. Uncle decided that by separating, they would have better chance of spying the will-o'-the-wisp. The professor seemed to approve the idea. So uncle drew diagrams of paths that he has discovered in the swamp and they each chose a separate course."

"I hope they see the marsh lights," chuckled Rokesbury. "But I doubt that they will. I faked that story about the watchman noticing them. I used it as an edge to get friendly with your uncle."

"I thought so," responded Dorothy. "Well, last night was unexciting. I hope that our troubles are at an end. Mr. Halthorpe seemed to think so. He stopped in last night."

"What did he have to say?"

"He talked over financial matters with Uncle Wildemar. You see, Mr. Halthorpe has charge of the Thaddeus Culeth estate. No new heirs have appeared."

"Are any likely to?"

"Mr. Halthorpe does not know; but as executor, he must act on the supposition that some one will arrive. For example, he cited the case of Austin Culeth."

"The son? I thought he was dead."

"Mr. Halthorpe thinks he is. But he stated that he must deal in possibilities, even though they are remote. He said that if Austin Culeth should happen to turn up alive—as is possible, though improbable—the estate would belong to him."

"Of course. But how does that alter your uncle's situation?"

"Austin Culeth—or some other unexpected heir—might want to keep this old mansion. Uncle has made no payments. The heir who agreed to the sale, Hector Lundig—is dead."

"So what did Halthorpe suggest?"

"He decided that my uncle should move out shortly; that the house could remain vacant until next spring."

"How did your uncle take that?"

"He was agreeable. You see, the first frost should come within a few weeks. When that occurs, there will be no use in further search for the ignis fatuus."

"I see. The marsh lights would not show up in winter. Is that the idea?"

"I am not sure; but I do know that the phenomenon is frequent chiefly in warm weather. Autumn is almost here. Uncle Wildemar did not intend to remain here more than a few weeks longer."

"Then who will own the house?"

"The estate; but my uncle will hold an option on it. As soon as we move, Mr. Halthorpe will have the place completely repaired and renovated."

"Who will pay the bill?"

"The estate. Mr. Halthorpe says that he has authority to use funds for that purpose. I believe that he intends to do a thorough job. Uncle Wildemar seemed pleased. This morning he began to go through the house, tapping the walls, looking all about."

"For what purpose?"

"To make a list of repairs that should be done. Uncle Wildemar is quite cagey at times. He is sure that the

house will eventually be his and he apparently intends to get the full benefit when the repairs are made."

"I wonder"—Rokesbury had arisen. He was pacing by the fire place - "if that prowler did come here to murder Merle Cray."

"Why else could he have come?" questioned Dorothy.

"He was here before," asserted Rokesbury. "At least he might have been that same bearded fellow whom you saw before."

Dorothy nodded.

"Both went into the cellar," reasoned Rokesbury. "You heard no tapping the night that Cray was killed; but maybe the fellow had no chance."

"That is true. You are right, Nicholas. The murderer could have had some purpose other than killing Cray."

"He was here looking for something, Dorothy. I believe that this old house holds some secret which no one suspects."

THE girl stared as she nodded her agreement to Rokesbury's belief.

"Searching the cellar," mused Rokesbury. "But there is nothing down there. The secret must lie on this floor. Has your uncle looked about here yet?"

"No. He was on the second floor to-day. But what makes you think that the secret is on this floor, Nicholas?"

"My men searched the cellar two nights ago. While Halthorpe was looking for clues. There were three of them and I told them to be thorough. I am worried, Dorothy."

"Why?"

"Because that prowler may come back. Of course, we will be ready for him; but he seems to be a dangerous character."

Rokesbury paced about. He studied the walls of the great hall. He strolled over toward the door that led into the tapestried room. He beckoned to Dorothy. The girl approached.

"This door was open," declared Rokesbury, in a low tone. "We found it that way—after Cray was killed."

"Mr. Halthorpe thinks that Cray went in there."

"If he did, it might have been because the prowler had been in the room before him."

Rokesbury looked about. Twindell was not in sight. The engineer stepped through the door and turned on the light. He studied the oak panels that framed the tapestries. He looked at the baseboard; then to the molding.

"There might be a hinged panel here," he said, "but I have another idea about it."

"Some secret entrance?"

"Possibly. But the panels are too solid. Look at the molding and the baseboard. If those screws were taken out, the panels could be removed from the walls."

Dorothy nodded.

"Three walls," resumed Rokesbury, "for one side is all windows. Three men could take down those panels and replace them in less than an hour. How soon will your uncle be back, Dorothy?"

"Not for two hours."

"I brought three men over with me. They are outside. I thought I would station them as guards. Dorothy, this room may be the next danger spot. Suppose I have them make a search."

"You are sure," queried Dorothy anxiously, "that they could do it in an hour?"

"Easily," replied Rokesbury, "unless they find a secret opening behind the panels. Then we shall have to take time out to investigate. Let us try it. If these tapestried panels hide a secret, we can anticipate and be ready for coming danger."

"Uncle is searching," declared Dorothy, "but in a haphazard fashion. I suppose he would leave this room alone. It is in good condition. Mr. Halthorpe would not touch it, either. Not unless he -"

"Unless what?"

"Unless one or the other suspects that the house holds a secret and is preserving silence."

Rokesbury pondered. This idea seemed to strike him. He rubbed his brow as he weighed the girl's statement. While the man was in deep thought, Dorothy spoke.

"Bring in the workmen," said the girl. "Have them search this room. I shall make sure that Twindell is not watching. It would not be wise to have him know what is going on."

Rokesbury nodded. He followed Dorothy into the hallway. The girl looked up the stairway while the engineer went out to call his men. She was seated by the fire place when Rokesbury returned. She nodded to indicate that the way was clear. The engineer led his men into the paneled room.

AFTER they had closed the door, Dorothy watched the stairway. She was listening intently for any sounds from above. None came. But the girl failed to glance toward the passage near the far end of the great hall. Hence she did not see the pallid face that was staring from darkness.

Twindell had come downstairs while they were in the room with the tapestried panels. He had sneaked into that far passage. He had caught words of Dorothy's conversation with Rokesbury. Time moved by; Twindell lingered, watching.

Inside the closed room, Rokesbury and his crew had completed their removal of the large tapestried panels. The electric brackets revealed a barren result. The walls in back of the panels were smooth and whitewashed. There was no possibility of a secret doorway. Rokesbury tapped with his knuckles to encounter solid stone.

The engineer ordered his men to replace the heavy panels. They went to work, while Rokesbury timed them with his watch. Intent upon his supervision, he did not glance toward the window, where he had drawn the blinds. Hence Rokesbury did not see the peering eyes that shone through a tiny crack at the bottom of the shade. Those were the eyes of The Shadow.

The cloaked watcher was standing in the dusk outside the mansion. His form was black against the shaded side of the house. Thick darkness with thin rifts of mist pervaded the bog; The Shadow was a living phantom as he moved farther along the wall. He had seen the failure of Rokesbury's brief search. He wanted to observe others within the mansion.

Through the grilled window at the end of the great hall, The Shadow caught the glow of the fire. He saw Dorothy Brent watching the stairway. Then his keen eyes spied the pallid face of Twindell. Lingered, The Shadow saw the servant move back into the passage. The door had opened from the tapestried room. Rokesbury and his men were coming out. The Shadow faded with the increasing darkness as he moved toward the end of the mansion.

Rokesbury ordered his men to leave. He sat down beside Dorothy. He shook his head as the girl whispered a question regarding the search.

"No luck," said Rokesbury. "If there are any secret hiding places, we will find them elsewhere on this floor. There were solid walls in back of those tapestried panels."

"Did you put the panels back in perfect order?"

"Yes. No one will know that they were removed. That room must be watched, Dorothy."

"Why? You found nothing there."

"But I alone have made the search. Others"—Rokesbury paused—"like the prowler who came down from the hill—may still think that the room hides a secret. I am going to stand watch to-night, Dorothy. My men will be in readiness at the causeway."

"You think the prowler will return?"

"Yes. If he knows what is going on here—which is possible—he will lose no time. Your uncle is looking through the house. Halthorpe has stated that he intends to repair it. There is mystery here, Dorothy—deep mystery—but do not fear."

The girl nodded bravely. She felt confidence because Rokesbury would be on hand at the causeway. She was sure that she could rely further upon this friend who had proven his interest in her welfare.

ROKESBURY arose. Dorothy did the same. They walked to the outer door. Rokesbury's men had gone back to the causeway. While the engineer stood talking to the girl, just outside the door, a lantern came gleaming from the bushes by the swamp. It was Wildemar Brent, returning from his search through the bog.

"Any luck?" questioned Rokesbury.

"No," returned Brent.

"Where is the professor?" asked the engineer.

"Following a trail of his own," replied the naturalist. "Ah! There is his light. Here he comes now. Any sign of the ignis fatuus, professor?"

Shelby came up with a lantern. He was shaking his head in response to Brent's question. He peered solemnly through his spectacles; then glanced ruefully toward the boots that he was wearing. They were thick with mire from the bog.

"The paths are difficult," declared Shelby. "Time after time I nearly slipped into the quagmire. My word! This marsh is muckier than many of the fens that I have visited in England. Of course, one is apt to encounter quicksand in the midst of an English fen. That danger is not present here."

"You had better change your shoes, professor," suggested Dorothy. "You have been more than ankle-deep in mud."

"Thank you for the suggestion," said Shelby, with a bow. "I shall follow it, Miss Brent."

He scraped mud from his shoes; then entered the old mansion. Rokesbury remained talking to Brent. The naturalist did not seem greatly impressed by the offer of men to guard the house. He grumbled that he would prefer to have Rokesbury keep his workmen on the causeway, where they belonged.

Brent went into the house. Dorothy said good-bye to Rokesbury. The engineer departed; the girl went indoors. She sat down at the fire place, beside her uncle. Professor Shelby had gone upstairs to change his clothes.

Twindell was standing at the far end of the hall. Unnoticed, the old servant threw a glance toward the opened door that led into the paneled room. His face was strained and troubled. Twindell seemed perplexed.

Eyes from without saw that expression; for those eyes were close by the solid window at the end of the hall. The Shadow was peering in from outer darkness. Twindell walked away. The gleaming eyes disappeared.

A swish in the darkness outside the old house. An unseen figure glided toward the marsh. The Shadow was taking a swift short-cut through the swampy land—a route that led to the town of Rensdale. By this path that he had discovered, the trip would require no more than a dozen minutes.

Again, The Shadow had seen. He knew that Twindell had learned that no secret lay within the room with the tapestried panels. The Shadow knew that the old servant was perturbed. New events were brewing upon this night.

Through his agents, The Shadow would anticipate what lay ahead. His plans were made; his orders would be obeyed. The Shadow was nearing the end of a quest as strange as Wildemar Brent's search for the ignis fatuus. Yet all was not sure yet. Chance could still play its part.

While The Shadow, invisible, was trailing his way through the swamp, another figure was stalking along the road that led by the broad marsh. Philo Halthorpe had started off on one of his long evening tramps.

There was no moon to-night. Complete blackness had settled over town and countryside. It was a night when danger lurked abroad. It was a night suited to insidious crime. But the weird, whispered laugh that sounded in the depths of the marsh indicated another fact.

This was a night to The Shadow's liking. To the being who battled crime, thick darkness was the cloak that aided his thrusts against men who plotted evil.

CHAPTER XII. ABOVE AND BELOW

"BURKE speaking."

The statement came through Harry Vincent's earphones. Listening from his post in the beacon shack, Harry had formed new contact with Clyde in the Hotel Rensdale. Acknowledging the call, Harry awaited instructions. They came.

"Cover the squatter's cabin," ordered Clyde. "Prevent the bearded man from leaving. Hold him for further orders."

"Instructions received."

Using his flashlight along the ground, Harry Vincent proceeded from the shack. He found his way to a forgotten path that he had discovered. Through thick blackness, he began his descent toward the cottage on the hill.

The evening was less than half gone. There was ample time to reach the cottage before the bearded Dalwar was ready to leave. All the way along, Harry watched for signs of flashed signals from the distant mansion in the marsh. He saw none. Hence he was sure that he would find the bearded man in his cabin.

Harry had spied the fellow once or twice, late in the afternoon. He had seen signals from the mansion on the night of Cray's murder. Harry knew The Shadow's purpose for this particular evening. Somehow, The Shadow had foreseen that signals would come from the mansion. He wanted to prevent the bearded man from making another of his trouble-bringing forays.

It was Harry's job to stop the Dalwar. In leaving this duty to his agent, The Shadow was relying upon a man of proven power. Harry was a good hand with a gun. He was thoroughly capable for a task of this sort. Particularly so, because all the odds were in his favor. The bearded man would not be expecting an opponent from the mountain top.

WHEN he neared the cabin, Harry spied a flickering light from a side window. He crept in that direction; close by, he peered into the interior of the cabin. The light was from a fire place beside the door. A slight chill had fallen on the hillside; the bearded man was warming his hands before the fire.

