FORGOTTEN GOLD

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CHAPTER I. FORGOTTEN GOLD

HARRY VINCENT stopped at the dilapidated railway station and sent his telegram. The old station agent read it through a pair of horn-rimmed glasses, but offered no comment. The wire simply read:

CLYDE BURKE,
NEW YORK CLASSIC,
NEW YORK, N. Y.

WEATHER HOTTER THAN EVER.
HOPE TO LEAVE HERE BY TOMORROW.
VINCENT.

The weather was hot, as it should have been for this was Georgia in midsummer. Even the boards of the station platform were warped by the heat, which Harry could feel through his shoe leather as he paced outside the station agent's window. The tracks, curving off among the red-dirt hills, seemed to wiggle as

Harry watched them.

Maybe the tracks did wiggle. Remembering his trip to Hillville, over that same branch line, Harry was inclined to such an opinion. But when he looked at the few unpainted buildings that fringed the single track, they seemed to waver, too. High noon in Hillville, Georgia, could certainly produce enough heat waves to give the illusion of an earthquake.

The telegraph key was clacking in the agent's office. Harry's wire was going to his friend, Clyde Burke, who, in turn, would relay it to The Shadow. A very simple way for Harry to inform his chief, The Shadow, that the job in Hillville was about finished and showed good chances of the desired result.

Harry was turning toward the coupe that he had parked near the station platform when the agent poked his head from the little window and called after him:

"Telegram here for Robert Beverly. Want to take it along, Mr. Vincent?"

Harry accepted Beverly's telegram; pocketing it, he drove away. He knew that the wire was probably from Morton Selwood, in New York. It might have something interesting to say, but whatever it was, Harry would learn it from Bob Beverly as soon as he got back to camp. If Harry hadn't done anything else on this expedition, he had certainly won Bob's confidence.

It was a five-mile drive from Hillville, over roads that sloped between woods of southern pine, before Harry reached the turn that took him toward the camp. He slackened as he neared the turnoff, watched another car coming from the opposite direction. It took the very sand road that Harry expected to take.

Harry knew the car and the man who drove it: Bert Peld. An odd sort, Peld - the one sour note in this expedition. Peld seemed to have a lot of things on his mind other than the search for the lost Aureole Mine.

Bob Beverly was sorry that he had hired the fellow, but firing Peld was a difficult proposition. Harry agreed with Bob that it was better to keep Peld with them than to let him leave their sight permanently.

As Harry swung into camp he saw Peld alight from his old car. Hearing Harry's approach, Peld gave a suspicious stare, and the sunlight offered a good glimpse of the fellow's sallow, pointed face.

Then Peld had started up the path to the high hill, where the whole party was at work. Harry decided not to overtake him, for there would be no use to start another argument with Peld at this late date.

ANOTHER man had heard the cars approach. Bob Beverly stepped from his tent too late to witness Peld's return, but he saw Harry alighting from the coupe and waved a greeting.

A cheery fellow, Bob, even when he had a lot of burdens on his mind. His dark hair, rugged face and steady eyes marked him as the type who would give as much as expected, and perhaps more.

That was probably why Bob liked Harry and didn't like Peld. Harry was a type after Bob's own: clean-cut in manner, straightforward in action. They were the sort who looked like friends, and a weasel-eyed specimen like Peld didn't belong in their company. It was a tribute to the patience of both Bob Beverly and Harry Vincent that they could put up with Bert Peld at all.

Harry handed Bob the telegram. His friend opened it, read it, and passed it back. As Harry expected, it was from Morton Selwood, and its message was more blunt than ever. It read:

ROBERT BEVERLY,

HILLVILLE, GEORGIA.

MUST HAVE RESULTS WITHIN

TWO DAYS. URGE ALTHORN TO

LIMIT.

MORTON SELWOOD.

Bob clamped a strong hand on Harry's shoulder, and gestured toward a pair of camp stools that were under a shading cypress near the little stream that flowed toward the swampland below the camp. Bob talked as soon as they were seated.

"We're on the homestretch, Harry," he said. "We'll crack this thing today or never. But I don't think it will be never. That's why" - he nudged his thumb toward the hill - "I've got poor old Althorn sweating away. I want results by sundown, and I didn't need Selwood's telegram to tell me so."

Harry nodded. He was thinking of the wire that he had sent; how "weather hotter," as Harry had put it, meant that the hunt was mighty warm, and should be over "by tomorrow," as Harry had also expressed. Then Bob was talking again.

"I'd like to sum up a few facts, Harry," said Bob, "just so we know exactly where we stand. You're acquainted with most of the facts, but don't stop me. I don't want to miss any points."

"Go ahead, Bob."

"To begin with, we're looking for the lost Aureole Mine," stated Bob. "It belongs to Morton Selwood, a New York financier. He's had a lot of bad luck, Selwood has, with foreign investments destroyed by the war. He's counting on the Aureole Mine to pull him out of a very deep hole."

"Selwood owns hundreds of acres" - with a wide sweep of his hand, Bob included the big hill - "and the mine is somewhere on his property. It would normally take months to find the lost shaft, if at all. That's why Selwood took a chance on Claude Althorn and his gold-finder."

Another nod from Harry. Bob arose and took a wary look at the hill path, to make sure that Peld wasn't lurking in the scrub, listening in on the discussion.

"That gadget of Althorn's works," declared Bob. "We have both seen the indicator act, but never to the gold mark. We have narrowed down the hunt to this big hill. The mine must be here."

"If anywhere."

"I'll grant that," conceded Bob. "But remember, there are other people interested in this gold hunt - investors who want to buy stock in the Aureole Mine, if it turns up. Your friend, Lamont Cranston, is one, and there are others."

MENTION of Cranston brought a sober nod front Harry. It was Cranston who had sent him on this trip. Often, Harry had identified Lamont Cranston with The Shadow, but he wasn't sure that they were one and the same.

Instead of sending information to Cranston, Harry was working through Clyde Burke, who, like Harry, was an agent of The Shadow. The arrangement was by The Shadow's order, and could, or could not, mean that The Shadow was Cranston.

The thing puzzled Harry whenever he considered it. Then, realizing that Bob was watching him, Harry smiled.

"Why the grin?" inquired Bob. "What's funny about my mentioning Cranston?"

"Nothing," chuckled Harry. "I was thinking of the others."

Bob rubbed his face to hide an embarrassed expression. Then, with a friendly laugh, he acknowledged:

"You're including Brenda Selwood. You're right, Harry. She is interested in my finding the Aureole Mine. It's all that's needed to make her father decide that I'm good enough to marry his lovely daughter. Well, you've got the whole picture, except for one thing." Bob's laugh had ended abruptly. "I might say, one person."

"Bert Peld?"

"Not just Peld. I mean the man higher up, the fellow who probably hired Peld. You've heard of Frederick Zern?"

Harry nodded.

"Zern tried to buy this property," declared Bob. "He missed out, but he bought a lot of adjacent territory - about everything he could get hold of, except swamp, where there couldn't be any gold. I don't think Zern wants us to find the Aureole Mine. That's why he may be using Peld."

"How could Peld hurt us, Bob?"

"You saw him drive in today," returned Bob. "He's been hobnobbing with the squatters again, trying to make them think they'll lose their shacks if the mine is found. It shouldn't matter, because none of them are living on Selwood's property. But you know what those squatters are like when stirred up. We'd better be ready, that's all."

Abruptly finishing his theme, Bob gestured toward the hill. He and Harry went up the path, and all the while The Shadow's agent was thinking over the angle concerning Zern.

There was merit in Bob's argument, for Frederick Zern was a deadly financial rival of Morton Selwood. Nevertheless, Harry was inclined to minimize any menace from Bert Peld. The fellow had the marks of a snooper rather than an actual trouble-maker.

They found Peld standing with a small group, watching Althorn work the gold-finder. Claude Althorn was a tall, angular man with shocky hair and weather-beaten face who bent above the strange machine that he had invented.

The gold-finder was a large square box that buzzed, and Althorn kept pressing buttons to test the electric current that came from the batteries.

At times an indicator wavered, signifying mineral earth. But the needle failed to reach the gold line that registered high on the dial. Shaking his head, Althorn told two men to move the machine to a new position, some twenty yards away. As he drew himself erect and stretched, Althorn saw Bob and Harry.

"You've heard from Selwood?" he inquired eagerly. "Any message from Jackie?"

"A wire," replied Bob, but he didn't mention Jackie. "Just another reminder that we've got to keep moving."

Althorn's whole frame sagged; his face drooped in dejected fashion. He looked as though he couldn't proceed with his work. Finding his voice, he made a choky complaint:

"My little Jackie! A poor, motherless boy! I intrusted him to Selwood while I was gone. As friend to friend, Selwood faithfully promised that I would hear from Jackie every day. Today you receive a telegram. Gold is important" - Althorn brushed away a trickly tear - "but not my Jackie!"

Of a sudden, Althorn's sobbing manner ceased. He came erect again, quivering with indignation.

"Selwood and his gold!" stormed Althorn. "I'll have him know that Jackie is more important to me than all the gold in the world! If Selwood won't keep his promise -"

"He's kept it," put in Harry. "You've had a letter from Jackie every day. The mail won't be in until five o'clock, so why worry until then? As for the wire, the fact that Jackie wasn't mentioned simply means that Selwood thinks we've received the letter."

The logic impressed Althorn. After a few slow nods, he shambled over to his gold-finder and turned on the current. Soon the machine was buzzing, with Althorn stooped above it, as keenly interested in the machine as in his absent son Jackie.

"Great work, Harry!" confided Bob. "I'd forgotten that Althorn always worked in the cool of the evening, after reading one of those precious Jackie letters. Hop over to town at five and keep your fingers crossed when you ask for the mail. If we find the Aureole Mine, credit will go to Jackie more than to his father."

DURING the afternoon, the gold-finding machine continued along the contours of the hill, narrowing the search still further. Harry purposely delayed his trip for the mail, fearing that there might not be a letter from Jackie. But when he drove in he found a Jackie letter, much to his relief.

It was almost dusk when Harry arrived back at camp and climbed the hill path. He saw the group gathered around Althorn's machine, halfway up the slope. Bob Beverly was with them, and like the rest, Bob was huddled close to Althorn. Forgetting the letter in his pocket, Harry dashed up to join them, confident that they had made a strike.

He was close to the group when it broke apart, Bob and the rest whooping like wild men, flinging hats right and left. Only Althorn remained at the machine, his fingers pressing the buttons in rapt fashion.

As Harry arrived, Althorn looked up, his face wearing a happy smile. He nodded at the indicator, and Harry stared, fascinated by the needle. No longer did the needle waver. It was fixed upon the gold line that it had never reached before!

Then, with a dramatic gesture, Claude Althorn drew himself away from the controls. Pulling his shoulders erect, he raised one hand for attention. As howling men subsided and gathered close again, Althorn drove his pointing forefinger straight downward toward the ground.

"The Aureole Mine is found!" he announced in a tone of authority. "I have shown you where the gold is. Dig!"

CHAPTER II. THE MEN FROM THE SWAMP

ALTHORN'S words brought an immediate response. Half a dozen men sprang to work with picks and spades that they had carried over long hillsides, while Althorn cackled happily, as though the Aureole Mine was his, not Selwood's. So ardent were the workers that they had hacked at big chunks of rock and shoveled out a two-foot pile of dirt before Bob Beverly could stop them.

"Hold on," ordered Bob. "Let's go at this thing reasonably. We're pretty high up the slope. We ought to know how deep the gold is before we start to dig. What do you say, Althorn?"

"The shaft runs upward," decided Althorn. "Of that I'm sure, because the indicator crept up step by step. It might be fairly close to the surface."

"How close?"

Althorn shook his head. He wasn't sure, especially when Bob reminded him that the gold-finder was noted for its ability to discover deep lodes. When the choice lay between his personal opinion and the merits of the machine, Althorn was forced to favor his brain child, the gold-finder.

"It might be deep," he admitted. "Still, it would be unwise to neglect this spot. The gold is here."