Harry studied the fellow—his heavy shoulders with their forward stoop— his profile, black because of the thick beard. There was something rugged yet almost gawkish in the Dalwar's bearing. Harry gained the sudden impression that the black-beard might be a false one, used for a disguise.

There was a door at the back of the main room. It opened into what appeared to be a small apartment. Moving from the window, Harry circled the rear of the cabin; he saw a window in the little room; it was five feet above the ground, because of the slope. The rear of the house was toward the marsh below.

The proper place to watch was from the side window. Harry returned to that post. He stayed close, watching the man within. He saw the bearded Dalwar pace impatiently into the little room; then back to the outer. A short while later, the fellow repeated the action.

He was watching for flashes from the house in the marsh. Harry would not be able to see them, due to the angled side of the cabin; but that caused him no concern. By watching the bearded man, Harry was accomplishing his mission. Once the Dalwar tried to leave the cabin, Harry would present opposition.

The outer door—facing up the hill—was bolted and locked. A huge key was visible. Hence Harry formed a simple plan of strategy. He knew that he could reach a spot outside the door before the Dalwar could unlock the barrier. Coming from the darkness, it would be a simple matter to trap the fellow before he stepped from the cabin.

The bearded man prowled back into the little room. He stayed there a few minutes. When he returned, he did so quickly. He picked up his flat hat and placed it on his head. Harry knew that he would be starting for the door. The man had probably received the signal. Harry hurried to the front of the cabin. He crouched there, his revolver in one hand, the flashlight in the other.

The bolt clattered in the lock of the front door. Harry was tense, waiting for the key to grate. The expected sound did not come. One long minute passed— then another. For some reason, the bearded man had decided to delay his exit.

Harry crept back to the side window. He looked into the main room. He saw that it was deserted. Had the Dalwar gone back into the little room to wait for a repetition of the signal from the mansion? Stealthily, Harry crept to the rear of the house. He looked up toward the window. A deep breath came from Harry's lips.

The window was open. That fact told its own story. The bearded man, possibly suspicious, had chosen the window as his exit after unbolting the door. Wildly, Harry scrambled to the side of the house. Peering in, he saw that the key had been removed from the front door.

The Dalwar had left the cabin locked; but he had taken the key. Thus he could enter by the door when he returned. In the meantime, he had slipped the vigilance of The Shadow's agent. He was already off on his journey to the mansion.

Harry's one thought was to overtake the fellow. The bearded man had a few minutes' start. He must be caught before he reached the marsh. After that, Harry would be unable to trace him farther. Madly, The Shadow's agent started down the hillside, intent upon capturing the man whom he had been set to take prisoner.

HARRY was right in his assumption that a signal had been given. All had retired within the old house. Brent, Shelby and Dorothy were in their rooms on the second floor when Twindell had sneaked down stairs to open the big door. From the alcove, the servant had blinked his flashlight. He had gone back into the house, leaving the door unbolted.

Watching eyes had seen that signal. Shrouded by darkness, The Shadow had come from beside the house. Then he had traced a course along the solid ground, through brambles and shrubs, until he had neared the causeway. There he had paused to watch the working night shift. Standing between the abandoned well and the battered kennels, The Shadow had noted idle men who seemed to be on watch.

Then he had taken to the marsh. With strange precision, the invisible investigator had picked a swift path toward the hillside. His whispered laugh sounded as he strode through the bog. The Shadow was on his way to join Harry Vincent. He had every reason to rely upon Harry's ability. The Shadow was satisfied that the bearded man was already a prisoner in his cabin on the hill.

Because of his detour toward the causeway, The Shadow was forced to pick a bog path that brought him to the left of the line between mansion and hillside cabin. Cutting upward at an angle, The Shadow moved with surprising swiftness toward the cabin. His upward course showed a speed that the average man could not have made along a downward path.

Nearing his goal, The Shadow spied the flicker of the firelight from the side window of the cabin. Approaching rapidly, he peered through the window. He saw that the cabin was deserted. He noted that the bolt was drawn. Rounding the back, The Shadow saw the opened window. His hands shot upward; they gained the sill. The cloaked form swung up from the dark.

Stepping through the little room, The Shadow entered the main portion of the cabin. He stepped to the door and tried it. He found it locked. Spectrally, The Shadow stood in the glare of the firelight. His form was ghostly in the wavering glow. The laugh that came from his hidden lips was a strange, hollow tone that lacked all mirth.

The Shadow could tell exactly what had happened. His keen mind pictured Harry watching the front of

the cabin where windows were absent. The Shadow visualized the bearded man, drawing the bolt, removing the key, then dropping out by the rear window.

Chance had balked The Shadow. While he had been ascending the hill, confident that his agent had trapped the Dalwar, the bearded man had been making the descent. The Shadow had reached the deserted cabin—in all probability, the Dalwar was already at the mansion in the marsh!

HARRY VINCENT'S slip had not only permitted the circumstances which The Shadow had planned to prevent. The agent's failure had done double damage. Had The Shadow remained at the mansion, he could have shown his powerful hand in the trouble that was brewing there; but as fate had willed it, The Shadow was completely out of the picture down below!

The black-garbed figure came to life. Swiftly, The Shadow moved into the little room. With quick action, he cleared the sill and dropped to the ground below. He moved into the darkness of the hillside.

Damage had been done. A conflict was impending below. The Shadow was eliminated from the struggle. Yet the weird, grim laugh that stole from the darkness was proof that the master's cause was not yet hopeless.

Chance had brought The Shadow to the empty cabin. Though chance had tricked him, it might yet turn to his favor. Whatever occurred within the mansion on the marsh, The Shadow would be ready for the aftermath.

Strokes were in the making. They might fail completely; or they might leave the issue doubtful. The stage would be set for new action. The counterstroke would be The Shadow's.

CHAPTER XIII. FROM HOUSE TO HILL

DOROTHY BRENT was nervous. She had not gone to sleep after she had retired. Lying in bed, the girl had been listening for sounds from below. Beneath her pillow, Dorothy had a .22 automatic. It was a weapon that the girl had brought here with her; but until this night, Dorothy had left it packed. She had been afraid to trust herself with a gun.

Positive that she heard sounds from below, Dorothy tiptoed to the hall. She listened. She heard stealthy footsteps. The girl knew that it might be Twindell, down by the fire place. That, however, would not matter. Her own window faced toward the causeway. Dorothy determined to follow a plan that Nicholas Rokesbury had suggested just before leaving her in the driveway.

Coming back into her room, the girl took a flashlight from the bureau. Stopping by the window, she blinked the little torch. Staring across the solid ground, Dorothy saw figures moving toward the embankment of the causeway. Her signal had been seen. Rokesbury would be coming with his men.

Dorothy gained confidence. Then she felt sheepish. She knew that she would be chagrined if she had given a false alarm. The girl waited for a few minutes; then went softly out into the hall. Again she listened for sounds from below. She thought she heard the front door open and close. Then came stealthy whispers.

Knowing that aid was coming, Dorothy tiptoed down the steps. Her light footfalls made no noise. She reached the bottom and peered toward the fire place. Two men were standing there, in consultation. One was Twindell; the other was the bearded squatter from the hill. Their faces were plain in the firelight.

"This afternoon..." The girl caught snatches of Twindell's whisper... "the room with the tapestries... I was watching... nothing..."

An incoherent whisper from the bearded man. The fellow seemed savage as he shook his head. Brawny fists clenched and unclenched.

"Better to wait..."

This was Twindell's whisper. The bearded man responded with a nod. He turned toward the outer door. With Twindell close beside him, the fellow was ready to make his departure. Dorothy grew tense.

Where was Rokesbury? Had he and his men failed to understand the signal from the window? Perhaps they were outside, waiting for new word, watching the door for some one to come out. Dorothy had a sudden fear that if the bearded man encountered them, he would double back into the house. The girl suddenly remembered that this squatter, though marked as a murderer, had fled twice before when she had given the alarm. Acting upon bold impulse, the girl reached to the wall and pressed the lower light switch.

SIDE brackets flashed. Twindell and the bearded man swung startled toward the stairs. Dorothy raised the little automatic. In a tense voice, she ordered the men to stand where they were. A sound made the girl turn suddenly; a gasp came to her lips as she saw another figure in the hall.

It was Nicholas Rokesbury. The engineer was coming from darkness beside the stairway. Dorothy realized that he had gained entrance into the house; that he had secretly managed to come to her aid, leaving his men outside. Rokesbury was armed with a revolver. Like Dorothy, he was covering the men before him.

A hoarse cry from Twindell. With a terrific bound, the old servant threw himself directly into Rokesbury's path. The leap was an amazing one. Twindell struck Rokesbury's arm just as the engineer fired. The shot went wide. Then, with the same fury that he had shown in his fight with The Shadow, Twindell dashed Rokesbury back into the passage beside the stairs.

The bearded man seemed hesitating; he was about to travel toward the door when Dorothy spoke again. Stepping forward with the automatic, the girl cried out:

"Stand where you are!"

The bearded man obeyed. Twindell and Rokesbury were grappling fiercely in the darkness past the stairs. Involuntarily, the girl turned to see if she could aid the engineer. When she again looked toward the bearded man, he was coming forward with a terrific lunge.

Dorothy fired. Her nervous shot went wide. Then the squatter caught her arm as she fired a second bullet. Dorothy screamed and struck at the man's face. Wrenching the girl about, the Dalwar knocked the automatic from her hand and stopped her struggles with a powerful arm that caught her body like a steel trap. While Twindell and Rokesbury struggled on, the bearded man made for the door, carrying the girl with him.

The squatter yanked the door open. He pulled a big revolver from his hip. He plunged out into the darkness; then came the sudden glare of flashlights. Rokesbury's men were here; they, too, were armed with revolvers.

"Get him!" came a hoarse cry. "Get him!"

"Don't shoot!" was another shout. "He's got the girl! Look out!"

One glare blocked the path toward the marsh. Savagely, the bearded man fired toward the flashlight. The torch dropped to the ground. A groan came from the man who had held it. The squatter sprang in that

direction; then, holding Dorothy's slim body as a shield, he turned and moved sidewise in swift, crablike fashion.

As he fled, the fellow began to pump new shots toward the lights that covered him. Another man went down; then a third dropped his light. Others began to fire wild shots. The bearded man delivered a snarling laugh; he knew that they had fired wild, for fear of hitting Dorothy. Pumping the last bullets from his gun, the squatter flung the weapon far. He stifled Dorothy's screams with a powerful fist as he swung and leaped beyond the bushes that fringed the darkened swamp.

THE bearded man was gone from view. The passing beam of the airway beacon shone too high to show him. As Rokesbury's men came out from cover, they found their flashlights too feeble to trace the hidden path that the abductor had taken. Dorothy's screams had ended.

Men stood dumbfounded; then the light came on above the door of the mansion. Nicholas Rokesbury, the collar of his khaki shirt torn from his neck, came plunging into view.

"Where is the girl?" he cried.

"The guy got away with her," growled one of the men. "We were afraid to shoot. Thought we might hit her."

One of Rokesbury's men lay silent on the ground. Another was groaning. A third had risen and was clutching his arm. Rokesbury waved to the others.

"Get those fellows inside," he ordered. "Look after them. See to that old servant. I had to plug the fellow. He put up a tough fight."

The engineer sprang to the brink of the marsh. He stopped short as he flashed a light. He could trace no path in the boggy mire. The course that the bearded man had taken seemed impassable. Rokesbury turned. An exclamation came from his lips.

Wildemar Brent was at the door of the house. Half dressed, the naturalist was swinging his electric lantern. He seemed to be wondering what all the commotion was about.

"Hurry, Brent!" cried Rokesbury. "Do you know the path through the bog? The way to the hill?"

Brent nodded as he stepped from the door.

"There's no time to lose," stated Rokesbury. "One of the squatters came down here. A big fellow with a beard. He's taken Dorothy. Lead the way, Brent. We're following."

A wild expression showed upon Brent's face. The naturalist was gasping at the news of his niece's abduction. He lost no time. Hurrying to where Rokesbury stood, he pressed a bush aside and revealed the beginning of a twisted path. With his lantern throwing a vivid glare along the ground, Brent picked his way into the marsh.

Rokesbury waved to his men. They scrambled after him, all but two who were carrying their wounded companions into the mansion. Others had come from around the house; there was a full half dozen at Rokesbury's heels.

Brent was moving swiftly, finding his path with keen precision. Close behind their guide, the members of the rescue party moved with Rokesbury. Grimly, the armed band was making its way toward the hill.

CHAPTER XIV. IN THE CABIN

THOUGH the pursuing party had moved promptly, its pace could not compare with that of the bearded squatter. The big man had stifled Dorothy into a state of semi-consciousness. He was carrying the girl as easily as he might have taken along a tiny child.

Though moving blindly through the darkness, he picked his path unfailingly. He did not pause within the confines of the marsh. When he did stop, it was on the fringe of solid, rocky ground, that marked the base of the hill. Looking backward, the squatter saw the tiny glare of Brent's electric lantern. The pursuers had already slackened; yet they were not halfway through the spreading swamp.

A muffled laugh came from the heavy beard. Shifting the girl to his other shoulder, the squatter began his climb. He traveled up the slope at a pace that rivaled The Shadow's progress. At this gait he was sure to reach the cabin long before those who pursued him.

There was no need for silence. Speed was the man's one aim. His heavy boots clicked against stones and sent them rolling down the slope. His breath came in long, heavy puffs. The squatter's endurance was tremendous.

Evidently his exit from the back window of the cabin had been merely a matter of set precaution; for at present, the squatter took it for granted that no one was close at hand. In this assumption he was wrong. A listener on the hillside was hearing his approach. The waiting man was Harry Vincent.

Rising from behind a rock, The Shadow's agent began a stealthy upward course. The squatter was gaining, but Harry had a head start. He reached the cabin while the squatter was still puffing upward, nearly a hundred yards below. Quietly, Harry stationed himself outside the door.

The squatter arrived. Fumbling in his pocket he produced a key. He unlocked the door; he entered and laid Dorothy, still semi-conscious, upon a rickety cot in the corner. He turned to close the door. Dorothy, weakly opening her eyes, was a witness of what followed.

AS the squatter stepped toward the doorway, a flashlight glared squarely into his bearded face. The man staggered backward with a snarl. Harry Vincent sprang into the cabin, automatic in hand. His gun was leveled straight between the eyes that glared fiercely from above the bearded face.

"Up with your hands," ordered Harry.

The squatter came forward with the same terrific speed that had enabled him to capture Dorothy Brent. His big fist shot to Harry Vincent's right wrist. The twist that it delivered wrenched the gun from Harry's hand. The Shadow's agent grappled hopelessly as rugged arms gripped him. Then, with a fling, the bearded squatter sent Harry rolling on the floor. The young man's head thumped the stone facing of the fire place. Harry lay motionless.

The squatter grabbed the automatic and pointed toward the man whom he had overcome. Dorothy gave a gasping scream, thinking that he intended to shoot. The squatter turned and approached the cot. He glared toward the girl; he was about to speak when a new sound attracted his attention. It came from the door of the little room.

Looking up, the squatter found himself covered by the muzzle of an automatic that extended from a blackgloved fist. Behind the gun was a strange figure cloaked in black. Above the barrel were blazing eyes that glowed like living coals. A hissed command issued from hidden lips.

It was The Shadow. Spectral master who had cowed the fiercest fighters of New York's underworld, he had arrived to challenge this furious, bearded superman who seemed to fear no odds.

Not one man in a million would have resisted The Shadow's might. But this bearded Dalwar was a power unto himself. He acted with the same suddenness that he had previously displayed. Swinging the automatic that he had gained from Harry Vincent, the bearded fighter sprang upon The Shadow with a tigerlike roar. A cloaked arm swung to meet the Dalwar's descending stroke. Automatics clashed like sabers. Then the fighters grappled. The Shadow went plunging backward from the fury of the squatter's onslaught.

Dorothy had turned to see the grapplers surge into the darkness of the little room. The girl tried to rise. The effort was too great. She heard a chair crash to the floor; then the clattering of glass as a window-sash was smashed from its frame. Bodies struck the inner wall with a terrific thud.

Gazing toward the fire place, Dorothy saw Harry Vincent rising. The Shadow's agent was groggy. Holding one hand to his head, he staggered toward the little room. Dorothy tried to scream a warning. Harry tottered into the darkness. A roar, loud as the bellow of a bull, came from the fighting squatter. Another terrific thud; then silence. Dorothy sank back on the cot. The girl had fainted.

WHEN she recovered consciousness, Dorothy heard the crackle of embers in the fire place. Then came muffled voices, outside the house. The girl sat up. No one was in the large room; all was silent from the little room adjoining. Voices again, just outside the door. A man came into view, carrying a gleaming revolver. Dorothy sank back with a gasp of relief. It was Nicholas Rokesbury.

Footsteps tramped into the cabin. Wildemar Brent came wheezing after the members of Rokesbury's crew. The engineer helped the girl to a sitting position. Brent came scurrying forward, gasping grateful words. While he and Rokesbury aided Dorothy to her feet, the rescue squad tramped into the little room. They found it empty, save for a broken chair and bits of glass from the shattered window.

In bewildered fashion, Dorothy tried to explain what had happened. She realized that her recollections were chaotic. Fighting—then silence. While she tried to tell her story, Rokesbury's men began to scour the premises. A call came from outside.

"Who's that" shouted Rokesbury.

"It's all right," returned one of the men. "A friend."

Half a minute later, a tall, panting figure appeared in the doorway. It was Professor Darwin Shelby, carrying an electric lantern. The scientist blinked through his big spectacles. Shelby was fully dressed.

"I heard the confusion," he puffed. "I decided to follow you. I hailed you from the marsh—you were too far ahead. I found my way through. My word! Is Miss Brent all right?"

"Yes," acknowledged Brent. "She has had a harrowing experience, however. The man who carried her here has escaped. Come. We must take her back to the mansion."

"I'll leave two men here," decided Rokesbury, "in case that bearded fellow returns. Do you feel well enough to start back, Dorothy?"

The girl nodded. The men aided her as they left the cabin. The returning party made its way down the hill; guided by Brent and Shelby, they found the difficult path through the marsh. Dorothy was walking steadily when they reached the old house.

A figure was standing in the glare beside the door. A stern face greeted the arrivals. It was Philo Halthorpe. Returning from his nightly hike, the rugged lawyer had seen the light outside the mansion.

Once again, Halthorpe was here to act as questioner, that he might have data ready when the law came

to investigate new trouble at the house in the marsh.

THE quiz began when they reached the great hall. Two of Rokesbury's men were there: one with a bandaged arm. The engineer inquired for the others. The response was a thumb nudged toward the closed door of the room with paneled tapestries.

"In there," said the workman, soberly. "Bill was dead; Harry kicked in just after you fellows left."

"And Twindell?" asked Brent, in an anxious tone.

"He was dead when we found him," said the workman. "We put his corpse in with the others."

Nicholas Rokesbury slumped in a chair beside the fire. He knew that his bullet had taken the old servant's life. His solemn gaze showed that the news had stunned him.

"Three men dead," declared Philo Halthorpe, in a serious tone. "It is important that I have the details before I go back to my home and call the county prosecutor."

Halthorpe looked toward Dorothy, as though expecting the girl to make the first statement. Recovered from her prolonged ordeal, Dorothy nodded. She began her story, describing the events in the mansion. She ended with a hazy recollection of the fight in the cabin.

"A man came in to rescue me," said the girl, in a positive tone. "The squatter knocked him to the floor. Then another challenged the bearded man, from the door of the little room. They fought. I saw the injured man get up from the floor. Then—then I fainted. When I recovered my senses, the place was empty. After that, Nicholas arrived."

"What can you tell us, Rokesbury?" asked Halthorpe.

"We saw Dorothy's flashlight," declared the engineer. "Over at the causeway. I told my men to surround the house. I ran ahead of them. As I neared the house, I decided to get inside, if possible. So I took to the side toward town. I came in through one of the windows in the passage to the far end of the hall."

"Go on," ordered Halthorpe.

"I found a hiding place beside the stairway"—Rokesbury pointed—"and waited there. I was just in time to elude Twindell, who came prowling from the stairway. Then the door opened; in came the chap with the beard. He began to whisper to Twindell; I couldn't hear what they said."

"Why didn't you challenge them?"

"I wanted to be sure my men were ready. The bearded man was edging toward the door. I had my revolver so that I could cut him off if he tried to double back through the house. Then, just at the crucial moment, Dorothy turned on the lights. Twindell saw me. He sprang upon me."

"And you shot him?"

"I fired one shot, wild. That was to warn my men; to frighten Twindell and make the squatter run for it. Then I had my hands full. Twindell fought like a fiend. I didn't want to kill him; but I had to. He was pulling the gun from my grasp. Beyond him, I could see the squatter, carrying Dorothy from the house. I pulled the trigger. Twindell fell away from me."

"I witnessed the struggle!" exclaimed Dorothy. "I saw Twindell make the attack -"

"I have heard your statement," put in Halthorpe, dryly. "It is sufficient to exonerate Rokesbury, since it is

obvious that Twindell was an accomplice of the squatter. You men outside—you saw the bearded killer shoot down your companions?"

The workmen nodded. The wounded man pointed to his arm.

"The guy nicked me," he said.

"He is already wanted for murder," decided Halthorpe. "This adds conclusive evidence to circumstantial facts. Your statement, Mr. Brent."

"The firing was over," declared the naturalist, "by the time I arrived downstairs. I learned that my niece had been abducted. I led the way."

"And you, professor?" quizzed Halthorpe.

"I was even later," stated Shelby. "I must have come downstairs while the bodies were being carried into the tapestried room. This hallway was deserted. So I went outside and followed the distant lantern through the marsh."

"I shall go to town immediately," declared Halthorpe. "Suppose, Rokesbury, that I accompany you to the causeway. You can drive me into town; walking would take too long on this occasion. You can remain at my house until the coroner arrives to question you again regarding Twindell's death."

"Very well," agreed Rokesbury. "Can I leave some men here to make sure that all is well?"

"That would be advisable," responded Halthorpe.

The lawyer paused to ponder. His gawky form seemed powerful as he straightened and raised his head in thought. Then, in terse fashion, he delivered his usual summary of opinion.

"The murderer must have had enemies," decided Halthorpe. "They may have been persons who wondered what he was about. So they attacked him in the cabin. Miss Brent saw him overpower one; the shattered window is proof that he must have hurled the other out into the darkness.

"Then, in all probability, he fled. His assailants, half groggy, decided that it was unwise to remain. They also departed before your rescue squad arrived. That sums the case. Come, Rokesbury. Let us go to the causeway."

The lawyer and the engineer departed. Workmen took up their guard, outside the house. The occupants retired for the night. Thick blackness laid its hush over the house in the marsh.

LATER, a phantom form appeared mysteriously within the glow of the embers from the hearth. The Shadow moved toward the room with the paneled tapestries. His gloved hand opened the door; his flashlight flickered on the dead faces of Twindell and the slain workmen.

That same light roved along the walls; it flashed across the drawn shades that hid the solid, small-paned windows. Out went the light. The Shadow moved through the end of the hall, past the windows there; then through the windowed passage. He stopped at the door of the little room which Brent and Cray had occupied in turn.

That door was locked; by opening it, The Shadow could have found an exit through one of the ordinary windows. Instead, he kept on through other passages until he reached the cellar stairs. There, his form was lost in blackness.

AFTERWARD, a swish came softly through the gloom that hung over the solid ground between the old mansion and the causeway. The Shadow paid no heed to the distant lights and the dull sounds of the sledges that the workers wielded. He moved silently toward the blackness of the bog. From then on, his course was a mystery.

Hidden paths that he had discovered through the quagmire; rising wisps of mist that made white specters in the mist; these formed The Shadow's habitat. But later, as dawn was nearing, the cloaked form again appeared within the great hall at the mansion.

Before the fire place, The Shadow loomed unseen by human eyes. Only the long-faced portrait of Thaddeus Culeth glared upon his strange, outlandish figure. That portrait, had it been alive, could have told of weird events within this hall. But of all the personages that its painted eyes might have viewed, none was so sinister as the figure which stood before it at this moment.

The Shadow moved toward the stairway. His form was blotted by darkness. Dying embers crackled. The painted eyes of Thaddeus Culeth's portrait stared sightless into empty space.

CHAPTER XV. THE SQUATTER RETURNS

SEVERAL days had passed since the night when the bearded Dalwar had abducted Dorothy Brent. An early autumn chill had settled over the great marsh. It was late afternoon and Wildemar Brent was discussing the cool snap with Professor Darwin Shelby.

"If this cold increases," asserted Brent, "there will be a frost. The slough will freeze all through the marsh. There will be no use in continuing our search for the ignis fatuus."

"Perhaps not," agreed Professor Shelby. "However, the weather may turn warm again. I think, Wildemar, that I shall venture forth as usual at dusk."

"So shall I," decided Brent. "It is almost dusk at present."

"So it is!" exclaimed Shelby. "My word! I believe I shall set out at once."

The professor went out through the big door. Alone, Brent rose to his feet. He glared savagely at the portrait of Thaddeus Culeth. The long face with its aristocratic air seemed to annoy him. Brent gripped the portrait and brought it down from the wall. He studied the space that it had covered. The wall was solid.

Brent looked about. He began a prowling, stopping here and there. He entered the room with the paneled tapestries. He thumped the woodwork; then shook his head. The ring of the door bell brought him out into the hall. Dusk had settled. Brent could discern that as he glanced toward the thickly-grilled window by the entrance to the tapestried room. But he did not see the peering eyes that moved from beyond the panes. Those were the eyes of The Shadow.