"We won't forget it," promised Bob. "But we have reached a point where a concentrated hunt is better than a lot of labor. Look down below" - turning toward the base of the hill, Bob swung his hand in a semicircle - "and note that curving contour. Somewhere in the brush is the hidden shaft of the Aureole Mine.

"We can spread and hunt for it all night, if necessary. You can work the gold-finder, Althorn, and see if you get more indications. If we locate the shaft, our job is done, and we'll be sure, moreover, that this is the Aureole Mine, and not just a chance strike."

Althorn was inclined to argue further, but Harry silenced him by delivering the letter from Jackie. Apparently Althorn cared more for his son than the gold-finder, for he promptly began to read the letter by the light of a lantern that one of the workers provided.

Bob delegated two men to stay with Althorn and help him bring the detector machine down the hill when he was ready.

It took flashlights to find the path down to camp, for the dusk had thickened. Reaching a tent, Bob lighted a lantern and beckoned the others in for a conference. He counted Harry and three more, but at that the crew was one short. Frowning, Bob queried:

"Where's Peld?"

No one knew, and only Harry was able to provide the slightest of traces to the fellow. Peld hadn't been with the crew when Harry returned with the mail. It was evident, therefore, that Peld must have skipped when Althorn's mechanical detector gave its first indications of gold. But Harry hadn't met him on the road, or coming up the path.

Bob took a look outside the tent, saw Peld's car still parked on the fringe of the camp.

"He's probably decided to do some searching on his own," Bob declared. "If Peld finds the Aureole shaft, he'll probably be nice enough to keep it to himself. But we'll find it, anyway; and since Peld can't wrap it up and carry it away, why should we worry?"

SPREADING a topographical map, Bob made a red-pencil dot to indicate the spot where Althorn's machine had indicated gold.

The map was already well scored with blue - meaning places where the treasure-finder had registered a blank. As a result, Bob was able to trace out a comparatively narrow strip to search along the lower slopes.

"Separate, and beat the brush," he ordered. "Work in from the edges, each man taking a section. If you run into tough spots, call Althorn and let him work the gold-finder."

Bob added a warning to wear leather puttees in case any rattlers were awake, though so far the expedition had encountered very few snakes. In choosing his own area of search, Bob picked the lowest and most distant corner, a fact which caused Harry to remain after the others started out.

"You're giving yourself too big an assignment," suggested Harry, pointing to the map. "Why don't you top off that lower corner? We can leave it to the last."

"Maybe it's the most important, Harry."

"Not a chance, Bob. Look:" - Harry was holding the map into the light - "some of it is swamp. No use in searching there."

For reply, Bob pointed out some small black squares, no larger than pinheads, that were printed on the map. They were on the very fringe of the swampland.

"This is an old map," he said. "It's dated some thirty years after the Aureole Mine was buried and forgotten, but still it's old. Those black dots represent cabins, some of them still standing, or rebuilt. There's a fellow still living in one of them."

"A squatter?"

"I guess so. They call him Old Dokey, and he's a half-wit, probably a shade under the middle mark. I heard about him in Hillville. The station agent says that Old Dokey lived there for years."

"You've seen Dokey?"

"No. Selwood's instructions were to avoid all squatters as the best policy. But Peld has been visiting them against my orders. So far he's made his trips to property that belongs to Zern; but this swampland is neutral territory. I've a hunch that Peld has sneaked over to Dokey's, so I'm going to find out."

Putting the map away, Bob strode out. He was wearing a holster, with a revolver handle sticking out from it. Harry watched Bob's flashlight disappear toward the cypress trees that fringed the swamp.

Going to his own tent, Harry obtained an automatic and a red flare. Hoping that neither would be needed, he moved toward his own hunting ground, which adjoined the area that Bob had taken. As an added precaution, Harry intended to move over into Bob's territory without his friend's knowledge.

Chance, rather than design, took Harry to the lower ground; the route which Bob had followed. His original plan was to follow the slope, then cut down toward the shacks, but Harry ran into a heavy mass of rocks and scrub that seemed to thin on the lower side.

Instead, the farther Harry went, the more difficulty he found in gaining a path through. Not wanting Bob to see his flashlight, Harry did not use it, and finally his only course seemed the edge of the swamp itself.

The incessant croaking of the frogs drowned Harry's sloggy footsteps until he noted a sound very much like his own, almost an echo of his own paces. Working away from the muck, Harry found clear ground toward the hillside. Drawing into darkness, he listened. The sound came onward, and its loudness was explained.

It wasn't one sound; there were several. At least three men were tramping the mushy ground beside the swamp.

They were on their way to the shacks where Bob Beverly had gone!

HOW to warn Bob was a problem. The men were past Harry, and if his ears were hearing right, they were being met by others. Seemingly, the swamp was alive with men.

It struck Harry that Peld must be at Dokey's; that these arrivals were squatters, summoned by Peld to join him. Instead of a mere snooper, Peld was taking on the size of a dangerous organizer who might be arranging a massed raid.

It was no longer a question of merely getting word to Bob. They would need all the aid that they could get against this swamp tribe. Through Harry's brain drilled the memory of the telegram that he had sent that afternoon, and he wished that he had made it more urgent. The Shadow had sent Harry to Georgia to watch for just such things as the menace which had arrived.

The only resort was the flare. Harry hadn't wanted to use it, for its light would be a give-away. But at present many things were suddenly at stake. Bob had to be warned, enemies diverted, and friends brought to this spot.

Scrambling for higher ground, Harry planted the spiked flare in the ground; ripping off the cap, he inverted it and knocked it against the flare to ignite it.

There was a spurt of red fire that brought harsh shouts from the marsh. Men wheeled in the darkness, but they could not see Harry. He had dived away from the flare and was choosing the direction that they least expected. He was making for the shacks, hoping to find Bob.

Almost instantly, a flashlight licked the brush, and Harry rolled to the ground to avoid its glare. It didn't come from the swamp; it was from the direction of the shacks. It showed a man running for higher ground, a frantic fugitive who turned to fire a few wild shots back at the light.

The running man was Bert Peld!

Bob's flashlight! He must have uncovered Peld near Dokey's shack and challenged the fellow. But Peld was escaping off into darkness, leaving Bob the center of an unenviable stage, where a batch of men were creeping in to surround him.

The only way to save Bob was to beat the shots that would surely come from the swamp. And Harry did it.

Blindly, The Shadow's agent fired toward the blackness below. He didn't expect to score hits. He merely wanted foemen to know that Bob, the man with the flashlight, wasn't the most important target.

The swamp fighters took the hint. They opened fire in Harry's direction as he dived toward Bob, yelling for his friend to douse the flashlight.

Bob was quick to obey. He blacked out the light and stumbled toward Harry in the darkness. Then both were shooting sparingly as they crouched, and at Harry's urge Bob kept shifting with his friend to keep their positions unknown.

Momentarily they saw a shaft of light from the opening door of a shack. A big, rough-clad man with stupid face and shaggy hair was outlined in the doorway; evidently Old Dokey. Then the door slammed shut, proving that the half-wit could use some sense on occasion. Whatever was going on outside, Old Dokey wanted no part of it.

"Make for the flare," Harry was telling Bob between shots. "They won't think we're going back to it.

What's more, maybe Althorn and the rest will make for it."

"They won't see it," panted Bob. "They're a long way off."

"They'll hear the shots," returned Harry. "That will bring them close enough to find the flare."

HALF stumbling, half running, both Harry and Bob were nearing the flare. They were no longer shooting, nor were the men from the marsh. Only vague sounds could be heard, telling that the enemy, too, were on the move. Then, when Harry and Bob were almost at their temporary goal, flashlights blazed.

They came from all directions, more than a dozen lights. Dropping away from the nearest glares, Harry and Bob were caught by new ones.

Foemen had circled, to surround the two fugitives, cutting them off from the red light. Rocks, jutting from the ground above the shacks, offered refuge, but a poor one.

Flattening in such shelter, Harry and Bob heard bullets whine above their heads and ricochet from the stone barriers, none of which were more than two feet above the ground.

Shouting foemen were closing in, undaunted by the hasty gun stabs which Harry and Bob supplied from shelter. Hitting those bobbing flashlights was too difficult for men who were trying to keep low at the same time. The yells from the charging tribe were murderous, giving Bob and Harry no hope for quarter.

Then, when the men from the marsh had almost reached the rocks, there came an answer to their shouts and gunfire. It was a laugh, loud and challenging, outlandish, shivering mirth that rose to a fierce crescendo.

To Bob the strange tone was inhuman, a thing incredible; but Harry recognized it as a tone that he had feared he would never hear again.

That mirth promised rescue for two beleaguered men, who, at that moment, might well have counted themselves dead. It announced the arrival of a fighter whose use of last-minute tactics against all sorts of odds held good in any terrain.

It was the laugh of The Shadow!

CHAPTER III. DEATH TURNS ABOUT

THE blast of guns followed The Shadow's taunt so suddenly that the shots mingled with the echoes of his laugh. The concussions were earsplitting to Harry and Bob, for the shots were fired very close to them. The men from the marsh were shooting, but Harry and Bob were not their targets.

Murder-mad fighters had changed their aim toward a cloaked fighter who was outlined in a glare of dying crimson from Harry's flare.

Harry saw The Shadow, a tall figure clad entirely in black. His cloak was whipping from his shoulders as he wheeled about; his slouch hat, clamped upon his head, hid his face from view. But his guns were visible; big automatics, gripped in black-gloved fists. From lips concealed in the upturned cloak collar came a repetition of the defiant laugh.

The opening shots were too hasty to reach The Shadow. He had delayed his own action just long enough to draw the fire in his direction. Before his foemen could center on their target, the red flare was gone, extinguished by a blanketing sweep of The Shadow's cloak.

As for the flashlights, none caught The Shadow in their glow. One swung in his direction; a gun stabbed from darkness and toppled the flashlight, along with its owner. A second light began its sweep; again The Shadow nipped it as a target, taking out an enemy to boot. From then flashlights were absent, the marsh fighters flinging them away.

They were surging for The Shadow, trying to find him by his gun jabs. But The Shadow was using a defensive system that was, neatly enough, an offensive method, also. He let his enemies shoot first; then, swiveling somewhere in the blackness, he returned the fire in single-shot style with remarkable precision.

He nicked one marksman, then another, using their own idea of choosing a tonguing gun as a target. But always he was on the move, in an unexpected direction, away from the volley which followed each of his shots.

As for his foemen, he caught them flat-footed. Realizing that The Shadow was a master at such tactics, the marsh fighters surged for him without firing their guns, relying upon their numbers to find him in the dark.

Harry yanked Bob to his feet. They would both be needed if those fighters found The Shadow. Bob hadn't even seen the cloaked fighter; in fact, had no idea how the attack had been diverted.

There wasn't time for Harry to explain; even if he had, Bob might not have understood him, for at that moment the scene was suddenly changed.

Flashlights sliced in from the brush; shouts told that Bob's own crew of workers had arrived.

"They heard us!" shouted Bob to Harry. "They found the flare!" Then, raising his voice still louder: "Come on, boys! You've got them on the run. Let's scatter them!"

It was the right idea, even though Bob was crediting his own men with the rescue, overlooking The Shadow entirely. But it was the power of The Shadow, not the arrival of reserves, that put the marsh fighters into flight.

Wildly they scattered, except for those who were no longer able. Hearing The Shadow's laugh from below them, cutting off escape to the marsh, they ran for higher ground, frantically trying to escape the glaring flashlights that would make them perfect meat for The Shadow's deadly automatics.

Bob saw a man ducking for a path through the brush and recognized him. He shouted an order to his crew.

"There's Peld!" Bob called. "Get him, even if you miss the others! He's the fellow who stirred up the squatters!"

Bob's men turned and raced along the path. They were close behind Peld, with Bob and Harry following them. The fighters from the marsh were farther away, but going in the same direction. The chase led into camp, and all the while Harry was wondering what had happened to The Shadow.

AT the camp itself came the climax of Peld's flight. Lanterns were hanging from the fronts of tents, and only one man was in sight: Claude Althorn. He was holding a shotgun, as though wondering what it was for, and beside him was his gold-finder, propped on its squatty tripod.

Althorn saw Peld, who was flourishing a revolver that he had emptied at his pursuers. Bob shouted for Althorn to stop Peld, and the angular man made a gesture with his shotgun. Peld's snarl told that such feeble measures could not hold him. His revolver useless, Peld grabbed the nearest thing at hand: Althorn's gold-finder.

Usually two men carried the machine, but one could lift it, as Peld demonstrated. He actually hurled the contrivance at Althorn as the angular man pulled one trigger of the shotgun.

The blast ruined the gold-finder, which took the entire charge. Seeing Althorn stagger back, Peld decided to take the shotgun as a trophy. He grabbed it by the barrels to wrest it from Althorn's grasp, but in the brief interval something had happened. Althorn was changed into a madman, his new mood inspired by sight of the shattered gold-finder.

Althorn not only kept the shotgun, he poked it hard into Peld's ribs. As Peld lunged his hands for Althorn's throat, their grasp went short. Althorn's finger pressed the other trigger of the prodding shotgun, and the second barrel blasted Peld to the ground, where he rolled over, dead, leaving Althorn staring in amazement.

Peld's death was immediately forgotten. Shots were coming from beyond the tents. Again the marsh men were in evidence. Bob, Harry and the rest were diving away from the camp lights, dragging Althorn with them. They heard the roar of motors, knew that their recent foemen were taking Peld's car and another.

Off in the darkness, by the cars, a black-cloaked figure lunged in upon the marsh fighters. Their shouts mingled with the sound of a triumphant laugh. Again The Shadow was attacking, this time in the very midst of the fugitives. He was swinging his guns, using them as bludgeons, to thwart the escape.

Men, still shooting toward the tents, were suddenly finding themselves harried by the one foe that they dreaded: The Shadow!

Before Harry could give the right word, Bob acted on his own. Yelling for his men to follow, Bob swung around the tents, shooting as he went. Only Harry had recognized what was happening at the cars; for the first time he realized that Bob thought The Shadow belonged to the opposing force.

This was a dilemma, even worse than the one that Harry had encountered over by the shacks, when Bob's life was threatened. Fortunately The Shadow recognized it as soon as the shots began.

He dived away from the cars, carrying one foeman with him. As flashlights swept the ground, The Shadow flung his opponent aside and twisted off into the darkness.

As he went, he saw the face of the man who had grappled him, a blunt, darkish visage that had a thuggish look. It wasn't the face of a typical squatter; it was the sort that graced a mob leader, as did the raucous order to "get going" that the blunt-featured man gave.

Peld could have hired this gang of marsh fighters, but he hadn't been their actual leader. The man with the dark, blunt face rated as head of the murderous crew, and the others that The Shadow glimpsed were definitely hoodlums.

The Shadow's glimpse was brief. The cars were away, the darkish leader on the running board of the second one. As The Shadow turned to pick the fellow off, a flashlight intervened. Bob and his arriving men mistook The Shadow for the real leader of the mob, and there wasn't time for explanations.

Wheeling away, The Shadow dived into another car, one that he had hired at an airport in order to reach the camp. The bullets clanging the fenders, he zigzagged for the sand road that the marauders had taken.

Blunt-face and the marsh men had gained a good start; their cars were a half mile ahead of The Shadow when they reached the high-road. Striking the hard surface, The Shadow discovered something that the sand road had not indicated.

A rear tire of his car was nearly flat. Turning in the direction of the airport, some ten miles distant, The

Shadow drove a few hundred yards and swung the car into an open space beside the highway.

Lights out, he had just completed the tire change when cars came by and veered into the sand road. From all indications, the occupants were the local sheriff and some deputies, who had evidently heard about the gun fray at Bob's camp.

Deciding that Bob and Harry were the proper persons to explain matters, The Shadow drove along his way.

THE SHADOW'S surmise was correct. Soon afterward the sheriff reached Bob's camp, to find order restored there. He was satisfied with Bob's story until he looked over the bodies of three marsh fighters, who had been brought into camp by Bob's men and placed beside the dead form of Peld.

"Those aren't squatters," declared the sheriff. "Better be careful who you blame for this trouble. These are strangers hereabouts, and I allow that it's better for you because they are. You have a right to be on this property, and they haven't.

"We'll take the bodies over to the county coroner. Stop over for the inquest tomorrow. Death by misadventure is what he's liable to call it. We don't have much sympathy for meddlers in this country. Keep to your own property, though, because I won't be responsible if you go meddling around those shacks where Old Dokey lives."

Later, when the sheriff questioned Dokey on Bob's story, the shaggy-haired man responded with grunts, accompanied by nods. Inside his shack, Dokey hadn't been aware that both Bob and Peld were just outside. It was the shooting that had roused him, and by then the two prowling men had been running back toward camp.

There was one feature of Bob's story that did not please Harry at all. It concerned a black-cloaked fighter, mistaken by Bob for the leader of the marsh mob. But Harry did not consider it good policy to dispute any of Bob's testimony while the sheriff was around.

Back at the camp, the sheriff ordered his deputies into their cars.

"We'll drive around," he promised, "and see if we can find any of those meddlers, traipsing around the hills. We'll know them if we find them. One in particular is that fellow in black you talked about. I'd like to run across him."

Bob turned to Harry as the sheriff drove away. For the first time Bob's face showed doubt.

"About the man in black," declared Bob. "Do you know, Harry, I'm not so sure that he was fighting against us. I've told my story, so I'll have to stick to it, but I'm afraid I was mistaken. I certainly hope the sheriff doesn't come across that man in black."

Harry smiled. He knew that chances of finding The Shadow were nil, not only in this county, but anywhere in Georgia. Harry was sure that The Shadow had come from New York by air, in response to the telegram, and was by this time flying northward on his return trip.

Finding The Shadow was a quest which many had undertaken without success. Compared to such a hunt, the search for the lost Aureole Mine was a mere trifle.

CHAPTER IV. THE LOST SHAFT

A WHILE after the sheriff had gone, Bob Beverly gathered his men to renew the search for the mine shaft. He began by commending Althorn's idea that the search should start from near the spot where the

gold-finder had registered.

"If I'd taken your advice," Bob told Althorn, "all this trouble wouldn't have happened. At least we'd have been together when Peld moved that mob in on us. So don't feel that you're to blame for what happened to Peld. He deserved that dose from the shotgun, Althorn, and you just happened to be the man who gave it."

Althorn scarcely heard what Bob told him. His milky eyes had a faraway stare. His lips, half opened, were delivering little moans, which made the onlookers think that Althorn still blamed himself for Peld's death, until they saw his eyes turn toward the wrecked gold-finder.

Then Althorn's hands were on the ruined machine. He was crouched above it, almost weeping over the wreckage as he stroked it.

"See what you can do with him," suggested Bob to Harry. "It wouldn't matter if he was only worrying about Peld. The sheriff didn't even care who shot Peld after I told my story. I told him we all had a part in it, that Peld was trying to get us so we had to get him.

"But since it's the machine that sent Althorn off his nut, we may have a hard time snapping him out of it. He loved that gold-finder like he would a child."

Without realizing it, Bob had struck upon the best way to handle Althorn. Perhaps he did love the gold-finder like a child, but there was one child that he cared for more than the machine. With that thought in mind, Harry went over to humor Althorn. The moaning man began to talk first, so Harry let him proceed.

"For ten years I worked on this machine," groaned Althorn. "I used it in the Klondike, in Australia, along the Rand in Africa. Ah, it had whims" - he stroked the shattered contrivance - "but I could humor them. Time and again I found the faults and improved them.

"When I came back to the States a few months ago I found the very man I wanted: Morton Selwood. He needed me and my machine. I staked everything on its success when I came to hunt for the Aureole Mine. Now my hopes are shattered. I have nothing to live for."

"Not even Jackie?"

Althorn's eyes popped wide at Harry's question. Thrusting a hand in his pocket, Althorn brought out a batch of letters which he always carried with him. They were Jackie's letters, the envelopes addressed in a childish hand that indicated the writer to be a boy about twelve years of age.

"Ah, yes. Jackie!" Althorn's eyes gleamed happily. "I must live for Jackie. Look, Vincent!" Thrusting the letters back into his pocket, Althorn pointed at the wrecked gold-finder. "This machine! It has proven itself. Do you agree?"

"It has."

"Then I am successful!" Althorn came erect in his odd, unfolding style. "I can rebuild it with the money I receive from Selwood. It is my brain child, Vincent, and all the needed plans are recorded right here!" Emphatically, Althorn tapped his forehead, then added: "Yes. I shall rebuild it - for Jackie."

Feverishly he began to work on the machine. He found that some of the buttons worked and brought a response from the dial. Opening the box, Althorn pulled out broken parts. He attached two wires to a battery, then hooked them to the indicator. Bringing a gold watch from his pocket, he advanced it toward the dial.

There was no result, until he added another hookup to a flat plate of metal that was rattling around in the bottom of the box. When he placed the plate against the watch, the indicator needle jumped to the gold line.

"It is still a detector!" exclaimed Althorn. "It requires contact, but it works! The essential mechanism is uninjured, and the rest can be replaced. But I have already done my most important work. I have found gold, Vincent. Can anyone deny it?"

"No one can," returned Harry, "after we locate the lost shaft. That little detail still is necessary, Althorn. Why not come along and help us?"

ENTHUSED, Althorn nodded. He followed Harry up the slope, where they saw moving flashlights.

Keeping close together, Bob and the rest were working from the base that Althorn had given them, but Harry noted that they were moving downward on the sensible theory that the hidden shaft would have to be at a lower level.

As Althorn joined the group, Harry came alongside of Bob. Together they explored the scrubby ground, while Bob discussed the difficulties of the search.

"Georgia was real gold country a hundred years ago," declared Bob. "The government had a mint at Dahlonega, and it kept on working even after gold was discovered in California in '49. The Aureole Mine was still paying for itself up to the time when Georgia joined the Confederacy.

"The mint was closed then and never reopened. Mining quit, too, and the Aureole Mine was purposely buried for the duration of the war. No one wanted to reopen it afterward, not with a lot of carpetbaggers ready to grab it. Years later the heirs of the original owners sold the mine. But no one was able to find it.

"Eventually Morton Selwood bought the stock, which had dropped way down. He paid enough for it, considering how many people had tried to find the mine and failed. Brenda tells me that her father always liked to speculate, putting future prospects away until times when he may need them."

They prodded the ground a while in silence; then Bob took up the theme where he had left it.

"Believe me, Selwood really needs the Aureole Mine," he added. "He's had ten times his share of bad luck. If he can't pull a money-making rabbit out of the financial hat, his creditors will take over everything he owns. Let's hope that the Aureole Mine will be Selwood's rabbit."

"What about the creditors?" inquired Harry. "Do you think that Frederick Zern's one of them?"

"He's smart enough to be," returned Bob, "even if he had to buy up some of Selwood's debts. That could be one reason why Zern wouldn't want us to find the Aureole Mine. It would account for Peld being around here, and those phony squatters, too.

"But there's another reason. I've told you that Zern owns a lot of property off in the nearby hills. It's all potential gold territory, but none of its shafts ever paid. With modern methods, though, Zern might make a strike. The trouble is, he delayed too long.

"If we find the Aureole, Zern's property will naturally go up in price, but it won't take a huge jump. But should we fail, he might have time to locate gold first and start a real rush. He might even be shrewd enough to claim that he had found the Aureole Mine on his own property. Unless we discover the Aureole shaft, how could we disprove it?"

Bob left his own question unanswered, and it seemed to give him greater zest for the search. He and

Harry were covering twice the range that any other pair of men traversed. But the searchers were still hard at work, without result, when dawn began to streak the sky. Then Bob brought the tired group together.

"We'll have to spread out farther," he declared grimly. "Even as far as Old Dokey's line, if necessary. We met Dokey last night; maybe he'll be friendly enough in daylight, since the sheriff introduced us. After all, Dokey has lived around here a long while and may be able to tell us something."