Brent went to the door and opened it. Nicholas Rokesbury stepped into the house, followed by a quiet-faced fellow whom Brent recognized as Garry Logan, the new county detective. As they walked toward the fire place, footsteps sounded on the stairway. Dorothy Brent appeared. The girl had been taking an afternoon nap.

"No news, Mr. Brent," declared Logan, in a friendly tone. This new detective had been more tactful than Merle Cray. "We still have two men on constant duty up in the old cabin; but we haven't traced the squatter anywhere among the other hill-folk. None of them seem to know anything about him."

The door opened while Logan was speaking. It was Professor Shelby, coming back. Though bundled in a heavy coat, the scientist seemed to have disliked the chill of the marsh.

"I shall go out later," he declared, as he walked toward the stairway. "The dampness is more troublesome than the cold. It seems to be lessening."

"I won't stay here much longer," declared Brent, "if this cold increases. There is no use persisting in my search for the ignis fatuus if the chilly weather forces me to stay indoors."

"What is that portrait doing on the floor?" questioned Dorothy, suddenly. "Did you remove it from the wall, uncle?"

"Yes," snapped Brent. "I wanted to see what was—well, I just didn't like it glaring at me. Old Thaddeus Culeth! Bah! I wish he had lived to keep this beastly place."

BRENT stooped and picked up the portrait. He hung it back in place, just as Professor Shelby appeared at the foot of the stairway.

"Ah!" exclaimed the professor. "Did you discover something odd behind that portrait, Wildemar?"

"I wasn't looking for anything," snapped Brent.

"I thought you might have been," returned Shelby, in a mild tone. "I recall that you were tapping about a bit the other day."

"That was to see about repairs," barked Brent. "The place was to be gone over during my absence. However, I think the work will be unnecessary. The Culeth estate is welcome to keep this house. I shall want it no longer. Since this codger is dead"—Brent pointed to the portrait—"it is too bad that his son Austin is not alive. Halthorpe said he looked like his father. A man with a face like that is the sort of person to live in an old ruin such as this house."

"The face is not unhandsome," declared Dorothy, looking at the portrait. "It seems to be soured by age; that is all. It would be nice if Austin Culeth were still alive. I imagine that he would be a most agreeable young man."

"I'm going to dress for a trip to the marsh," decided Brent, moving toward the stairs. "I suppose you intend to wait a while, eh, professor?"

"I shall prepare to go out now," said Shelby. He arose and bowed to Dorothy and the others; then followed Brent upstairs.

"Do you think this fellow Brent was actually looking for some hiding place behind the picture?" inquired Logan, speaking to Rokesbury in an undertone.

"No," whispered the engineer. "He's eccentric, that is all."

"I shall report the matter to Mr. Halthorpe," said the detective, in a decisive tone. "He shall know about it, since he controls the house."

"Do you think your uncle really intends to give up the mansion?" inquired Rokesbury, speaking to Dorothy.

"Quite possibly," replied the girl. "I hope that he does decide to do so."

"I know it," said Rokesbury, soberly. "I can't help but think of Twindell, every time I come here."

"Forget it, Rokesbury," said Logan, gruffly. "You had every right to kill that man. He was the accomplice of a murderer."

"I know it," said the engineer, "but I'm sorry I was forced to slay him. To change the subject, the reason I spoke about the house was because I have a use for it."

"What could that be?" inquired the girl, in surprise.

"As a headquarters for the causeway workers," explained the engineer. "If your uncle leaves with cold weather; if Halthorpe is willing to postpone the repair work, this would be an excellent place for my men to live and have their meals. The causeway work will carry us into the winter. The men cannot stand the continued rigor of the cold weather."

"You can talk about that to-night, Rokesbury," suggested Logan, just as Professor Shelby appeared from the stairs.

"With whom?" inquired the engineer. "Brent or Halthorpe?"

"Both. The lawyer told me he was coming out here some time this evening. I believe his visit has something to do with the estate. Why don't you drop over?"

"I shall," responded Rokesbury. "Here comes Brent now; but I won't bother him. Well, it's time to head for the causeway."

"I'm driving back to town," put in Logan.

"Wait a minute." Rokesbury turned to Dorothy. "You'll be alone here. That won't do. I'll send a pair of men over to watch the place."

"Thank you, Nicholas," smiled Dorothy."

Brent and Shelby were leaving for the door. Rokesbury and Logan followed. Dorothy sat for a few moments by the fire; then went upstairs. She did not mind being alone in the old house since the men from the causeway would soon be on guard.

OUTSIDE, Brent and Shelby had separated, each with his electric lantern. Rokesbury chuckled as he saw the gleams move off through the darkness. He watched the lights go out; then turned to Logan.

"Chasing the marsh lights," laughed the engineer. "That's science for you. I'm glad I began my education with surveying. Both of those chaps are a bit balmy."

"Telling me?" snorted Logan, as he stepped to his car. "Say—why did they douse the glims? How can they find their way through that mush?"

"They know the paths," explained Rokesbury, "and they don't want the glare of their lanterns to spoil their chances of spotting the marsh lights. Say, Logan, wait here in your car until my men show up, will you? I'm anxious about Miss Brent. She's alone in the house."

"Certainly," agreed the detective, settling down in back of the wheel of his coupe.

Minutes passed; Logan kept turning his head as he followed the sweeping beams of the airway beacon on the mountain. Then the detective gained a sudden impression that some one was close by. He turned about, expecting to see either Brent or Shelby. He discovered no one. Yet the sleuth fancied that he had seen the door of the mansion close.

"Imagination," grumbled Logan. Then he turned as he heard actual sounds. Two workmen were coming with flashlights. Logan jammed his car into low gear and pulled away. But as he drove across the narrow strip of road that led to high ground, he could not shake away the thought that some one had entered through the unbolted door of the big mansion.

NOT long after Logan had left, the form of The Shadow emerged from a spot between the mansion and the causeway. Unseen, the tall figure moved off into the marsh. Blended with blackness, The Shadow's course was untraceable.

Half an hour after that, Clyde Burke returned to his room at the Hotel Rensdale, to find an envelope upon his table. He put in a prompt call to Harry Vincent, over the short-wave radio.

"Ten o'clock," was Clyde's simple statement.

EVENING lapsed. Again, the strange shape of The Shadow was prowling through the paths amid the marsh. This time, the master of the night came from the boggy land to the solid ground at the base of the sloping hillside. His course was upward. He neared the little cabin where two deputies, appointed by Garry Logan, were keeping guard.

Then came a brief interval. After that, the events that happened were of much concern to the men within the cabin. These fellows were husky chaps. They were armed with rifles; and they were vigilant. But at times it happened that they both laid their weapons aside.

As the deputies stood warming themselves before the log fire, the door sprang open. Into the room strode a tall, black-bearded man. His right hand held a gleaming revolver. The deputies stood flat-footed. The missing squatter had returned!

Eyes glared. A snarl came from the black beard. Deliberately, pocketing his gun, the wanted man seized the rifles that were standing by the wall. He thrust one weapon in the corner behind him. He swung the other rifle and brought its barrel against the corner of the fire place. Stone cracked. The rifle barrel bent like a toy of tin.

Throwing the useless gun to the floor, the squatter seized the second rifle. As new evidence of his strength, he pressed its barrel against his knee. He bent with savage force. The barrel twisted. The second gun was ruined.

With a raucous laugh, the Dalwar turned and strode from the cabin, slamming the door behind him. The startled deputies could hear his insane laugh from the darkness. It was repeated, from below the cottage. Then it came trailing from farther down the hillside.

"That was him!" gasped one deputy. "The murderer—with the beard!"

"One of the hill-folk, right enough!" exclaimed the other. "With the wide flat hat -"

"What'll we do about it? We can't use them rifles -"

"He was heading down to the marsh. Maybe he's going back to the old house."

"Say—we'd better act quick. Let's hop down to the causeway. We can cut over to the right so we won't run into the fellow with the beard. He's armed. We ain't."

The disarmed deputies dashed from the cottage. They ran wildly along the hillside, until they encountered a road. Puffing in their haste, they gained the far end of the causeway. They pounded across rough, broken stone, stumbling, tripping, but keeping on toward their goal.

Nicholas Rokesbury had not yet started over to the house. He had decided that Philo Halthorpe would be arriving late. Standing by a crew of workers, Rokesbury was the first to hear the approach of the deputies. He strode forward to meet the panting men.

"The murderer," gasped a deputy. "The Dalwar—from the cabin. We were watching for him -"

"And he smashed our guns," chimed in the other. "He beat it— heading for the swamp. He's armed -"

Rokesbury turned on his heel. Grimly he waved to his men. Tools dropped as workers responded to the beckon of the boss. Rokesbury snapped a short, decisive order.

"Get your revolvers, men," barked the engineer. "We're going to the old house. Looking for the bearded murderer. If you see him to-night, shoot to kill!"

CHAPTER XVI. THE MISSING MURDERER

WHEN Nicholas Rokesbury dashed across the solid ground between the causeway and the old house, the workmen and the deputies were close at his heels. Despite their tiring run down the hill, the former guardians of the squatter's cabin managed to keep pace with the armed band that was making for the gloomy mansion.

As they passed the battered dog-kennels, Rokesbury veered to the left. Scrambling through scrubby bushes, he called a low warning to the men behind him.

"Look out for that old well," he urged. "The boards are loose and weak. Keep over this way—to the left."

Rokesbury skirted the edge of the swamp above the house. Coming in from an angle, he and his followers suddenly arrived in a sphere of brilliance. The light was burning in the alcove above the big door. The entrance to the house was well illuminated. Rokesbury stopped.

"Surround the house," he ordered, in a steady tone. "Spread out by the borders of the swamp. Form a big circle. Then close inward."

The workmen responded. More than a dozen in number, they moved off in different directions. The two deputies remained with Rokesbury. Unarmed, they were in a quandary. The engineer recognized their plight. He beckoned them to approach the mansion with him.

Rokesbury rang the door bell. He waited impatiently. Finally he heard the sound of bolts being drawn from within. The door opened. Rokesbury was face to face with Dorothy Brent. The girl stepped back as she saw the excited look upon the engineer's face. Rokesbury sprang into the great hall. He saw that the place was empty.

"Are you alone here?" he demanded.

"No," responded Dorothy. "You must remember, Nicholas, that I sent your men back to the causeway after my uncle came in."

"That's right," recalled Rokesbury. "About fifteen minutes ago. Was that immediately after your uncle came in from the marsh?"

"Yes." The girl seemed perplexed. "What is the trouble, Nicholas?"

"I'll come to that later, Dorothy. Tell me—did you have the door bolted all evening?"

"Yes. I opened it to let Uncle Wildemar in; I bolted it again, immediately after he entered."

"Then you two are alone in the house?"

"No. About ten minutes ago, the door bell rang. I answered it; I found Professor Shelby. He had arrived back from the marsh. I bolted the door again; a few minutes afterward, there was another ring. It was Mr. Halthorpe. I bolted the door after he entered."

"Where are they now?" quizzed Rokesbury.

"In the room with the paneled tapestries," informed Dorothy. "They are discussing the matter of this house—whether or not uncle wants to keep it."

"I'll talk to them," declared Rokesbury.

THE engineer beckoned to the deputies. They followed him as he strode to the room with the tapestries. Dorothy came along, wondering what the trouble could be. The door was open. Brent and the others looked up from the big table as Rokesbury entered.

"Where is Detective Logan?" demanded the engineer, speaking to Philo Halthorpe.

"He has gone to the county seat," responded the attorney. "What is the trouble, Rokesbury? If it concerns the law, I can manage it."

"Tell him," ordered Rokesbury, turning abruptly to the deputies.

"The murderer," said one of the men, speaking to Halthorpe. "He came back to his cabin. Broke in on us and smashed our rifles. Laughed like he was loony; then he ran out and headed down the hill toward the swamp."

"Why didn't you pursue him?" quizzed Halthorpe, testily.

"He had a revolver," put in the second deputy. "Our rifles were no good. We headed for the causeway to give the alarm."

"I brought over a squad of men," stated Rokesbury. "They have surrounded this house. They are ready to trap the fellow before he can escape."

"What makes you think he is hereabouts?" demanded Halthorpe, dryly.

"Where else would he have gone?" asked Rokesbury, in return. "He had plenty of time to get through the marsh. This was his previous objective. He would certainly come here again."

"I disagree," snapped Halthorpe. "You have come on a fool's errand, Rokesbury. The county is paying you to build a causeway, not to head a tribe of vigilantes. Send your men back to work."

"Not until they have searched the grounds about the house," retorted Rokesbury. "I'm running my crew, Halthorpe. I'll give them whatever orders I choose."

"Suit yourself," snorted the lawyer. "Let them search for nothing if you choose to occupy them with that task. Mr. Brent was out on the marsh to-night. So was Professor Shelby. I walked in by the old road. We would have seen the prowler if he had come here."