MEN began to move apart. Althorn followed after Bob and Harry, who were heading toward the swampland. Bob turned and was forced to smile at Althorn's appearance. Brambles and brush had done their work on the angular man; his clothing looked as badly wrecked as his gold-finding machine.

"Better go back to camp," said Bob sympathetically. "You need a rest, Althorn. Read over Jackie's letters. They'll keep you occupied until breakfast."

Althorn nodded and slouched away. He looked weak and wavering as he followed the path; then, wanting a short cut, he turned off. Promptly he was blundering through a stony thicket, as he had evidently been doing half the night.

Bob and Harry were turning away when they heard Althorn stumble and give a sharp, pained cry, which suddenly ended.

They made for the thicket, but they couldn't find Althorn. Bob pressed through the brush and was starting a stumble himself when Harry leaped forward and dragged him back.

Straight below were two rocks; the space between them had once been filled with brush. At present the brush was broken, leaving a gaping hole.

Gingerly, Bob and Harry slid down into the pit. They found Althorn at the bottom, winded, but unhurt, resting deep in sand. Unable to find his breath, Althorn simply pointed. His fingers showed a crevice, extending back between the joining rocks.

Wedging through the space, Bob used a flashlight, then yelled to Harry, who joined him and saw the sight that lay ahead.

Thrusting straight into the hill at a slightly upward slant was an ancient mine shaft shored with timbers. The flashlight produced golden sparkles from the hewn walls, particles that looked like gold dust. The direction that the shaft followed would bring it just below the spot that Althorn had marked with his gold-finder, higher on the hill.

This was the lost Aureole Mine!

BY then, Althorn was on his feet, relaying Bob's yells to men outside. The whole crew arrived at the shaft which Althorn's lucky accident had uncovered. With Bob and Harry leading the way, they moved up into the hill, noting the sparkle of the shaft's walls along the way.

The shaft was a long one. It became irregular as they advanced, and the shoring timbers ceased. There were side passages that indicated diggings, but none of them were long.

The main passage terminated in a fork, the route to the left descended, but was short and showed a blank wall that lacked sparkles. Bob pointed the expedition along the passage to the right.

It turned, slanting slightly upward. They stumbled over the rough floor, then found their way blocked by chunks of ore that formed a slanting pile, clear up to the ceiling level. Bob gave a pleased exclamation.

"They were working here when they quit!" he told his men. "We've found the Aureole Mine just as they left it. They would have taken this ore out if they had still had time. If you don't believe it, look at this!"

Stooping, Bob plucked up a chunk of ore. There was no mistaking its content. Fine-grained particles that looked like yellow sand, were certainly gold. The ore was rich with the precious metal, and it did not require an expert to identify it.

With each man lugging a piece of the valuable ore, all went out through the long shaft and returned to camp. There Althorn insisted upon using his partially repaired detector to test the ore. When he put the contact plate against a chunk and turned on the current, the indicator promptly jumped to the gold level.

To prove that the device was correct, Althorn went to work on lumps of ore, using the "dry-blowing" method that was common in Australia, where he had learned it.

He had a series of sieves, one above the other, and he filled the top one with ruddy earth that he scraped from the ore, along with tiny bits of the stone itself.

As Althorn joggled the sieves, powdery earth trickled through, portions stopping at intervals along the line. When he had finished, the bottom sieve revealed pure pay dirt - dusty bits of gold which, heavier than the other minerals, had worked down to the lowest level.

Appraising the result with a pleased eye, Bob clapped his hand on Harry's shoulder and said to his friend:

"You're driving into Hillville."

Half an hour later Harry Vincent sent two telegrams from the little railroad station. One was to Morton Selwood, from Bob Beverly, telling the financier that the Aureole Mine was found and was as rich as anticipated.

The other message was from Harry himself; he sent it to Clyde Burke. It said that the weather was perfect and that Harry intended to stay in Georgia.

That second telegram was destined for The Shadow, telling him that his timely arrival and strategic battle of the night before had done more than save the lives of menaced men. The Shadow had made it possible for the search to continue.

Claude Althorn might claim that he had found the lost shaft of the Aureole, but in the opinion of Harry Vincent the real credit belonged to The Shadow!

CHAPTER V. GOLD FOR SALE

MORTON SELWOOD sat behind the big desk in the study of his Westchester County home, on the outskirts of New York City. He surveyed the group of men about him.

Selwood was a portly man, and his roundish face wore a broad smile, erasing the wrinkles which had come from long months of worry. The only thing that the smile did not cover were the gray streaks in Selwood's hair. The gray hairs, too, were the product of recent months.

The other men were busy studying the prospectus that Selwood had put together since the discovery of the lost Aureole Mine nearly a week before. The pages teemed with newspaper clippings and actual photographs of the mine shaft. There was one picture, an old one, of Claude Althorn, working with his famous gold-finder.

More important, however, were the assay reports, prepared by experts, stating that the loose ore found in the Aureole Mine was rich in gold. Important, too, were the actual exhibits that lay on Selwood's desk. The exhibits included specimens of gold dust from the Aureole and actual samples of the glittering ore.

Of the half dozen men who were visiting Selwood, two particularly impressed the financier. Selwood felt that whatever he had to say would be directed to those two. One would listen favorably, the other would be hostile.

The favorable man was Lamont Cranston. He was calm-faced, his features somewhat masklike. His eyes had an easy way of scrutiny, but they missed nothing. Though Cranston's pose was leisurely, Selwood was inclined to regard him as a man of action.

Certainly, Cranston was noted as a world traveler, a man who had encountered adventures everywhere. Gold seemed to interest Cranston, and in his gaze Selwood detected approval of the exhibits from the Aureole Mine.

The hostile man was Frederick Zern. Bulky of build, heavy of face, Zern's appearance bespoke brawn more than brain. He had plenty of brute strength and showed it on occasion, but to Selwood it was mostly camouflage.

There was just one tribute that Selwood could pay Zern, if it could be called such; namely, that Zern was the shrewdest man that he had ever met. That amounted to a great deal, considering that Selwood had met some of the smartest brains in the business world.

In fact, Selwood had clever ways himself, as he evidenced when he addressed the group.

"Gentlemen, you are in luck," Selwood declared in a convincing tone. "By rights, I should keep the Aureole Mine for myself, but I am ready to dispose of forty-nine percent of the stock at a thousand dollars a share. Of a thousand shares, four hundred and ninety are on the market. Do I hear any buyers?"

Selwood heard them, in tones that could not be mistaken. He began to list the shareholders, and was pleased when he put down Cranston's name to the extent of fifty thousand dollars. The only voice that did not join was the booming tone of Frederick Zern. Silence came while Selwood finished compiling the list.

"Three hundred and thirty thousand dollars," he calculated. "That leaves one hundred and sixty thousand more. I know plenty of men who will gladly buy in small lots. But I think that all who are here should take advantage of the opportunity. What about it, Zern?"

Zern's big lips showed a smile as his sharp eyes narrowed under heavy brows.

"You forget that I have other interests, Selwood," he boomed. "To be specific, I own property near the Aureole Mine, and am willing to sell it for much less than the price you ask."

"Because it has no gold?"

"No. Because gold has not yet been found upon it - which, I might add, was the case with your property, Selwood, until a week ago."

Selwood did not like Zern's tone. His own voice became crisp. Ignoring Zern, he addressed the others.

"I said you are in luck," repeated Selwood. "I had a reason for that statement. We nearly failed to find the Aureole Mine. There was a traitor in our expedition, a man named Bert Peld. He brought mobsters to

Georgia, disguised them as squatters, and had them attack our workers."

"Fortunately, they were driven off, with their leader, a man cloaked in black, as yet unidentified. In fact" - Selwood let his eyes rove - "that man in black might even be here among us."

SELWOOD'S eyes should have fixed on Cranston; instead, they stopped with Zern. The faintest flicker of a smile came to Cranston's lips. As for Zern, he lifted his great head and bellowed a derisive laugh.

"If I had troubled myself to go to Georgia," affirmed Zern, "I would have concerned myself with my own property, not yours, Selwood. Applying that point further, let me add that if I had hired a man like Bert Peld, I would have told him to do the same."

Rising to his feet, Zern turned to the group to drive more points home.

"I am interested in the Aureole Mine," he declared, "because its discovery proves that my own land may be valuable. Selwood thinks that I could have gained something by delaying his work. Perhaps I could have!" Zern's tone took on an exclamation, as though the idea had just occurred to him. Then, with a headshake, he added: "But I didn't."

Pacing the floor, Zern wheeled suddenly to the desk and leaned half across it.

"I'll tell you what, Selwood!" he boomed. "Just to show you bow well I feel toward you, I'll buy twenty shares of your Aureole stock. That will make me part owner in your mine, and as such" - there was a shrewd glitter in Zern's eyes - "I can talk freely to my fellow stockholders.

"So, fellow stockholders" - Zern was swinging from Selwood, to face the others - "I am offering all of you a chance to buy in on my property, which is very fine land, adjacent to the Aureole Mine. Is anyone interested?"

There was no reply, except a click from the doorknob. Zern turned, as though expecting to see a prospect. But his gaze was too high; he looked clear above the head of the person who entered.

The arrival was a boy, who looked about twelve years of age. He was chunky of build and had a roundish face with large, sober eyes.

The boy was clad in pajamas, and he looked surprised when he saw that Selwood had visitors. Under his arm he carried a cardboard box that rattled, and he was about to turn and leave the room when Selwood said in a kindly tone:

"Come in, Jackie." Then, to the visitors: "Gentlemen, this is Jackie Althorn, whose father found the Aureole Mine for us."

Entering, Jackie stared at Zern, who was standing up and therefore formed the most conspicuous figure in the room. He approached Zern and looked up at him, for Jackie's head came only to the big man's shoulders.

Rattling the box, Jackie extended it toward Zern and said, in an expressionless voice:

"My daddy sent me these."

Zern expected to see fragments of gold ore when Jackie lifted the box lid. Instead, the box contained pecans, and Zern took a few at Jackie's invitation. Going around the group, Jackie offered pecans to the rest, until be found himself facing Lamont Cranston.

Something in those steady eyes fascinated Jackie. The boy's own eyes met the gaze and retained it. Curiously, Jackie's own expression remained as inflexible as Cranston's. Then, on some impulse, the boy swung away and ran over to Selwood. From his pocket be brought a letter.

"To go to my daddy," Jackie told Selwood. "I thanked him for the pecans and asked him to send some more."

A laugh traveled around the group, but Jackie didn't appreciate it. He ran from the room, pausing only at the door, where he stared back.

Like Selwood, Jackie looked at two faces in particular and seemed to class them as opposites. One was Zern's; the bulky man was laughing uproariously because of Jackie's remarks. The other was Cranston's, which still retained its smileless gaze.

Perhaps it was the laughter that reduced the effect of The Shadow's eyes; possibly because Jackie had faced those eyes before, he found it easier to shake off their spell. With an impatient look at the laughing men, the boy turned and went through the door, giving it a slam behind him.

"Jackie is impetuous," explained Selwood. "A likable boy, and quite precocious. In some ways he has the adult viewpoint; but, of course, childish simplicity dominates, as with every normal boy of twelve. We should not have laughed at him. It may have hurt his feelings more than we supposed."

THERE was a knock at the door; a girl entered and the men bowed to Selwood's daughter, Brenda.

She was brunette with dark-brown eyes and a profile of even mold. The loveliness of her figure and complexion was increased by the strapless evening gown that she was wearing. Above the dark folds of the gown, her white shoulders emerged like shapely curves of living marble.

"I am leaving for the party, father," said the girl in a modulated tone. "I saw Jackie coming from here, and I wondered why he was up this late."

"He brought a letter for Althorn," replied Selwood. "I'm glad you haven't gone, Brenda. You'd better stop up and say good night to him. We were laughing, and it may have hurt Jackie."

Brenda nodded understandingly. Her eyes went toward the desk, then gazed inquisitively at Selwood, who smiled.

"No letter from Bob," he said. "But we should hear from him tomorrow."

Momentarily, Brenda looked quite as embarrassed as Jackie had; then, bowing to the visitors, the girl departed.

While the visitors were writing out their checks, Selwood went to a corner and opened a safe of modern pattern.

Cranston's keen eyes watched the process, noted that Selwood purposely blocked everyone from viewing the combination. But the gesture was definitely intended for Zern, toward whom Selwood turned a sharp glance when stepping from the safe.

Bringing the shares of gold stock, Selwood distributed them among their new owners, Zern receiving his twenty thousand dollars' worth as though accepting a trifle.

Selwood put the checks in the safe and picked up the exhibits from the mine, remarking that each piece of ore, as well as various reports, were all marked with the dates when he had received them.

Assuring the new stockholders that there would be future meetings, and frequent ones, at which they would be posted on new developments at the Aureole Mine, Selwood bowed his visitors out through the door.

Zern was among the first to leave; noting it, Selwood plucked Cranston's arm and asked him to wait a moment. Shutting the study door, Selwood confided:

"I've a lot to thank you for, Cranston. Your promptness in buying those shares really started the others. There's no doubt that Zern was here hoping to discourage any sale."

"Rather curious," was Cranston's reply, "considering that since the Aureole Mine has been found, his own property depends on its success. Unless" - Cranston's eyes showed steady scrutiny - "Zern happens to be one of your creditors."

"He's more than that," affirmed Selwood. "I'm sure that he has invested in various businesses which would expand if any of my enterprises should fail. Zern has a habit of playing all games two ways. I still think that Zern would make out better if the Aureole Mine proved worthless."

The statement seemed to impress Cranston, so Selwood followed it with a request.

"You'd do me a favor, Cranston, if you would talk to Zern about his property and learn what he really intends to do with it. He might drop some hint -"

Cranston's nod was sufficient. Selwood opened the door and they went out, overtaking Zern on the front steps. There Selwood watched from the background, while Cranston talked to Zern.

"Certainly, Cranston!" Selwood heard Zern say. "If you could stop over at my house before driving into town, I'd be glad to tell you all about my Georgia property."

"I'll drop by in about an hour," Cranston decided. "I promised to meet some friends at the country club near here, but I think I can get away from them shortly."

WHILE Zern was driving away in his car, Cranston stepped into a waiting limousine which started in the opposite direction. But before the limousine had traveled more than a few blocks, the chauffeur heard Cranston's even tone through the speaking tube:

"Turn left, Stanley, two blocks; then take another left turn. I shall direct you after that."

The voice was Cranston's, but the speaker was undergoing a transformation. From beneath the rear seat of the limousine, Cranston was drawing black garments from a secret drawer. A cloak slid over his shoulders; his hand placed a slouch hat on his head. Thin gloves came from the drawer, along with a brace of automatics.

Lamont Cranston had become The Shadow. He was heading for the vicinity of Zern's residence, about a mile from Selwood's home. The friends at the country club were purely imaginary; while posing as Cranston, The Shadow had mentioned them simply to obtain an hours' leeway, more or less.

Whatever Zern's game, the part that he might have played in the trouble near the Aureole Mine, The Shadow would have a better chance to learn it by a secret visit to Zern's house.

Compared to The Shadow's Georgia journey, such a trip seemed a simple matter. Nevertheless, The Shadow was preparing himself for any consequences.

In dealing with a man as shrewd as Frederick Zern, no step should be overlooked. Zern's double game,

as Selwood classed it, might include provisions for chance callers like The Shadow!

CHAPTER VI. TRICK FOR TRICK

WHEN Frederick Zern reached his house, he put his car away in the garage then came out through a little side door to avoid the gravel drive.

Zern had a pleasant habit of using the soft lawn when he walked to the house. Gravel could crunch, whereas grass could not, which meant that if lurkers were about, Zern might hear them before they could locate him.

The servants had taken the night off, a thing that Zern had overlooked before he went to Selwood's. From his manner, Zern seemed worried over burglars, hence his extensive precautions.

He watched from the sun porch, noting a slight motion of a hedge, which could have come from a wavering breeze; then, tilting his head, he listened to a sound that indicated a stopping automobile motor somewhere behind the house.

It might merely have been a neighbor returning home, nevertheless Zern listened suspiciously for a recurrence of the sound. Hearing none, the bulky man moved from the porch into the house, still retaining his listening attitude.

If he expected sounds indoors, he was disappointed, for he heard none. The house was very quiet, and dark, too, for only the lower hall was lighted.

There was a telephone in the lower hall, and Zern decided to make a call. He dialed a number; when it was answered, Zern made a low-rumbled inquiry for someone. So well was his voice confined to the mouthpiece that his words could not be heard beyond the range of the hallway.

Zern's caution was wiser, perhaps, than he supposed. Evidently he feared that hidden listeners might be upstairs. Instead, there was one much closer.

A figure had entered from the sun porch, a gliding shape that traveled the same route which Zern used. Alert though he was, Zern had failed to detect The Shadow's approach to the house; yet Zern, in moving through to the hallway, had been spotted by The Shadow.

Nor had the cloaked investigator lost time in following Zern. This was the sort of trail that intrigued The Shadow: when a man of Zern's status entered his own home like a thief in the night.

The only key to Zern's phone call was that he had not reached the person he wanted, for Zern plunked the telephone on its stand in an abrupt style. The big man seemed to sense an intruder; momentarily, at least, for he darted looks across his shoulder and actually took in the very doorway from which The Shadow watched.

But with the background of a darkened room into which he had partially withdrawn, The Shadow could not be detected by human eyes. Quite satisfied that no one was about, Zern went upstairs.

Heavy footfalls were dwindling on the floor above when The Shadow again moved along Zern's trail. With silent, gliding stride, The Shadow ascended the stairs.

ZERN, meanwhile, had reached a little office at the front of the second floor. Though the night was mild, he must have felt that the room was chilly. Immediately after pressing the light switch, he stepped to a small fireplace and struck a match to some kindling and logs that were arranged there.

The crackle of the fire pleased Zern. His own deep-throated chuckle was tuned to the sound. Stepping to a desk, he unlocked the top drawer and brought out a large envelope. From it he produced title deeds and other documents relating to his Georgia property. With the papers was a typewritten report.

Scanning through the paragraphs as though he had read them before, Zern reached the final page. His eyes rested on the signature.

The report was signed with the name, "Bert Peld."

Zern stroked his big chin in doubtful fashion. He was thinking of Bert Peld, and the man's death troubled him, for Zern had found Peld useful. Then Zern's face relaxed into a smile that gave an index to his reflections.

His thoughts had turned to Morton Selwood.

In linking Zern and Peld, Selwood had overplayed himself. His claim that Zern had hired Peld to import mobsters into Georgia and crack down on the Aureole Mine was an almost outrageous statement. It was like a thrust in the darkness, which Selwood hoped would excite Zern to the point of forgetting himself and therewith give credence to the accusation.

Instead, Zern had calmly spiked the charge by denying that he knew anything of Peld. He had specified, however, that if he had hired Peld, he would not have ordered the man to impede the search for the mine.

Zern was clever in twisting statements. He dealt in truths when it suited him, and evaded facts quite as readily. He liked to add suppositions which he could fall back upon when needed. Should he ever find it necessary to admit that he had known Peld, he would act as though he had so stated in the first place.

Yes, Zern could repeat the statement that he had made at Selwood's but twist it by leaving out the "if" with which he had prefaced it. There was only one witness who might give him trouble on that point: Lamont Cranston.

Thinking in terms of Cranston, Zern remembered that the man himself would arrive within the hour. For the first time Zern registered anxiety. Hurriedly he folded Peld's report; at the same time Zern's eyes strayed from the desk. They saw something that made him stiffen.

Darkness had encroached into the little room, as though protected from the hallway door, which Zern had purposely left ajar that he might listen for sounds within the house. The darkness formed a stretch along the floor, and it moved as Zern watched it.

The reason was the firelight.

Actually, The Shadow was immobile, as he peered in from the darkened hall. Even in wildest fancy, Zern should not have pictured the blackened streak as representing a human figure. The fault lay in the optical illusion produced by the firelight.

Wavering blackness on the floor took on grotesque significance to Zern. He remembered talk of a cloaked fighter who had waged battle near the Aureole Mine.

At that moment, Zern would have betrayed his mental turmoil if there had not been an interruption. There was a ring of the telephone bell, and Zern reached quickly for the extension telephone on his desk. It was an answer to his earlier call, and Zern steadied his tone as he spoke.

"Hello... Yes, this is Zern... Yes, I wanted you to come over. As soon as you can make it."

The call finished, Zern rose abruptly. Blackness was gone from the floor as he turned toward the door. But instead of going out into the hall, Zern simply pressed the light switch. Then, with only the firelight to guide him, he crossed the little office and went through a door just past his desk.

Turning on a bedroom light, Zern closed the door. The sound of its latch was audible.

INSTANTLY, The Shadow entered the firelit office, leaving the hallway door ajar, as he had found it. His cloaked shape took on a grotesque appearance, due to the wavering light. He looked like a creature from an outside world as he reached Zern's desk, where the Peld report still lay, along with the other papers.

Knowing that Zern might return at any moment, The Shadow took precautions. Betraying no eagerness regarding the report, he removed the glove from his right hand. He placed a dab of powdery chemical substance on his thumb, another on his second finger. Under circumstances like this, such preparation was better than a gun.

A snap of thumb and finger could produce a sharp explosion, thanks to those chemicals, good enough for The Shadow to make a startling exit any time he chose. Thus equipped, The Shadow used his left hand to thumb the pages of Peld's report.

The light was not sufficient for reading the typewritten sheets. There was a desk lamp near the papers; it had an extension cord running along the wall to a floor plug. But The Shadow deemed it unwise to use the desk lamp, since Zern might notice its glow beneath the bedroom door. Picking up Peld's report, The Shadow turned to move toward the firelight.

At that instant Zern's stroke came.

There was a silent puff from the innocent-looking desk lamp, a blinding flash directly in front of The Shadow's eyes. Instantly the room seemed black, the firelight dwindled to nothingness. Still dazzled, The Shadow heard Zern's door open; then came a rumbling chuckle.

"Stand where you are," said Zern. "I have you covered. Lift your hands and stand still while I take those papers which you hold. They happen to be my property."

A finger snap would have been useless at that moment. The Shadow's eyes had not recovered from the flash. He heard Zern approach, but could not see the man. Again, the rumbling voice demanding the report sheets.

The Shadow was holding the papers in his left hand. In resigned fashion, he transferred them to his right and stretched them in Zern's direction.

Receiving them, Zern drew back. Gradually The Shadow saw him, standing with a leveled revolver. Though Zern could not make out The Shadow's face, he recognized that his prisoner's vision had returned.

"Look at the desk lamp," suggested Zern. "I call it my 'crook trap.' It has a flash bulb, and the lamp cord runs into the next room. In case of unwelcome visitors" - he chuckled deeply - "I simply plug in the cord. A neat trick!"

It was a neat trick, though The Shadow did not compliment Zern on its success. He simply waited to hear what else the man had to say. Zern obliged with a further statement.

"I expect a friend soon," he declared. "When he arrives, he will escort you from these premises. You can explain to him why you happened to come here."

In turn, The Shadow spoke.

"Perhaps those papers will interest your friend." The Shadow's tone was sibilant. "Others might like to know of your full connection with a certain man named Peld."

It was a long shot, the chance that Zern might have confidential facts from Peld that he wanted no one else to know about, not even those whom he classed as friends. Not having found time to read Peld's report, The Shadow was merely working on a guess, but it turned out as he wanted it.

By this time The Shadow's eyes were getting accustomed to the firelight; he was working for a wedge that would help him from his present plight.

Moments were short. The Shadow could hear creeping footsteps in the hallway, sounds that escaped Zern, who was standing by the fireplace.

In a sneering tone, Zern remarked:

"You are quite wrong about these papers. They did not come from Peld. What they are, who prepared them, neither you nor anyone else will learn."

With a slight fling of his hand, Zern tossed the papers into the fire. The result was both startling and sudden. A sharp explosion, a blast of flame, and Zern was staggering away in a shower of burning wood that burst from the fireplace, full upon him!