"However, Rokesbury, since you are here, I can talk to you on another matter. Detective Logan tells me you want to rent this house as a sleeping place for your road gang. If I have charge of the mansion, I shall

refuse to lease it for that purpose. The repair bill will be too high as it is. Those clumsy louts who work for you would tear the place to pieces."

"So the estate has taken back the house, eh?"

"I did not say that. I used the word 'if' in my statement. Mr. Brent has not yet made his decision regarding the final purchase of the mansion. Come, Brent"—Halthorpe turned to the naturalist—"tell me what you intend to do?"

"One moment, Mr. Halthorpe." Brent waved his hand, then resumed a discussion with Shelby. "What were you saying, professor, about the ignis fatuus?"

"I had agreed with you," replied Shelby, "that methane, CH₄, is not spontaneously combustible. I was turning to your statement that phosphureted hydrogen, PH₃, might be the cause of the ignis fatuus. On that point, Wildemar, I disagree."

"Phosphureted hydrogen is combustible -"

"Of course; but no gas can burn without giving out heat. Moreover, phosphureted hydrogen has a penetrating smell that is very characteristic. In all my observations of the ignis fatuus, that odor has been absent."

"Perhaps you were not close enough to the phenomenon."

"I am not depending upon my own investigations, alone. I have read the statements of List, a German observer. He actually passed his hand through the luminous appearance and felt no warmth."

"Ah! Then the phenomenon may be akin to the luminosity of the Lampyridae -"

"Commonly called the firefly? Possibly that is the case, Wildemar. It is a tenable theory -"

"Come, gentlemen!" interrupted Halthorpe, rising impatiently. "Let us return to business. What about this mansion, Brent? Do you intend to keep it?"

"Be patient, Mr. Halthorpe," responded Brent, in a querulous tone. "I have not finished my discussion with Professor Shelby."

"What has that drivel to do with our business?" challenged Halthorpe. "The evening is waning. I am anxious to begin my usual walk. Tell me what is your decision?"

"My discussion with Professor Shelby," returned Brent, "has much to do with my future plans. He is reviving my eagerness to search for the ignis fatuus. I must weigh his statements before I decide whether or not I intend to remain here longer."

"And in the meantime," snorted Halthorpe, "a matter of real consequence is forced to go into the discard. You are exhibiting a childish nature, Brent."

"How about yourself, Halthorpe?" questioned Rokesbury, in a stern tone.

"What do you mean?" barked the lawyer, swinging angrily toward the engineer.

"You are bothering about the sale of the house," responded Rokesbury, quietly. "About a matter that can wait. All the while, you are neglecting the menace of which I have informed you. A murderer is at large. He is close by. Yet the fact means nothing to you."

"That bearded squatter?" sneered Halthorpe. "The man is a crazed fanatic. Perhaps he is tramping through the morass; or running back up the hillside. Certainly he is not close at hand."

"How can you tell?"

"Your men have not reported him. Yet you say they are searching outside. If the fellow came here, he has gone away. That light over the door would turn him back."

"Then you refuse to act in the matter?"

"To be guided by idle speculation? To start commotion over an absurd idea? Bah! Give these deputies revolvers. Send them back to the cabin. That is where the Dalwar might be found."

BEFORE Rokesbury could reply, there was a sound from the great hall. The outer door was opening. Then came voices and tramping footsteps. The engineer sprang through the door. He stepped back as he recognized two of his workmen. He beckoned to them. One came forward and followed Rokesbury into the paneled room.

"I found these, boss," informed the worker. "Alongside of a bush—by the swamp—on the door side of the house."

As Rokesbury stretched out his hand, Philo Halthorpe stared. Wildemar Brent and Darwin Shelby looked up from their new discussion. Dorothy stifled an exclamation.

The workman was passing Rokesbury three objects. The engineer laid them one by one upon the table. The first was an oddly shaped coat; the second a wide, flat hat; the third a false beard of jet-black hue.

"A disguise," announced Rokesbury, in a solemn tone. "That Dalwar was a fake. He wore that stuff to deceive us. He has come here, as I thought."

"He's not outside," affirmed the workman. "The gang has looked everywhere for him."

"He's gone back into the marsh," sneered Halthorpe. "He is somewhere in the morass, making his way back to the hill. He left those garments here to mock us. That is all."

"You are wrong, Halthorpe," pronounced Rokesbury, in a firm, challenging tone. "Wrong—as usual—with your false conclusions. I can tell you why this outfit was dropped at the edge of the bog."

"Why?" quizzed Halthorpe, testily.

"Because the murderer could not wear them further," retorted the engineer. "He was forced to lay aside his mask so that he could enter this house, not as the hunted Dalwar, but in his real character."

Rokesbury paused. He looked about from man to man. Halthorpe was sneering. Brent appeared annoyed. Shelby was blinking through his spectacles.

"I can tell you what has become of the murderer who wore this garb," declared Rokesbury, tapping the coat, the hat, the beard. "A crafty killer, he has sought to dupe new victims. Playing a double part, he has stepped into the role which he thinks cannot be discovered. He has become himself. What is more, he is here among us!"

A solemn silence followed Rokesbury's accusation. Hand on the gun that showed its handle from his hip, the engineer stood ready for any outburst that might follow his startling statement.

CHAPTER XVII. THE NEW ENTRANT

To Dorothy Brent, the moments that followed Nicholas Rokesbury's challenge seemed like a tense eternity. Bewildered, the girl looked about; first at the tapestried panels, then at the shaded windows. She half expected an apparition to spring up from the floor.

It was Philo Halthorpe who broke the silence. Staring straight into Nicholas Rokesbury's eyes, the rugged lawyer delivered a laughing sneer. His face was harsh; his glare was one that showed readiness to meet the challenge.

"You are a fool, Rokesbury!" hissed the lawyer. "Be gone, with your men. Talk of such bugaboos to the morons who compose your night shift. They are the type who would listen to such rumors. Idlers, ruffians, ex-convicts and -"

"Hold on, Halthorpe!" snapped Rokesbury. "You have evaded too many issues. We are dealing with a murderer. He killed Hector Lundig and Merle Cray. He slew two of my men in open conflict. Your dilatory methods are probably responsible for the fact that he is still at large. We are going to see this matter to a finish."

"I represent the law!" stormed Halthorpe.

"So you say," retorted Rokesbury. "But your chance friendship with the county prosecutor gives you no real authority. I have as much power as you."

"Where is your authority?"

"Here." Rokesbury tapped the butt of his revolver. "Moreover, I have men in back of me. I shall remain here, with them to aid me, until the murderer is discovered."

"You are not able to make arrests."

"These men are"—Rokesbury waved his free hand toward the stupefied deputies—"and they are seeking the murderer. Should I uncover him, I shall place him in their custody."

"It is their job to search."

"They requested me to assume that duty for them. I am acting at the request of officers, Halthorpe. You are trying to hinder a legal search. I shall not let you prevent it."

"You have no right to tramp through this house."

"I have a right to question those within this room. That is the issue for the present. I believe"—Rokesbury turned to the deputies—"that the murderer came in here. You heard Miss Brent say that she bolted the door each time a person entered. The three people who came in are with us here. What shall I do about it?"

"Question them," suggested one of the deputies.

"In your behalf?" asked Rokesbury.

"Yes," said the man.

"Very well," decided Rokesbury. "Halthorpe, I want to know more about your visit here. According to Miss Brent, you were the last person who came into the house."

"I refuse to answer any questions," snapped the lawyer.

"A process of elimination, then," decided the engineer. "You came in just ahead of Halthorpe, Professor Shelby. Where did you come from?"

"I was tramping through the quagmire," replied the professor, in a mild tone. "I was searching for the ignis fatuus. I was alone; I covered a considerable territory."

"Did you encounter any one in the swamp?"

"Not a soul. I saw occasional signs of an electric lantern, which I knew belonged to Wildemar Brent. When it moved toward the house, I decided to return."

"Where were you at the time?"

"On the side of the house toward the hill. I was probably a few furlongs distant from the house."

ROKESBURY nodded. He turned to Wildemar Brent.

"You came in first, didn't you?" quizzed Rokesbury.

"I did," responded the naturalist. "Moreover, I noted nothing on the marsh."

"What portion did you cover?"

"I went beyond the causeway at the start. You said that a watchman had reported seeing the ignis fatuus in that section. I crossed the causeway above the place where your shift is working. I found difficulty in tracing paths through the boggy soil, for it was my first visit to that region. So I came back to this side of the causeway and roamed a while before I returned to this house."

"Fair statements," remarked Rokesbury. "However, they still leave us in the dark. I am going to present a theory which has been forming in my mind. I intend to deal in probabilities: to eliminate those who could not have been disguised as the bearded squatter.

"Let us return to the night that the murderer killed my men. He carried Miss Brent from the house. I undertook the pursuit. I was aided in my search by Wildemar Brent. He led our party through the swamp. Therefore, it is a self-evident fact that Mr. Brent could not have been the disguised squatter.

"Next we have Professor Darwin Shelby. He had retired earlier that evening. He did not appear at the time of the gunfire; but he arrived after we had reached the cabin and were looking for the squatter. He knows the marsh as well as Mr. Brent. His statement that he had dressed and followed us through the swamp is both plausible and acceptable. He was not the man with the beard.

"Last, we have Philo Halthorpe." Rokesbury turned to stare steadily at the lawyer, who glowered in return. "He did not arrive at this house until after we returned with Miss Brent. He stated that he had been walking along the road that leads by the side of the swamp. Returning from a late evening tramp—those hikes seem to be a steady habit of his. He claimed that he came to the house because he saw the light over the door. Is that correct, Mr. Halthorpe?"

"I refuse to answer," rasped the lawyer. "I continue to dispute your authority, Rokesbury."

"My point is gained," resumed Rokesbury, gripping the handle of his gun. "I maintain that it would have been quite possible for Halthorpe to have come here in the guise of the squatter; to have carried off Miss Brent; to have returned by the road, without his disguise.

"It is also possible that he entered the cabin to-night and broke the rifles that belonged to the deputies. He could then have come through the swamp, dropped his disguise and entered this house as a welcomed guest. If the murderer is here"—Rokesbury emphasized the words—"he can be but one man present. That man is Philo Halthorpe!"

ROKESBURY'S accusation rang clear. Halthorpe's one response was a sneer. The deputies shifted as Rokesbury glanced in their direction; then one stepped forward and laid a hand on the lawyer's arm.

"Get away!" scoffed Halthorpe. "Are you as great a fool as Rokesbury? What do you intend to do? Arrest me?"

"You didn't answer the questions," said the deputy.

"Why should I?" snapped Halthorpe. "Who was Rokesbury, to ask them? Let me put a question of my own. Suppose I were the bearded fellow that you want. Why should I have been idiot enough to come back to that cabin? Why should I have created trouble for myself by coming to this house?"

"Answer those questions; then this one. Why would I have dropped the beard and hat beside the swamp where they could be found as evidence against me? I could have sunk them in the morass, where they would never be discovered.

"Think over those questions. Then, if you choose to act like fools, send Rokesbury back to his causeway, with his men. I shall walk into town with you. We can call the prosecutor from my home. He can come to Rensdale, with Garry Logan. They can decide what to do."

"All right," agreed the deputy. "Let us do that, Mr. Halthorpe. It will satisfy everybody. Come on"—he turned to his fellow officer—"and let's get going."

"Unarmed?" The question came from Rokesbury.

"That's right." The first deputy pondered. "We ought to have guns with us. Can you give us each a revolver, Mr. Rokesbury? Two of your men ought to be able to do without them."

"Certainly," responded Rokesbury.

"Wait a minute." The second deputy spoke nervously. "Maybe Mr. Halthorpe isn't all right; maybe he's the fellow that ran in on us at the cabin. We had rifles up there. They didn't do us any good. Even with revolvers, there'll only be two of us."

A snorting laugh came from Halthorpe. The lawyer had drawn himself up to his full height. The deputies stared, startled. The ruggedness of the lawyer filled them with alarm. They glanced at Rokesbury, seeking advice. Before the engineer could give it, new footsteps sounded in the hall. Another workman appeared at the door of the room.

"Fellow outside to see you, boss," informed the worker. "Says he knows you. A newspaper reporter named Burke."

"Keep him out of this," roared Halthorpe. "The fellow can see the prosecutor to-morrow. I shall have no absurd statements going to the press."

"So!" The exclamation came from Brent. "I was right about that chap. A reporter, eh? He shall not enter my home. I forbid it."

"Show Burke in," said Rokesbury, shortly. "Maybe he has something to tell us. At least I shall have

something to tell him."

"There's another guy with him," informed the worker.

"Let him come along," ordered Rokesbury.

"This is outrageous!" snorted Halthorpe, about to stride toward the door.

"Stay where you are," snapped Rokesbury, half drawing his gun.

The lawyer stopped. Wildemar Brent, rising as he mouthed a protest, went slumping back into his chair. Professor Shelby sat motionless.