Surging from the opposite direction was The Shadow; in the midst of the smoke he sent Zern sprawling in one direction, while the man's unfired gun scaled to the other side of the room.

Zern's trick of the flashing light bulb had deserved another. The Shadow's answer was the blast from the fireplace. The Shadow had delivered trick for trick!

CHAPTER VII. STROKES IN THE DARK

FROM the size of the blast in the fireplace, it seemed that The Shadow had planted a bomb there. Actually, the explosion had been caused by Frederick Zern. He had made a mistake when he tossed those papers into the fire at The Shadow's baiting suggestion.

In transferring the papers from one hand to the other, The Shadow had disposed of the chemical powders on thumb and finger, transferring them to Peld's report sheets. Ignited, they had produced the result that The Shadow had intended earlier, delivering their startling blast at a very suitable moment.

Having flattened Zern, The Shadow wheeled toward the hallway, bringing an automatic from beneath his cloak. As The Shadow swung, the door slashed open and someone pressed a light switch in the hall.

Four thuggish men were revealed. They were unmasked; their leader was the same flat-faced ruffian who had led the pretended squatters during the battle near the Aureole Mine. Flat-face had drawn a gun, and his men were copying his example, but their gestures were too late.

Already The Shadow was lunging toward them. Having no time to aim, the mob leader grappled with the cloaked fighter, at the same time yelling for someone to turn out the light while he cursed the fool who had supplied it in the first place. One thug yanked the switch, then joined the others in a surge.

Guns weren't shooting, they were slugging, for in the darkness, crooks could not tell each other from The Shadow. However, results proved the distinction. While men were merely groping for The Shadow, preliminary to taking swings at him, he used his gun like a sledge hammer and warded off grappling hands

with his other arm.

Rocked right and left, crooks took to flight as they heard their leader's snarl. From along the hallway they turned back to fire hasty shots, which The Shadow answered with staccato gun bursts that were tuned to his mocking laugh.

The gunmen and their flat-faced leader were routed and did not care to rally. They preferred only to get away before The Shadow's fire became deadly, as it had in Georgia.

They did not go by the front stairs. Instead, The Shadow heard them tumbling pell-mell down a stairway at the rear of the hall. Instead of starting immediate pursuit, he whipped back into the little office, poising motionless in the dark. He could actually count the fleeing foemen by the clatter that they made, but he was more interested in closer sounds.

The Shadow had not forgotten Frederick Zern. Just where Zern had gone was something that might prove imminently important. A powerful man, with much at stake, Zern could be dangerous in the dark, with or without his gun.

No sound from Zern. There was still time to overtake the fleeing men, perhaps to capture their leader. With a sweep so swift that he was actually in the hall before Zern could have realized it, The Shadow sped for the front stairs. He wasn't taking chances on Zern.

Counting Zern as demoralized as the rest, The Shadow felt free from any surprise attack. That was why the thing which happened was as unexpected as anything that he had encountered during his career.

It came just as The Shadow swerved to the front of the top stairs.

HANDS shot upward in the darkness. Apparently their owner was a few steps below, for the hands caught The Shadow waist-high. They had the grip of giant steel pincers, and acted with the same precision. The shoulders below them gave a hard, twisting heave as The Shadow sledged his gun for the attacker's head.

The twist caused The Shadow's swing to go wide. The heave launched him forward, clear over his opponent. The hands added a forceful fling as a send-off for The Shadow's headlong trip down the stairs. It was like a pitch into a canyon, that dive down through the darkness, a ride that was meant to end in sure disaster.

The Shadow had been on the lookout for Frederick Zern, because he knew that the big man was both strong and vengeful. But power and ardor were secondary in this catastrophe.

It was the skill of the jujitsu fling, the timely fashion of its delivery, that was sending The Shadow to the ground floor of Zern's home without stopping anywhere along the stairs.

Yet it was the length of the dive that saved The Shadow. Twisting as he went, he did not try to stop his spin. Instead, he sought to guide it, to double himself into something of a ball that would resist the shock at the bottom.

He was landing in true tumbler fashion, and fortunately nothing was in his way, as he took a succession of long, loping rolls across the lighted front hall.

He brought up against the front door, but by then his speed was ended. Though jarred and dazed, The Shadow was still intact.

His plight was temporarily worse than when in Zern's office. There he had merely lost sight of things; here

all his senses were at loss.

Instinct told him to remain motionless until his senses cleared. That would probably postpone a further attack, for by rights The Shadow should at present be lying with a broken neck, as his attacker wanted him to be.

The policy proved effective, for the dizzy sensation rapidly ceased. Deciding that he could navigate, The Shadow suddenly came to life. On hands and knees, he saw his gun nearby and scooped it up.

There was a stir at the top of the stairs. Thrusting toward the center of the hall, The Shadow saw Frederick Zern above. Hurriedly, Zern yanked his revolver from his pocket, ducking away as The Shadow aimed.

Zern was lucky, because The Shadow was still partially dazed. The Shadow, too, was fortunate, because Zern did not have his gun in readiness.

Both fired, too late. In getting to cover, Zern hurried his shot, and it went badly wide, while The Shadow, slow in tugging his trigger, found no target remaining. Still anxious to settle things with Zern, he steadied and started up the stairs. He could hear Zern pounding off toward the front room.

As evidence of new trickery, there were sounds below. The Shadow turned, as the front door opened. About to aim at a man who shouldered through, The Shadow halted. The man was in plain clothes, but behind him were a pair of policemen. Obviously the leader was a detective, come to investigate things at Zern's.

The arrivals saw The Shadow and started for him, but they were far too late to do any damage. He was at the top of the stairs by the time they had begun to shoot.

Zern saw The Shadow from the front room and poked his revolver into sight, but The Shadow's quick response, a shot that splintered the doorway above Zern's head, sent the big man to deeper cover.

How the local police had come into the scene so soon was something of a riddle, unless The Shadow had miscalculated the length of time that he had been lying propped against the front door.

Taking the back stairs, The Shadow reached an empty kitchen; from above he could hear Zern shouting at the police, telling them which way he had gone.

THE SHADOW'S head start was ample. He was through the hedge by the time lights appeared at the back door of Zern's house. Excitement was starting throughout the neighborhood, but the surrounding houses had large grounds that would require a long search for any fugitive.

Such a hunt had not even begun when The Shadow reached his limousine, a few blocks away.

Police were stopping strange cars in the neighborhood, and when they saw one pull up in front of Zern's, they were suspicious of it until they noticed its size. Such a large, expensive car was not the sort that common burglars would use. They assumed that it must contain some friend of Zern's, coming to pay a call.

The point was proven when Lamont Cranston stepped from the limousine and introduced himself. His immaculate attire showed no traces of the recent tussle. His cloak and hat, the garb of The Shadow, were stowed away beneath the seat of the limousine.

Ushered into Zern's house, The Shadow calmly went up the very stairs that he had previously descended in a nonstop dive. Chief participant in the recent fray, he was returning, a casual visitor, to hear of events

which no one - Zern included - could suppose that Cranston already knew!

Yet among those things were certain questions to which The Shadow still sought the answers.

CHAPTER VIII. THE HIDDEN TRAIL

FREDERICK ZERN was in the little office, seated at his desk. He welcomed Cranston with a wry smile, remarking that he was glad his visitor had not arrived a short while before. To hear Zern's version of events, one would suppose that he had been a total victim from the moment that he returned to his home.

"I thought that prowlers were about," stated Zern. "That is why I called Detective Gunther" - he gestured toward the plain-clothes man - "to ask him to come over. Unfortunately Gunther wasn't in his office when I called." Remembering the call that Zern had made from the downstairs phone, The Shadow recognized that the statement could be correct. It was promptly corroborated by Gunther, who mentioned that he had received Zern's message and called him later.

"You did call," agreed Zern, "and in very timely fashion, Gunther. I made the call short, merely asking you to come as soon as possible, because at that very moment I heard an eavesdropper in the hall. He was a man in black, unquestionably the same trouble-maker who operated recently in Georgia.

"He marched into this very room and tried to deprive me of these papers relating to my Georgia property. When I resisted he flung me across the room and dashed out. He had a mob with him, and they kept shooting, hoping they would kill me.

"When I thought that they were gone I found my gun and went out into the hall. As soon as I looked downstairs I saw the man in black again. Finding that I wasn't dead, he dashed up to complete the job. Fortunately for me, Gunther" - Zern clapped an approving hand upon the detective's shoulder - "you arrived in time to save me."

To The Shadow, Zern's story was about as leakproof as a sieve. It included no mention of Peld's report, nor of the clever trick whereby Zern had actually gained temporary superiority over The Shadow.

While Zern talked, The Shadow was looking at the bulb in the desk lamp. Its glass was smoky-white, proving it to be the same flash bulb used in Zern's clever trick.

But it would have been a mistake to point out the bulb to the police.

Such a gesture would have tipped Zern to the fact that Lamont Cranston was The Shadow.

The Shadow knew Zern's reputation, which was just the trouble. Legally, Zern's name was unblemished. No one had ever caught him in actual crime, hence there was no proof that he had ever committed any.

Even the fact that Zern knew Peld was not an incriminating proposition, particularly since The Shadow had been unable to delve into Peld's report. Having destroyed the papers in question, those bearing Peld's signature, Zern was completely in the clear. Should he be forced to admit that he had known Peld, he could still claim that anything happening in Georgia had been Peld's own idea.

One of Zern's aims, at least, was clear. He was trying to put himself in the same light as Selwood: to make it look as though ownership of Georgia mining property had made him the target of criminals. In classing The Shadow as the leader of the mob, Zern was following the lead of honest men like Bob Beverly, who had been mistaken about The Shadow.

But how far could the mistake hold with Zern?

There was a question for The Shadow. Oddly, the evidence was somewhat in Zern's favor. Certainly, The Shadow had entered the house unheralded and had pried into Zern's papers. He had actually attacked Zern in order to escape. At the same time, other marauders had arrived, and there was no proof that Zern had summoned them, since his call had been made to the police.

From The Shadow's viewpoint, however, Zern's story was not conclusive. The Shadow certainly had not summoned the crew of thugs and their flat-faced leader, and it was very unlikely that they could have picked up his trail.

The whole thing summed to one question:

Had Zern expected a visit from The Shadow!

PICTURING Zern as the master hand of crime, The Shadow could piece a plausible answer. Expecting The Shadow, Zern had told the mob to be on hand. He had called the police, after he arrived home, in order to cover his own game.

Talk of marauders in the neighborhood would have been a perfect alibi if Zern had managed to drop The Shadow with a few well-placed bullets. With proper support from the mob, Zern could have hoped to do it.

The flight of the thugs fitted with such a game; as it was, Zern claimed to have routed them. Looking at Zern, the police did not doubt him, for he was heavy and powerful; moreover, he said that he had been banking upon the police to arrive and aid him. But The Shadow was better qualified to judge Zern's prowess.

The Shadow had not forgotten the encounter in the hall, and his flying trip downstairs. Zern's strength wasn't the question. It was surprising that a man of his cumbersome bulk could be deft, as well. Moreover, The Shadow was forced to credit Zern with remarkable recuperation. Unless he possessed it, Zern could not have reached the front stairs ahead of The Shadow.

Abruptly shifting the conversation, Zern suggested a trip to Selwood's home on the ground that the financier would be interested in hearing what had happened. The Shadow recognized the motive behind the trip. Zern wanted to convince Selwood that they were both in the same boat; that, as a property owner in the vicinity of the Aureole Mine, Zern, too, had been the victim of a mysterious attack.

The suggestion suited The Shadow. Leaving the police in the house, he took Zern in the limousine and they rode to Selwood's. Arriving there, they found the house dark, but Zern insisted that Selwood couldn't be asleep, so they rang steadily at the doorbell.

It was Jackie who answered. The boy looked half scared, half asleep. He shrank back at sight of Zern, but smiled when he saw Cranston. When the visitors asked where Selwood was, Jackie did not know.

They went into Selwood's study, Jackie with them. On the way, Zern gave The Shadow a significant glance, as though to say that Selwood might have been the mysterious man in black. While they were talking with Jackie, a car came into the driveway. Soon afterward, Selwood appeared.