The workman departed. He called from the hall. Thirty seconds later, Clyde Burke appeared in the doorway, followed by a tall, stoop-shouldered man whose overcoat collar obscured half his face. Clyde's companion remained in the background.

"A story for you, Burke," informed Rokesbury, as he saw the reporter. "I can give it to you; but you'll have to wait for confirmation from the proper authorities."

"I've got a story already," returned the reporter. "One that will beat anything you've uncovered. I've brought the man, himself, to tell it. Here he is."

Clyde stepped aside. The muffled man stepped into the light. He drew his hat from his head and dropped the collar of his overcoat. A gasp came from Dorothy Brent. The face that the girl viewed was almost identical with the visage that glared from the portrait above the fire place. It was Thaddeus Culeth, but younger and, and less stern.

The others stared, bewildered, all save Philo Halthorpe. It was the lawyer who delivered the words of recognition, the proof of the newcomer's identity. With a hoarse, startled voice, Halthorpe gasped the name:

"Austin Culeth!"

CHAPTER XVIII. THE HEIR SPEAKS

"YES, I am Austin Culeth." The long-faced visitor removed his overcoat as he spoke. The act showed him to be a man of rangy build. "You, Mr. Halthorpe, knew me when I lived in this mansion. These others, I presume, have heard of me."

"You were classed as dead," declared Halthorpe. "I have certificates to that effect from Durban, Natal. Yet I was not fully convinced of their accuracy, Austin."

"They were false," returned young Culeth. "I arranged to have them sent here in case of any inquiry. I felt sure that they would past muster."

"You mean that you deliberately planned the hoax yourself? That you eliminated yourself as the principal heir to your father's estate?"

"Exactly. I have money of my own. I was willing to forgo the tainted funds that my father might have left me."

"Explain yourself, Austin! This is incredible!"

The young heir looked about the group. Philo Halthorpe seemed challenging. Wildemar Brent wore a

quizzical expression. Professor Darwin Shelby appeared sympathetic. Nicholas Rokesbury wore a puzzled frown.

"I suppose," declared Austin, bitterly, "that you have all noted a resemblance between my features and those of my father's portrait that hangs in the great hall. Whatever any of you may know about my father, I can tell you that the resemblance is in facial appearance only. In spirit, in deed, my father and I were totally at odds.

"It may seem unnatural for a son to blacken his dead father's name. But remember: it was my father himself who chose the course of evil. My statements will be pure fact. I merely intend to reveal circumstances which he managed to conceal."

Philo Halthorpe took a step forward. He raised his hand in interruption. Austin Culeth waved the lawyer back. Nicholas Rokesbury involuntarily tightened his grip on the handle of his revolver; then relaxed.

"My father was a crook," assented Austin, solemnly. "He shared that secret with a band of dangerous criminals. But he was doubly crafty. Not only did he preserve a false reputation that his associates could not shatter; he also served as the genius of his evil band. It was to him that they brought the profits of their crimes."

"When did you learn this?" questioned Halthorpe.

"Years ago," responded Austin. "Before I went away to Africa. I suspected the part that my father was playing. I saw him in conference with men who looked like rogues. I witnessed the transfer of funds from them to him."

"Did you protest?"

"I did. My father was outraged, in his hypocritical fashion. He accused me of being a sneaky spy. Then, when I persisted in my bold accusation, he mocked me. He said that I was as helpless as the members of his band; that I could never prove anything against him. He said that he intended to make fools of his associates; that I would suffer if I betrayed his game.

"My response was direct. I told my father that I did not intend to expose his evil work. I had money of my own—a small legacy from my maternal grandfather. I left home and went abroad to Africa. In Durban, I decided to relieve myself of the Culeth name—for I considered it tainted."

"That was the reason for the death certificate," prompted Clyde Burke, from the doorway.

"I took the name of James Delaman," resumed the heir. "Austin Culeth was dead; I framed certificates to prove the fact. I lived in South Africa. I prospered. The years passed; during them my father carried out his threats. He double-crossed his associates and hoarded the ill-gotten funds that they had entrusted to him."

"How did you learn all this?" demanded Philo Halthorpe.

"Through Twindell," replied Austin. "Before I left home, I told the old servant of my suspicions. Twindell would not believe that my father was a crook. But he remembered all that I had told him and he discovered later that I was right.

"I kept my secret correspondence with Twindell, using the name of James Delaman. Twindell destroyed the letters that I wrote him, so that my father would not find them. But I have his correspondence with me. It is pitiful in parts."

AUSTIN paused to produce a packet of tattered envelopes, which he held in his right hand. His face had grown more sober than before. The watchers could see a quiver of his lips, produced by the thought of Twindell's death.

"Poor old Twindell," said Austin. "He was trapped. My father would have suspected him had he tried to leave the service. Twindell learned that my father made trouble for his former associates. Some were killed; others went to prison. Twindell sent me copies of letters that he found—letters which my father later destroyed. Those copies are with these documents.

"Even more important is a copy of a list that named all the crimes which the band had perpetrated. Moreover, Twindell was convinced that my father had hidden away the stolen wealth that he had gained. When I received that information, a great thought struck me. Should I inherit my father's estate, I might recover those funds and restore them to the banks and individuals from whom they had been taken."

Austin Culeth paused. His face had lightened. Keen enthusiasm showed upon his visage. Philo Halthorpe, hand to chin, watched him narrowly; then put a question.

"If that was your intention," asked the hard-faced lawyer, "why did you fail to appear at the time of your father's death?"

"He is coming to that," put in Clyde Burke. "You've only heard half his story, Mr. Halthorpe."

"Burke is right," declared Austin, with a nod. "My actions became peculiar; but Twindell's correspondence will explain them. Twindell wrote to me, some months ago, to relate that my father was living in a state that bordered upon terror. He had two additional servants in the house—strong men who were always armed. He had installed a kennel of dangerous dogs. Those hounds roamed loose at night. Obviously, my father still feared enemies.

"When my father was stricken with paralysis, I happened to be in New York. I received a letter from Twindell, telling me that it would be only a matter of time before my father died. I wanted to come to Rensdale; yet I feared to do so."

"Why?" Again the question came from Halthorpe.

"Because of my father's enemies," stated Austin. "I was sure of two facts. First: that they knew a secret way into the house. Their mysterious visits were proof of that fact. I believed that my father had blocked that secret entrance; but when he died, the crooks would probably have little difficulty in reopening it.

"Second: I was sure that the funds were hidden here. If my father had an enemy, that foe would be part of my heritage. I would have to be prepared for his attack. I needed some protection. I realized that I had it."

"What was your protection?" queried Brent, suddenly breaking into the story.

"The fact that I was supposedly dead," answered Austin, promptly. "I sensed that the man my father feared would begin operations after my father died. I wanted to observe what happened. So I came to Rensdale, but I did not enter the town. Instead, I went to the hillside and occupied one of the empty cabins. I disguised myself to resemble one of the hill-folk—a Dalwar."

"What!" exclaimed Nicholas Rokesbury. "You were the man on the hill all -"

"Yes," interrupted Austin. "I was the intruder who paid those visits to this house. Twindell was working with me. I came on nights when he signaled with a flashlight from the doorway."

PHILO HALTHORPE leaned back and delivered a guffaw. His laugh ended, the lawyer turned to Rokesbury. The engineer was standing in total perplexity.

"And you accused me," snorted Halthorpe. "I said you were a fool, Rokesbury. But you, Austin"—the lawyer scowled as he turned to the heir—"were also a fool. More than that, you are a murderer! In behalf of the law, I must arrest you -"

"Hear him to the finish," broke in Clyde Burke. "His hands are clean. When he killed, it was in self-defense."

"When he murdered Lundig?" quizzed Halthorpe, savagely, "and Cray?"

"I did not kill those men," retorted Austin. "I would have saved them."

"Listen to the story," urged Clyde.

"All right," rasped Halthorpe. "He has already incriminated himself. Let him proceed and build a complete case that the law can use against him. Continue with your confession, Austin."

"This is not a confession," responded Austin, hotly. "Listen and learn new truth. When I knew that Hector Lundig was here to claim the estate, I feared for him. When Twindell informed me that Hector was coming to the house, I told him to warn the young fellow. Twindell did."

"I thought so," declared Rokesbury. "I remember Hector talking to me in my car."

"I saw Twindell speak to Lundig," put in Brent. "It was out in the hallway."

A slight smile showed on Halthorpe's lips. The rugged lawyer, however, did not add his statement to the others. Halthorpe could be a man of silence when he chose.

"I learned of Lundig's death through Twindell," stated Austin. "Then I feared that others might suffer. I saw one way to prevent further murder. Whoever the killer might be, his purpose was to find the wealth in this old mansion. If I could uncover the spoils, I would end the menace. So I resolved to search the house.

"Twindell and I had held conferences on various evenings. I always came through the marsh, wearing my disguise. I had known the path to the hillside since boyhood. One night Twindell signaled. He left the door unbolted. I entered. He and I went down into the cellar, to begin our search there."

"That was what I heard!" exclaimed Dorothy. "You were tapping the walls!"

"Yes," nodded Austin. "I barely managed to escape. Yet Twindell thought that you might have glimpsed me."

"I did," said the girl. "I saw your hat and beard."

"Nevertheless," resumed Austin, "I came back. I wanted to resume my search in the cellar. Twindell warned me that Detective Cray was in the house; he thought the fellow was asleep in the corner room. I entered the door to the cellar. Cray was down there; he heard me and flashed his light."

"So you killed him," sneered Halthorpe.

"No," returned Austin. "I started back. I heard shots. I thought that Cray was firing at me. As I fled, some one began a struggle with Twindell. The servant fought with him, but the man escaped."

"I saw the struggle!" exclaimed Dorothy. "I thought it was Twindell fighting with the man who wore the beard—with you, Mr. Culeth."

"That proves my statement," declared Austin, with a smile. "These letters are evidence that Twindell was on my side. He would not have battled with me."

"A good point," put in Rokesbury, before Halthorpe could speak.

"I WENT back up on the hill," resumed Austin. "When next I saw Twindell, several nights had passed. I knew that I was running a terrible risk to come here. But Twindell summoned me and I came. We whispered together by the fire place. He told me alarming news."

"What was that?" asked Halthorpe quickly.

"First, that Mr. Brent was poking about the house. That made me fear that the hidden criminal would act."

"I was looking for places that needed repairing," protested Brent. "Mr. Halthorpe said that he was going to have the house gone over after I left."

"Twindell told me about Halthorpe's plan also," added Austin. "That made an even stronger chance that a hiding place might be uncovered. Then he told me that Rokesbury had searched this tapestried room."

"Ah!" Halthorpe's eyes gleamed in quick challenge. "So you were poking about, too, eh, Rokesbury? Who gave you that right?"

"I did," asserted Dorothy. "Nicholas and I discussed the mystery of this mansion. The cellar had been searched by his men. The door to this room was open on the night that Cray was murdered. We thought that this room might hold some secret."

"So I had my men remove the tapestried panels," stated Rokesbury. "We found solid walls behind them. We put the panels back in place."

"Twindell saw you," put in Austin Culeth. "That was the final reason why he sent for me. We talked things over in the hall. I was in a quandary. I decided it best to leave. I intended to dispose of my disguise; to reveal myself and ask the aid of the law after taking possession of this house. Then trouble started."

"I began it," admitted Dorothy. "I heard you downstairs. I flashed a light from the window toward the causeway."

"Which I saw," added Rokesbury. "I brought my men; while they surrounded the house, I came in the passage window."

"We know the rest," said Halthorpe, tartly. "Go on, Austin. Why did you abduct Miss Brent?"

"Because she saw me," said Austin. "She would have given me away. I did not know that men were waiting outside. I wanted to carry her away from the house; to explain who I was; to gain her aid. Then I found my path blocked. Men were aiming to shoot me. I fired in return."

"And killed two of them," reminded Halthorpe.

"Yes," admitted Austin, soberly. "My aim was closer than I had intended. When one has trekked the African veldt and battled through the jungle, he is apt to have a quick and ready trigger. I am willing to stand trial for the manslaughter that I committed. Yet I was partly within my rights."

"How so?"

"The house was actually mine. I had a right to enter it. Those workmen were trespassers. They did not know who I was; but I did not know who they were. They would have killed me instantly but for the girl. I thought they were going to fire anyway, as I neared the marsh. To turn back would have meant certain death. I acted to defend myself and to save Miss Brent."

"No jury will send him up for that," assured Clyde Burke. "Don't let them worry you, old chap. Tell the rest of the story."

"I was pursued," declared Austin. "I knew that I would have to make a quick explanation to Miss Brent when I reached the cabin. But before I could revive her, a stranger leaped in from the door."

"And you fought him!" exclaimed Dorothy. "I remember!"

"I knocked him out," said Austin. "Then I encountered another intruder at the door of the little room. I sprang upon him. I could not see his face in the dark; but he fought with the strength of a giant."