As soon as he saw Zern, Selwood glared suspiciously.

"Is this a hoax?" he demanded. "I received a call, telling me that Brenda was in an accident. I took one of the cars and drove over to the party, only to find that she was all right."

"Probably a mistake," suggested Zern. "Someone may have seen a wrecked car that looked like hers."

"Not many people make mistakes," retorted Selwood, "and not many know Brenda's car. But you are qualified on both points, Zern!"

Zern's big hands tightened in apish fashion. In the leisurely style of Cranston, The Shadow shifted between the two men to prevent any trouble.

"If you are bringing up old arguments, Selwood," sneered Zern, "you are the person who is mistaken. Your theory that I arranged that raid at the Aureole Mine has been disproven. Tonight, in my own home, I was the victim of an attack by the very same band that made trouble at the mine."

Selwood looked to Cranston for corroboration. The Shadow's response was a rather noncommittal nod.

"I suppose you need more than my word for it," jabbed Zern. "Very well, Selwood; you have it. Cranston knows what happened, and so do the police. But I am wondering" - his tone resumed its sneer - "if you actually received that call you spoke about."

"Of course I did!" stormed Selwood. "Jackie was here. He knows about it. Don't you, Jackie?"

"I was asleep, Mr. Selwood," returned Jackie. "But I think it must have been the telephone bell that woke me up. I remember that you told me you were going out."

Zern gave a rumbling laugh.

"A good alibi, Selwood," he remarked. "So we can call it quits. You think I had something to do with the raid at the Aureole Mine, but tonight's events proved otherwise. So I won't claim that you were responsible for the trouble at my house this evening, provided that there is no recurrence."

SELWOOD went purple with indignation, but Zern ignored him. Shaking hands with The Shadow, the big man strolled from the room. The front door slammed before Selwood could find his voice. Turning to The Shadow, the portly man exclaimed:

"It's another of Zern's tricks, Cranston! I warned all of you against him. Whenever Zern claims one thing, you can always look for another answer. He was in back of the Georgia business. This thing tonight is his alibi, not mine. I'll wager that Zern had someone call me up and start me on a blind chase.

"He is shrewd, Zern is." Selwood's brow was wrinkled. "Yes, very shrewd. He knows that I would like to find out certain things, such as his association with Peld. I made a mistake in accusing him openly tonight. In return, he put me in a position where I would have to explain things. That is the way Zern bluffs."

Selwood would have said more if it hadn't been for the presence of Jackie. The boy had begun to whimper, and he did not stop until Selwood placed a kindly hand around his shoulder.

"Don't worry, Jackie," assured Selwood. "Zern won't get me into trouble. He's trying to save his own hide, that's all."

"But he tried to hurt my father," blurted Jackie. "You said so, Mr. Selwood. I was scared when I saw Mr. Zern tonight. I was all alone -"

"But Mr. Cranston came along, too," interrupted Selwood. "Don't worry, Jackie. Zern will never come here alone. He is too wise for such business. So run upstairs and get back to bed."

Jackie scampered from the room. They heard him paddle up the stairs and slam the door of his room.

Selwood shook his head.

"A nervous child," he said, "and it is not wise to excite him. By the way, Cranston" - Selwood paused as they strolled to the front door - "did Zern try to sell you any of his property?"

"He showed me the title deeds," replied The Shadow. "He claimed that the crooks were after them."

"Zern would," nodded Selwood. "There is another of his double games. Those deeds would be useless to anyone who stole them. Zern wanted you to think they were valuable, to give you the idea that his property was worth more than it is. Don't promise a thing to Zern until you have talked with me. My advice is to watch Zern."

The advice was better, perhaps, than Selwood supposed. The Shadow considered it, while riding into town. From the rear seat of the limousine came a low, whispered laugh, the tone of The Shadow, uttered by Cranston's lips. Watching Zern was exactly what The Shadow planned to do some time in the future.

A hidden trail would be better than an open one. That fact was evidenced when The Shadow reached his sanctum, a hidden headquarters in New York City. There, cloaked in black, The Shadow worked beneath a bluish light, studying photographs from his own collection of criminal portraits, a rogue's gallery in itself.

The Shadow found the face he wanted, a flattish one, that bore the name of Case Barbel. He had glimpsed that face in Georgia, had gotten a better view of it at Zern's. There wasn't a doubt that Case Barbel was the leader of the thugs who had twice battled The Shadow and left him to be branded as their chief.

The nickname - Case - was based on Barbel's skill at keeping watch on men and places. An asset more useful, perhaps, than the fellow's willingness to use a gun.

It accounted for the stealth with which the crew had moved in on the shacks near the Aureole Mine; also, for the smooth entry at Zern's house.

Two could use such tactics. By finding Case, The Shadow could trail the crook and his mob, thus learning from first-hand observation what their next move would be. His identity unguessed by the law, Case would certainly be used in crime again.

By taking up the hidden trail, afforded through Case Barbel, The Shadow might gain a thorough insight into the schemes of Frederick Zern.

CHAPTER IX. WORD FROM THE MINE

DURING the days that followed, Morton Selwood heard frequently from Frederick Zern; though, as Selwood had promised Jackie Althorn, Zern never came to the house.

Zern's calls always concerned the Aureole Mine, in which he was a stockholder. Selwood's replies were always the same. New samples were coming in in regular procession, all of high-grade ore. Selwood had disposed of all the stock in the mine, except his majority shares, and would notify Zern of a meeting to be held before the week ended.

As matters stood, Selwood had cleared nearly half a million dollars and had paid off all his debts. His other holdings were safe, and he felt grateful to the men who had invested in the Aureole Mine. But he wasn't willing to hold a meeting every night just for Zern's benefit. In fact, he remarked that Zern's twenty-thousand-dollar investment was a comparatively small one - a mere trifle.

Other stockholders agreed that it was too early to hold a second meeting, and Selwood abided by their opinion. Nevertheless, he pushed the meeting night forward just to satisfy Zern.

As he expressed it to Cranston, first to arrive on the meeting night, it was best to keep Zern from talking too much to the other stockholders. Meetings were therefore useful, as details would be thrashed out to the satisfaction of all.

Selwood made his statements in an undertone, for Jackie was in the room, putting a picture puzzle together. Selwood did not like to have Jackie hear Zern's name mentioned. When other men began to arrive, he gave an anxious look toward Jackie's corner and said:

"Better run along to bed, Jackie. It's getting very late."

Jackie registered disappointment. It wasn't very late, and the picture puzzle was only half finished. He was sure that he could work on it very quietly, without disturbing anyone, but Selwood only shook his head.

"It's bed for you," he told Jackie. "After you get into bed, you can call Brenda. I'm sure she will read to you."

"I can read," returned Jackie. "It's silly, listening to someone else."

"But easier on your eyes," reminded Selwood, "and they've been troubling you, Jackie, By the way" - he reached for a cardboard box on the desk - "you forgot these."

It was another box of pecans. When Jackie had gone, Selwood explained that Althorn mailed a fresh box nearly every day, as pecans were about the only type of present that he could buy in the remote region of Georgia, where the Aureole Mine was located.

Then, as the stockholders arrived in full force, Selwood began to talk about the mine itself. He noted with pleasure that Zern was a member of his audience.

There were samples galore on the desk, all specimens of mineral rock, gold-bearing ore that bore the red-clay crust common to specimens from the Aureole Mine. Selwood had labeled them very carefully with the precise dates, and he also supplied affidavits describing the various samples.

Approaching the desk, Zern weighed the specimens and gave them thorough scrutiny.

"These look like loose chunks of ore," he rumbled. "What are they doing - still picking them up?"

"They are," replied Selwood. "Read the affidavits if you wish, Zern. There are tons of loose rock at the end of the mine shaft, ore that was broken loose and left there when the mine was closed. But the workers have just about cleared the loose material, and they report that the vein continues into the solid rock."

"How sure are they?" queried Zern. "Have they tried using the gold-finder?"

"No. He has not obtained all of the parts he needs to make it work at full efficiency. The reports are based on observation."

"You mean they saw gold in the solid rock? Ore with glittering particles like this?"

"Exactly," affirmed Selwood. "But they have not yet begun to break it. I expect samples within a few days."

"Which will mean another meeting, I suppose," said Zern. "How about day after tomorrow, Selwood? I am going on a trip right after that date."

Selwood drew himself up pompously behind the desk. He glanced around the group and stated:

"I think that everyone else is satisfied, Zern. I shall call the next meeting when I deem best."

Nods came from the stockholders. Selwood's figures indicated that enough gold could be extracted from the ore already hauled from the mine to pay for necessary machinery. None were anxious to interfere with Selwood's plans, since he was managing matters quite thoroughly.

"Very well, Selwood," agreed Zern. "Hold the next meeting after I return. I'll let you know when I get back."

ON the day of Zern's departure, The Shadow stopped at Selwood's house and found the mine promoter busy at his desk. There was an open package on the table, containing specimens of ore.

Selwood finished affixing labels, closed the box and took it to the safe, which was open. Having put the ore alongside previous specimens, he added some letters from Georgia.

"Those can wait, Cranston," declared Selwood wearily. "I have so many matters to attend to that I am overtaxing myself."

Selwood did look tired. He was worried, too, though he tried to hide it. When The Shadow inquired if he had heard from Zern, Selwood gestured for silence and pointed to the corner.

Leaning past the desk, The Shadow saw Jackie curled up on the floor, half asleep. On one side of him was a box of pecans, on the other a drawing book, which he had been coloring with crayons.

"Poor Jackie," said Selwood with a headshake. "No other boys to play with, nothing to amuse him except what he thinks up for himself. But he manages well enough. Althorn said he would be very little trouble. They traveled a great deal, you know, and Jackie managed to become self-sufficient."

"He misses Althorn?"

"Sometimes, yes. But he writes his daily letter, and it seems to help. Do you know, Cranston" - Selwood's tone was abrupt - "I wish Althorn would get that gold-finder working again."

The Shadow's gaze was quizzical. Selwood noted the steady glint of the eyes that had so often impressed him. For a moment he seemed nervous under the scrutiny of Cranston. Then:

"Not entirely on account of the mine, you know," said Selwood quickly. "I'm thinking of Jackie. If Althorn could get a few days off he could fly up here and see Jackie. Come, Cranston. We can talk outside. I don't want to wake up Jackie."

Obviously Selwood had something on his mind, and the presence of a visitor, even Cranston, troubled him. He was trying to find out if there was any special purpose in The Shadow's visit. Unable to obtain a clue from Cranston's steady demeanor, Selwood remarked:

"Perhaps I should call a meeting soon. No" - he became thoughtful - "I promised Zern that I wouldn't until he returned from his trip. You understand, don't you, Cranston, that it is wise to humor Zern?"

"Of course."

"If you think that the others would like to come out -" Selwood halted. "But no, they wouldn't. They are

all willing to accept my decision, aren't they?"

The Shadow nodded. He and Selwood had reached the limousine, where Stanley was seated behind the wheel. In a half-groping fashion, Selwood opened the door of the car. He was suggesting, without words, that it was time for Cranston to leave.

Casually, The Shadow ignored the hint. He turned away from the car and saw a nervous flicker display itself on Selwood's roundish features. At that moment Brenda came from the house, and Selwood took quick advantage of his daughter's arrival.

"You were going into town for dinner, weren't you, Brenda?" queried Selwood. "Mr. Cranston is leaving. He will take you along."

"But... but -" Brenda paused, surprised. "I may need my own car, father."

"No, no," returned Selwood hastily. "Not in town, Brenda. I'd rather have you come out by train at night. The roads are dangerous."

By then Brenda caught the inference that her father wanted Cranston to leave. Nodding, she said she would be ready in a few minutes. Very promptly, she arrived and rode away as a passenger in the limousine.

DURING the trip to Manhattan, The Shadow observed that Brenda, too, was nervous. When he inquired if she had heard from Bob Beverly, she nodded, started to say something, then compressed her lips quite firmly.