"Yet you threw him through the window," declared Rokesbury.

"I did not," returned Austin. "We smashed against the window when we struggled. I tried to throw him through. He landed a jujutsu hold. I was the one who went headfirst through the opened window frame. I landed headforemost. Although the ground was soft, I was stunned."

"When I came to my senses, I was lying on the ground above the cabin—in the fringe of the woods. A man was leaning over me. He was the fellow whom I had first knocked out. My beard—my hat—my coat— all were gone."

"The man whom I had first attacked proved to be a friend. He called me by name. Somehow, he seemed to know much about my visits to Twindell. He gave his name as Vincent; and he helped me up the mountain to the shack beneath the airway beacon."

"And you remained there?" asked Halthorpe.

"Until to-night," replied Austin.

"When you returned to the cabin," declared Rokesbury.

"No," said Austin. "I stayed in the beacon shack until nearly ten o'clock. Then Vincent took me to his car. He drove me down and around the mountain, into the town of Rensdale. He told me that it was time my story should be known."

"Why?" questioned Halthorpe.

"I do not know," admitted Austin. "Nor did Vincent. He seemed to be acting under the orders of some hidden chief, whom I knew only as the superhuman being who had pitched me from the window of the cabin."

"Vincent told me that he had learned of a New York reporter staying at the Hotel Rensdale. He believed the man's name was Burke. He told me that this reporter would certainly listen to my story; that he might be keen enough to suggest a course of action. So I found Burke. My story convinced him. He believed that it would convince others. So we came out here."

A PAUSE followed Austin Culeth's speech. The heir's story was ended. Austin looked from man to man,

again seeking to study their expressions. Conviction was registered upon all faces with one exception. Philo Halthorpe still looked dubious.

"Your story, Austin," stated the lawyer, "has the semblance of truth. But it does not account for the murders of Lundig and Cray. Wait! Do not interrupt me!" Austin had been about to speak. "I know that we have only circumstantial evidence to link those deaths with you, as the squatter on the hill.

"But one flaw in a story"—Halthorpe smiled harshly—"leaves it open to doubt throughout. You say that you were the Dalwar—that is, the pretended Dalwar—and you have accounted for all your actions. But your story is not complete. Tell us, Austin, why did you fail to state that you entered the cabin to-night; that you came down through the marsh, once more the bearded squatter -"

"I performed no such act!" exclaimed Austin.

"Then how do you account for these?" quizzed Halthorpe, picking up the hat and beard that lay upon the table. "Two deputies are here to testify that you came upon them in the cabin. One of Rokesbury's workmen found these on the fringe of the marsh, just outside this house."

Austin Culeth stared. For the first time, he noticed the incriminating garments. His puzzled, hunted expression proved that he recognized them as the very articles that he had worn while living in the cabin.

"I did not wear those to-night!" exclaimed the heir. "I lost them, the night of the fight in the cabin. They are mine; but I did not wear them to-night."

"Then who did?" demanded Halthorpe.

"I can answer that question," came a quiet voice. The lawyer wheeled. He stared at Professor Darwin Shelby, who had risen. "Austin Culeth is correct. Some one else wore that garb to-night."

"Do you know the man?" snarled Halthorpe.

"Yes," replied the professor, blinking as he smiled mildly. "I was the man who wore them."

CHAPTER XIX. THE SHADOW SPEAKS

THIS had been a night of surprises. One startling development had followed another. The unexpected statement of Professor Darwin Shelby added to the series. Every one—Philo Halthorpe included—was at a total loss.

"My story is a short one," declared Shelby, holding the floor without interruption. "I must confess that I behaved in an eccentric manner, but"—he paused to smile as he surveyed the group—"I do not think that my behavior is more erratic than searching a bogland for the ignis fatuus, or taking long, lonely tramps across the country after sunset."

Philo Halthorpe and Wildemar Brent caught the inference. They sat silent while the professor continued.

"I am a bit of a criminologist," he declared. "I keep that fact quite to myself, as a rule. However, the strange crimes that occurred within this mansion interested me deeply; particularly because I had observed them at close range.

"To-night, while tramping through the bogland, the chill troubled me even though its intensity had lessened. I chanced to find myself at the border of the hillside. I resolved to stroll to higher ground, to escape the cold dampness.

"That led me to think of the squatter's cabin. I presumed that these guards would have a fire there. So I ascended the hill, intending to enter the cabin. As I neared the building, however, I realized that I might be mistaken for an intruder instead of a friend who had come for temporary warmth.

"I paused near the rear of the cabin. I turned my electric lantern on the ground. There I spied a slight depression in the ground; it went beneath the cabin. Though it was too small for a person to enter, I decided to learn if it had a use. I approached with my torch. I spied black cloth beneath the frame house. Searching closer, I uncovered these."

The professor paused to indicate the disguise that had once been worn by Austin Culeth. He picked up the beard, held it before his face and dropped it.

"I realized," said the bespectacled scientist, "that the supposed Dalwar had been an impostor. I wondered if he were still in the vicinity. Perhaps he might be spying in some other character. I wondered what the psychological effect would be upon him should definite evidence be established that he had returned to his cabin.

"Brent and I go armed through the marsh. I had a revolver with me. Seized by a mad-cap mood, I donned the disguise. I wanted to witness the effect that it would produce. I thought of the men in the cabin; I entered by the door. The result was startling; so much so, that I feared the immediate consequences.

"The guards were ready to leap for their rifles. I was forced to seize the weapons. Realizing that I was playing a false character, I utilized all my strength to give a display of the power that the squatter was reputed to possess. I demolished the weapons."

A PAUSE. One of the deputies growled in recollection of the scene in the cabin.

"And how he did it!" muttered the officer. "Boy! He must have been a circus strong man when he was a kid."

"Then I hastened from the cabin," resumed the professor. "I seized my lantern, which I had left outside. I sped down the hill to the marsh. I picked my way through the quagmire. I was a bit excited; more so than I had supposed. For I was on the point of stalking into this house, beard and all.

"Realizing that such a course would create consternation, I paused on the brink of the morass and doffed the disguise. I placed the garments and the beard beneath a convenient bush. Then I came to the door and rang the bell. Miss Brent admitted me. That concludes the story."

The professor had risen while speaking. He had strolled past Nicholas Rokesbury. Approaching Austin Culeth, he extended his hand. The young man received it warmly.

"I, for one," declared the professor, "believe in your sincerity. I hope that my explanation of to-night's occurrence will solve this trifling dilemma that has been thrust upon you."

"It has!" cried Austin. "That settles matters, Mr. Halthorpe. You cannot doubt me now. But there is still a question that must be answered. Hector Lundig was slain; so was Merle Cray. I believe the murderer is still near Rensdale. In fact"—the heir's eyes were flashing—"he has every reason to be among us. Who could he be?"

Halthorpe looked warily about. Apparently, he was impressed by Austin's statement. In his usual decisive fashion, the lawyer felt that he must deliver some striking theory. His sharp eyes turned upon Wildemar Brent.

"You came frequently to Rensdale, Brent," challenged Halthorpe. "As I recall it, you were remarkably prompt in your desire to purchase this house."

"As headquarters for my search for the ignis fatuus," broke in Brent. "Take note of that, Halthorpe."

"A fine pretext!" snorted the lawyer. "One that enabled you to roam at large whenever you chose. Out on the marsh—always the same story. You were here, Brent"—Halthorpe's tone was accusing—"before Hector Lundig died. You were in this house the night that Merle Cray was slain. Can you explain your actions on both those evenings—can you give your exact whereabouts on both occasions?"

"I was in the bogland, when Lundig met death," declared Brent. "I was in my room upstairs when Cray was killed in the cellar."

"The footprints led to the marsh," sneered Halthorpe. "I mean the ones that were found after Lundig's murder. As for the death of Cray, I understand that you might have been anywhere before you appeared in the hallway. Down in the cellar, possibly, instead of in your room."

"You are accusing Uncle Wildemar of murder!" cried Dorothy.

"I am stating," declared Halthorpe, sternly, "that he could have played the part of Simon Glosting, the killer of Hector Lundig. Also, that he could have laid a trap for Merle Cray. I may add, after hearing what Austin Culeth has said, that Wildemar Brent might well have been searching for something in this house as much as for the will-o'-the-wisp in the marsh."

"He admits that he was tapping through the mansion. This very afternoon, so Garry Logan told me, he had taken down the portrait of Thaddeus Culeth and was searching behind it. To-night, he was planning to stay longer in this house."

WILDEMAR BRENT was on his feet. His face, usually pallid, had taken on a purplish tinge. The naturalist seemed enraged by Halthorpe's inferences; yet words failed him. He stood quivering, clenching his fists in an excited manner.

"A clever scheme," sneered Halthorpe. "You, Brent, as Thaddeus Culeth's hidden enemy -"

"Stop!" The exclamation came from Dorothy. "Say nothing further, Mr. Halthorpe."

The lawyer paused, glowering. Dorothy turned to Rokesbury who was standing stolid as a statue, with arms akimbo. It was to the engineer that Dorothy made her plea.

"Can't you help us?" queried the girl. "Can't you refute these accusations, Nicholas? Don't you believe that my uncle is innocent?"

"I do," declared Rokesbury, suddenly. "Leave this to me, Dorothy. Look here, Halthorpe"—the engineer faced the lawyer, who had turned in his direction—"you are a great hand at creating hypothetical cases against people. I wonder what lies behind your odd procedure."

"What do you mean?" snorted the lawyer.

"Just this." Rokesbury spoke steadily. "You were Thaddeus Culeth's attorney. You knew more about him than Wildemar Brent did. You lived in the town of Rensdale. Your position was an ideal one to keep track of Thaddeus Culeth."

"You are accusing me -"

"Of being the hidden crook? Yes. Those evening hikes of yours are more suspicious than Brent's search for the marsh lights. Where were you the night that Hector Lundig was murdered? Somewhere out on the countryside, so you say.

"But you could have played the part of Simon Glosting. You could have fled to the causeway. You didn't show up until long after the murder. The same thing happened the night that Merle Cray was killed. You were out on a hike. Perhaps you were here, in this house. Perhaps you slew Cray; then fled, to show up afterward."

Philo Halthorpe chewed his lips. He glared with venom as he met Rokesbury's steady gaze. Then, with a sneer, he came back with a question.

"How could I have been in this house?" asked the lawyer. "How could I have left here? Your ideas are absurdities, Rokesbury. You made a fool of yourself when you accused me of being the disguised squatter. You are making a fool of yourself right now."

"I am piecing circumstances," retorted Rokesbury, hotly. "I see your game, Philo Halthorpe. Working in as Thaddeus Culeth's lawyer, you could bide your time. You were pleased when Wildemar Brent bought this house. You saw your chance to remodel it after he left for the winter. Then you would have your opportunity to search the place for Thaddeus Culeth's wealth at your leisure.

"Hector Lundig was suspicious. You had to get rid of him. The same with Merle Cray. When I put my men to search in the cellar, looking for evidence after Cray had died, you tried to hinder their search. You did not want people to look through this old mansion."

Halthorpe was filled with rage. He steadied, however, as Rokesbury paused. Again, he shot his question.

"How could I have come in here to kill Cray?"

"How?" Rokesbury stepped forward. "I can tell you. Through that secret entrance of which Austin Culeth has spoken. Its inner end is probably in the cellar. That is how you entered. That is how you escaped. That is why you objected to our search."

"I simply saw no use in the search," responded Halthorpe, savagely. "This attempt to make a circumstantial case against me -"

"Is like your accusation of me!" The hoarse challenge came from Wildemar Brent. "Rokesbury is right. The shoe is on the other foot, Halthorpe. You accused me to cover your own actions. Rokesbury has unmasked you."

HALTHORPE was on his feet. He turned as though to make for the door. Rokesbury reached for his gun. The lawyer paused. Clenching his big fists, he looked about. He met Brent's glare; then Rokesbury's; finally the accusing stare of Austin Culeth. Then a sudden light showed on the lawyer's hard face.

"Where is Professor Shelby?" he demanded. "Look! He has left the room. He admitted a part in this game. He could have been Simon Glosting. He never showed up here until after the death of Hector Lundig."

"Trying to stall us, Halthorpe?" demanded Rokesbury.

"I want to question the professor," asserted Halthorpe. "He was in this house the night of Merle Cray's murder. I demand that he be made to declare himself."

"Halvorpe is right," put in Brent, in an excited tone. "We must hear more from Professor Shelby."

"Yes," agreed Rokesbury. "If we don't, Halvorpe will keep on passing the buck. Hurry, you fellows"—he turned to his two workmen—"and pass the word outside. Have them stop the professor if he tries to leave. Then get up to the second floor. See if Shelby is in his room."

The men moved out. Silence persisted in the tapestried room. The listeners heard the workmen going to the outer door; they heard the order called to those outside; then came the sound of Rokesbury's men pounding up the stairs to the second floor.

"We'll hear the professor's statement," asserted the engineer. "We will find out what he knows; and we will weigh his statement. Before another person leaves this room, the name of the murderer will be disclosed."

A momentary pause; then came a sound that made all swing toward the door. Rokesbury's hand went to his gun. It stopped there, petrified. Fixed expressions appeared on every face within the room; countenances were frozen by the sinister whisper of a weird, chilling laugh.

There, in the door, stood a figure garbed in black. The upturned collar of a flowing cloak; the projecting brim of a slouch hat—both concealed the arrival's countenance. Only eyes were visible; eyes that burned like spots of fire. Gloved hands, projecting from the cloak, held looming automatics. The sight of those guns had stayed Nicholas Rokesbury's instinctive motion to draw his revolver.

"You seek a murderer." The tones of The Shadow's sinister voice came from his hidden lips. "So you shall find him. He is here, within this room. Harken while I name him."

A pause of momentary silence, so tense that it seemed never-ending. Then came the pronunciation of the name which listeners expected. It was hissed from The Shadow's unseen lips:

"Nicholas Rokesbury!"

CHAPTER XX. THE END OF CRIME

No one stirred as The Shadow's hissed pronouncement echoed in whispers from the tapestried walls. Steady, burning eyes; massive, menacing automatics still held the throng motionless.

Nicholas Rokesbury was rigid, his face had turned ashen while his fingers were stilled upon the handle of his revolver. Philo Halvorpe was stooped forward with hands upon the table. The lawyer's mouth was agape.

Wildemar Brent had slumped back in his chair. Dorothy was standing by the wall, amazement in her expression. Austin Culeth was staring at The Shadow. He had recognized the mysterious warrior who had conquered him in the conflict in the cabin.

Clyde Burke and the deputies formed a group of three men who made no move. The reporter did not have to pretend astonishment. Even though he knew The Shadow as his master, Clyde was dumfounded at the sudden entry of his spectral chief.

All seemed to sense that further words were coming. They were correct in this conjecture. Tersely, in steady, inflexible tones, The Shadow drove home the truth of his accusations.

"You are the crook who sought Thaddeus Culeth's life." The Shadow's burning gaze was fixed on Nicholas Rokesbury. "You established yourself in Rensdale. You gained the contract to construct the causeway. Surrounded by hired ruffians—your workers—you bided your time until Thaddeus Culeth

died.

"Hector Lundig became an obstacle. You decided to remove him. You planted footprints leading to the causeway. You entered the hotel as Simon Glosting. Removing your disguising garments, you placed them in the box that a workman took to the causeway.

"Returning to your own character, you went to your room. Half shaven you entered Lundig's room and slew him. You dashed back to your own room and arrived as a rescuer. You had already prepared the rope of torn sheets to indicate the pretended flight of Simon Glosting."

A pause. The Shadow's laugh sounded as a weird whisper. The fire-eyed master had moved forward into the tapestried room. His gaze still glowed on Nicholas Rokesbury.

"Those extra shoes were obviously left behind," sneered The Shadow. "They were proof that the killer wanted his tracks discovered. All the evidence showed me that the murderer wanted to lead pursuers away from the hotel. That made me suspect you as the killer. Yet, at the time, there was still a possibility that another might be the murderer."

THE eyes burned toward Halthorpe then at Brent. This showed that The Shadow had once suspected that either of them might be guilty. Then the burning optics again centered upon Rokesbury.

"I came here as Professor Darwin Shelby," hissed the merciless accuser. "The real Professor Shelby died recently in London. I observed Austin Culeth—as the bearded Dalwar—when he came to confer with Twindell. When Merle Cray was murdered—through his own folly—I knew the truth; Austin Culeth could not be the killer. The real murderer must have entered and left by a secret exit in the cellar.

"I found that opening. It had been blocked but reopened. It led to the old well between this house and the causeway. I knew that the search of your men, Rokesbury, was a pretence. You had used that passage to enter the cellar and lie in wait for Austin Culeth. You were forced to kill Merle Cray in his stead. You left and followed your men here to the house."

Rokesbury's face was white. The engineer's expression showed that The Shadow had divined the absolute truth. But the grim accuser had not finished.

"I sought to prevent Austin Culeth's next visit," declared The Shadow, in his shivering whisper. "Chance was against me. Austin Culeth entered a trap. Twindell saved him from you, Rokesbury, but Twindell died because of his faithfulness. You slew him in cold blood.

"Good fortune enabled Austin Culeth to escape your men outside. When you testified to your actions, when you expressed feigned regret at the death of Twindell, you gave yourself entirely away. To cover the fact that you had entered by the secret tunnel, you stated that you had come in by a window in the passage by the hall. That window—like all others except those in the locked corner room—is solid. No one could have entered through its metal structure."

This was the statement that brought instinctive exclamations from Philo Halthorpe and Wildemar Brent. Both remembered Nicholas Rokesbury's explanation of his entry on the night of Twindell's death. They realized that the man's own testimony—held in the prosecutor's files—was evidence of his guilt.

"I used your passage," concluded The Shadow. "It is open, for all to see. To-night, I played the part of the bearded squatter. I brought the climax that was needed. I wanted all here to listen to Austin Culeth; then to learn the truth of your guilt, Nicholas Rokesbury.

"You sought Thaddeus Culeth's hidden wealth. It was in your grasp; but you did not know it. When you

removed those tapestried panels -"

The Shadow's statement ended. With amazing swiftness, the black-cloaked accuser wheeled to the door. His keen ears had detected approaching footsteps. Rokesbury's men, not finding Professor Darwin Shelby, had returned. They had caught The Shadow's sinister tones; they had sensed that their chief was in trouble.

THE SHADOW'S sudden twist forestalled their surprise attack. As the two workmen sprang forward, leveling their guns, The Shadow whirled through the doorway to meet them. His automatics delivered tongues of flame. One thug crumpled; the other wavered. His gun arm dropped; then, with a dying effort, he sprang upon The Shadow. He clutched the black-garbed fighter with a frenzied death grip.

Nicholas Rokesbury's game was up. Knowing it, the crook acted with sudden promptness. He yanked his revolver from his hip. Wildly, he sprang toward the door. Of all the startled witnesses, one alone was quick enough to act. That was Austin Culeth.

The man who had trekked the South African veldt had given previous displays of his mighty strength. He pounced upon Rokesbury as the fellow neared the door. Catching the man about the body, Austin sent him spinning across the floor to the wall. Following the swift strike, Austin again pounced forward toward the crook.

Rokesbury responded. His head had struck a thick tapestry. He was not stunned by the thump. Up came his revolver. A vicious snarl hissed from his leering lips. Then came a roaring shot. It was not from Rokesbury's gun, however. That report was delivered from the door.

The Shadow had hurled the dying workman aside. Swinging, he had fired with quick aim. His hot bullet had speeded straight to its appointed mark—the heart of Nicholas Rokesbury. As Austin Culeth completed his lunge toward the man on the floor, Rokesbury rolled sidewise, dead.

REVOLVERS barked from the great hall. The rest of Rokesbury's crew was piling into the mansion. They had spied their fellows dead upon the floor. The first of the intruders fired wildly at the form of The Shadow, framed in the doorway to the tapestried room.

The Shadow turned. His automatics boomed. Weaving forward, he delivered burning slugs into the ranks of these vicious enemies. Pretended workmen—actually ex-convicts hired by Rokesbury—went tumbling to the floor. Yet others came surging in behind them. The Shadow was ready for all.

Crooks fired wild shots at the vague figure that was weaving its way toward the passage to the cellar steps. But The Shadow, swaying elusively, was perfect in his aim. While bullets whistled past his shrouded form, his automatics kept up their stinging fire. Newcomers sprawled upon the floor. Others went screaming, staggering from the house.

One lull enabled The Shadow to swing his emptied automatics beneath his cloak. A second brace of weapons delivered the final shots. The doorway was cleared, with wounded crooks lying in the hall and on the ground outside. But The Shadow did not choose that exit. Instead, he opened the door to the cellar. He descended and reached an opening in a bin. He entered a low, blackened tunnel—the secret way to the old well that lay between the mansion and the causeway.

THE crowd was surging out from the tapestried room. The deputies seized revolvers dropped by the first crooks whom The Shadow had encountered. Austin Culeth had drawn a revolver of his own; Philo Halthorpe had seized Nicholas Rokesbury's weapon.

While Wildemar Brent and Clyde Burke were slowly following with Dorothy, Austin and Halthorpe came

back. They tossed revolvers on the table. These were the guns of Rokesbury's entire crew. The deputies were bringing the wounded men into the hall. Halthorpe was taking charge.

Clyde Burke set out for town to summon physicians. Austin Culeth, strained by his long ordeal, slumped into a chair beside the table. He looked up suddenly to face Wildemar Brent and Dorothy. He spoke, in a mechanical tone.

"You heard what our strange rescuer said," declared Austin. "Just before the final fight—to Rokesbury—about my father's wealth. How Rokesbury"—Austin paused thoughtfully—"had the spoils in his grasp. When he was in this room -"

As Austin paused again, Brent and Dorothy looked toward the tapestried panels. The girl remembered that Rokesbury had removed them. She turned to Austin.

"Those panels," she began, "with the thick tapestries -"

Austin was nodding as he arose. He drew a knife from his pocket. He thrust the blade into the edge of a thick-clothed panel. He ran the knife sidewise, upward, sidewise. The tapestry peeled back like the cover of a paperbound book.

Fitted between the cloth of the tapestry and the muslin that served as backing were flat sheets of paper that gleamed with gold-inked printing. One came loose in Austin's hands. Shaking, the heir carried it to the table.

"A utility bond!" exclaimed Austin. "Ten thousand dollars of United Power right -"

"Worth far above par!" exclaimed Brent. "We know what your father did with the stolen wealth he held!"

"Every panel holds them," asserted Austin. "Those tapestries are backed with more than a million in gilt-edged securities. Look here!"

He was plucking new bonds from the panel that he had opened. His knife blade ripped the edges of a second tapestry. More bonds came into view. Austin was trembling as he brought them into the light.

"Consolidated Electric!" exclaimed Brent. "Also worth more than your father invested in it. Austin, you can restore every cent that was stolen and still have many thousands of your own!"

"We must tell Philo Halthorpe!" declared Austin, suddenly. "Come! He is outside."

The trio hurried from the room. They passed through the hall where the deputies were watching the wounded crooks who had served Nicholas Rokesbury in his vile schemes. The outer door was open. They found Philo Halthorpe pacing the drive beneath the alcove light, waiting for Clyde Burke to return with the physicians.

"We've found the hidden wealth!" exclaimed Austin, hoarsely. "Found it where our mysterious rescuer indicated. In back of the tapestries of the panels."

PHILO HALTHORPE stood dumfounded. He began to stutter his surprise. Then came a cry from Wildemar Brent. The naturalist sprang out into the drive. He stood there, pointing toward the blackness of the swamp, beneath the sweeping beam of the distant airway beacon.

"Look!" cried Brent. "Look! At last—at last—at last! The ignis fatuus."

"The marsh lights," expressed Austin, in an awed tone. "I remember seeing them here when I was a boy."

A luminous nebula of bluish light was creeping, wavering across the surface of the marsh, less than a hundred yards from where the watchers stood. It was the eerie will-o'-the-wisp, that strange phenomenon that some have termed the "Jack o' Lantern."

Like a ghostly figure, the blue light flickered just above the boggy muck. It was traveling mysteriously between the mansion and the hill. Sometimes it seemed to take the shape of a gigantic human; at other moments it formed an elongated cloud. But always it glowed with that mysterious luminosity which science has sought unsuccessfully to explain.

In his hushed enthusiasm, Wildemar Brent forgot all but the ignis fatuus. The startling events within the house passed momentarily from his mind. He forgot the revelations that The Shadow had made.

"If Professor Shelby were only here," said Brent. "He would understand my enthusiasm -"

The naturalist paused. He realized that there was no Professor Darwin Shelby. He stared again toward the mystic marsh lights. The wavering glow had reached a fixed position—a usual occurrence with the ignis fatuus. The other watchers stared as tense as Brent. All seemed to sense that something strange was about to happen.

Into the aura of bluish light stepped a shrouded figure. Spectral in the cold glow, The Shadow moved forward. The lights was wavering as it formed a luminous setting for that weird shape cloaked in black.

Then came a creepy sound, as strange as the phenomenon of the marsh light. From the spot where the ignis fatuus still shone came a weird, triumphant laugh. It rose to a startling crescendo. It shivered into nothingness. The house caught the quivering echoes. Ghoulish tongues seemed to answer from gray walls, responding to the call of a mysterious master.

The watchers gasped as they stared at the avenging figure that had become motionless against the flickering blue background of the weird light. Then came a sudden fading of the ignis fatuus. Complete darkness reigned on the morass; with it was the hush of absolute silence.

Weird as the elusive will-o'-the-wisp, The Shadow, triumphant, had vanished into the blackness of the marsh.

THE END