Later she resumed the conversation, but made no mention of Bob. She was evidently trying to avoid all talk of the Aureole Mine.

The Shadow knew the reason. He had the answer in his pocket. After he had dropped Brenda at her destination, The Shadow drew out a telegram that had reached him from Harry Vincent. It was another of the two-way weather reports.

In substance, the telegram stated that the quest for gold had struck a stumbling block. Such a message could mean only one thing: The loose ore had all been removed; the workers were operating on the solid wall at the end of the shaft. Instead of pay ore, they were getting worthless rock.

Putting the telegram away, The Shadow drew another message from his pocket. He read it by fading daylight, for dusk was rapidly shrouding Manhattan. It contained new data that The Shadow had been seeking, including a certain address where Case Barbel might be found.

With Frederick Zern gone from town, Case Barbel had become important. Whatever the fellow might know about the Aureole Mine might solve a problem which, from all appearances, was baffling Morton Selwood. Still, The Shadow was not going on appearances. Zern could not be judged by them; perhaps it was unwise to gauge Selwood by the same standard.

Something was wrong at the Aureole Mine, and that fact alone promised a flare-up of the rivalry between Zern and Selwood, which could lead to other consequences in New York as well as in Georgia. For the present, New York was more important, inasmuch as Case Barbel and his tribe were still in town.

Until Case and his crew were settled, other matters could wait. That was why a transformation again took place in the gloom of the limousine. Once more the infolding shroud of a black cloak, drawn from its hiding place, changed Lamont Cranston into a figure of darkness - The Shadow?

CHAPTER X. CROOKS CONFER

CASE BARBEL prided himself on the fact that he never chose an ordinary hide-out. Even when pressed by the law, as he had been on past occasion, Case always lived in what he considered real style.

Seated in a compact living room that opened on a fenced back yard, Case studied the windows of other apartments in the rear. They were old houses, in back, that had been changed into apartments, and Case had come to know every window.

Ordinarily he didn't bother too much about his neighbors, but the chance that one of them might turn out to be The Shadow was rather disconcerting to Case.

Four men were with Case Barbel, all members of the crew that had raided the camp near the Aureole Mine and had later invaded the home of Frederick Zern. They shared Case's worry as they listened to his theme.

"The Shadow lamped me," Case admitted. "He won't forget my mug. Maybe he got a peek at some of you guys, too. So we're sitting tight until we get the word."

Considering that previous orders had put them in tough spots, Case's men were not too pleased by thoughts of coming word. A sudden ring of the doorbell startled them; two of the thugs came to their feet, guns half drawn. Case snarled for them to sit down and take things easy.

"It's a special delivery," he said. "I can tell by the way the guy rings. Besides, I've been expecting a letter. Hop down, Dibby" - Case gestured to the least nervous of his companions - "and sign for it."

Like Case, the rest watched Dibby as the fellow left the apartment. Their attention centered on the door, they naturally did not observe what happened at the window. Momentarily, blackness blotted out the dim light of the courtyard; a grotesque silhouette crept in through the window and stretched along the floor.

Taking shape, the blackness became the cloaked figure of The Shadow. Burning eyes, peering from beneath a slouch hat brim, studied Case Barbel and his men. Then, like drifting smoke, the shape was gone.

Only a mere streak of inkiness remained alongside the open window. Having chosen an outside vantage point, The Shadow was watching for further developments.

Returning with the letter, Dibby handed it to Case. By then, tension was over; the other men were lounging about, helping themselves to drinks that Case had provided. Occasionally one glanced toward the window, but no longer did a blotting shape obscure the open space.

Only Case had a habit of thrusting his head outside, to glance in both directions. At present, Case was too concerned with the letter to think about other matters.

"It's from Zern, all right," announced Case. "He must have mailed it from out in Westchester before he left town."

"Did he say where he's going?" inquired Dibby in a harsh tone.

"No," retorted Case, his own voice metallic. "Get wise to one thing, Dibby. Just because I sent you down to pick up the letter don't mean that you rate extra. What Zern wants to tell me is his business and mine!"

DIBBY didn't apologize. From the window, The Shadow saw the fellow glance about and catch approving looks from the others. They were willing to accept Dibby as their spokesman. A pleased

gleam showed on the thug's leathery face.

"Zern's business and yours," sneered Dibby. "But look at it this way, Case. First you get a letter from Zern, and dough with it, sending us down to Georgia. We're supposed to handle some palookas who came over by the swamp. Only, who do we run into? The Shadow!

"That wasn't part of the deal. You said it was just an accident. Back here you get another letter from Zern, with more dough. This time we're to move into his joint and be ready if he needs us. He needed us, all right, because The Shadow showed up again."

Case gave a shrug, as though The Shadow might be expected anywhere. It didn't satisfy Dibby and the rest.

"Zern knew The Shadow was due," accused the spokesman. "He had it all figured out, with us to be the fall guys. But all the letter said was to be ready if he needed us."

"So what?" snapped Case. "If Zern was smart enough to figure The Shadow would have been around, we ought to have doped it out the same. What's more, we'd have got The Shadow if you lugs hadn't gone yellow!"

From his pockets, Case brought other letters. They formed a small stack as he showed them to big companions.

"I've been keeping these," declared Case. "They're all from Zern, with his own moniker on them. If he ever tries a double cross, I've got the goods on him, and he knows it! I've seen his signature on checks and other things, and he's using the right one. No chance for him to crawl out if I sent these letters to the cops.

"Only, Zern hasn't tried a double cross. Look at this letter I just got from him. He says he thought we'd run into some snooper the other night, only he wasn't sure it would be The Shadow, He's got another job for us tonight, and he says if we meet up with The Shadow he'll pay us double. That's fair enough, isn't it?"

Dibby looked at the others, saw that they agreed with Case. From the window, The Shadow noted the expressions on thuggish faces and understood why they were convinced. The offer of double pay indicated that The Shadow would not mix in things tonight, and that Zern knew it.

"All satisfied?" queried Case. "Good! Listen to this" - he was referring to the letter - "and get a load of what Zern has to say. He admits he should have tipped us off that Peld was working for him, only Peld wasn't supposed to get tangled up the way he did. Peld's job was to make friends with the regular squatters and keep them off of us.

"Zern's idea was smart the other night. Bringing us in and calling the cops, too. He wanted to knock off any guy that made trouble and give himself an alibi. It says all this in the letter. Here - take a gander and see how smart Zern is."

Case let the others read the letter only to the end of a page. When Dibby wanted to turn the page, Case withdrew the letter and thrust it in his pocket, with the other notes. Dibby gave a scowl and commented:

"Maybe Zern is too smart."

"If he is," returned Case coolly, "I've got the goods on him. These letters'll do the trick like I said. Our best bet is to play right along with Zern. He's told us to pull the job he wants; then lam town. We'll do what he wants and go where he says. We'll hear from him later."

EVERYONE liked the idea except Dibby. Case saw at once that he could expect more trouble from the leathery-faced thug who had come to regard himself as more than a mere underling. Case showed tact in the way he handled Dibby.

"Suppose you stay here, Dibby," Case suggested. "Kind of cover up for us."

"What good will that be?" demanded Dibby. "I'll have to know where you headed, won't I?"

For answer, Case produced the last letter and opened it to the final page that bore Zern's signature. He gave the page a few folds to show the top and bottom, but keeping the middle hidden. He let Dibby read the part that was in sight.

"There's where we're going," declared Case, "and what we're supposed to do. You can see Zern's moniker at the bottom."

"It's the dope on the job," admitted Dibby. "But where are you going to lam afterward? Is that what you're holding out - the part you've got folded in the middle?"

"You guessed it," returned Case, "and where we lam to is still my business, Dibby. When we've pulled the job, we'll either come back here or give you a buzz. I'm telling you one thing at a time, that's all."

Again Case was showing the tact that kept his crew in line. He didn't mistrust Dibby; he was simply telling the fellow half the story to satisfy him, and retaining the rest as an assertion of Case's own authority.

It left Dibby exactly where Case wanted him - in the middle. Before Dibby could offer further argument, Case turned to the others.

"Let's go," he said. "We'll take the back route out. You know where to reach us, Dibby, if we need you."

As the door closed behind Case and the departing crew, Dibby turned toward the window. His face had regained its scowl, for he knew that Case had used soft-soap tactics.

Muttering to himself, Dibby was saying that there wasn't a chance that Case would need him. Being left in the hide-out to "cover up," as Case expressed it, was bunk and nothing more.

Dibby was wrong.

As he stopped by the window to watch for Case and the departing crew, Dibby failed to notice the blackness that loomed on the outside wall. A figure was clinging to a low rail that went beyond the window - a thing shaped like an enormous bat, that came to life before Dibby had a chance to look in its direction.

Blackness lunged. Out of it came two gloved hands that caught Dibby's throat in an iron grip. Powerful shoulders heaving inward carried the body behind those hands. Off balance, Dibby had no chance to stop the surge. He was bowled backward to the floor, where he thrashed furiously, trying to get at the attacker who had throttled him.

Dibby couldn't find The Shadow's throat. Jabbing elbows warded the crook's hands, but all the while The Shadow's own fists kept their hold. Dibby weakened under the terrific torture, until, momentarily, the iron fingers relaxed.

Then came the whispered voice of The Shadow, reaching Dibby as something from far away, demanding

that he tell where Case and the rest had gone. When Dibby failed to answer, the fingers tightened, then eased again, making the contrast more evident. This time a gargly utterance came from Dibby's throat.

"Hiram... Herkimer" - Dibby's words were chokes - "an old professor. Lives at No. 62 Westside Place. Case has gone to croak him. I don't know... why."

Deftly The Shadow had squeezed the information from Dibby. The facts learned, gloved hands relaxed. It was the opportunity that Dibby wanted; elbows against the floor, the crook came upward, grabbing The Shadow's hands to force them aside. The Shadow seemed to sag away, and Dibby made a forward scramble that he intended as a lunge.

Dibby never completed his drive. Recoiled like a human spring, The Shadow unleashed. His head struck with the power of a battering-ram squarely against Dibby's chest.

Hurled backward, the thug's own head cracked the wall with a force that shook down a shower of plaster. That spray mingled with a galaxy of starry lights that burst through Dibby's brain.

Crumpled on the floor, unconscious, Dibby failed to hear the low-toned whisper of The Shadow, voicing mirth that signified a coming conquest over crime.

CHAPTER XI. THE OLD PROFESSOR

THE house on Westside Place was an old one, a forgotten relic of Manhattan. It was the sort of house that Case Barbel liked, for it offered ample opportunity of approach. Nevertheless, Case was not hasty in his actions.

He hadn't forgotten the battle at the Aureole Mine, nor the fray at Zern's residence. On those occasions Case had shown too much urge.

The letter in Case's pocket offered double price should the crooks encounter The Shadow at Herkimer's. To Case, who figured Zern as a man of great wealth, with much at stake, the offer meant that The Shadow might indeed be on hand.

Thinking in terms of The Shadow, Case decided to investigate every cranny, to pick convenient routes for departure as well as entry, before invading Herkimer's premises.

It didn't occur to Case that The Shadow might also be thinking in terms of Case Barbel; that if the black-cloaked fighter knew what was due at Herkimer's he would expect the crooks to move with caution.

All during the half-hour that Case wasted, first in skirting the house, then in testing its doors and windows, a stealthy prowler could easily have entered the place.

In fact, early in the survey, one of Case's men reported a stir of blackness in the dim back yard, but on investigation Case attributed the strange phenomenon to the wind which stirred the branches of a tall ailanthus tree.

Case noticed that the branches of that tree pressed close to a window on the second floor, and thought about using it as a means of entry. But he decided that the tree route would be a poor exit in a pinch, so he jimmied open a ground-floor window instead.

All during the preliminary survey, Case had kept intermittent watch upon the window of a second-floor room, the only lighted window in the house. The room was a deep one, and it had an occupant who had been glimpsed at intervals by the snooping crooks. The occupant was unquestionably Professor Hiram

Herkimer.

The light being dim, the professor had been identified only by an oldish face topped with thin white hair; but when he had moved deeper from the window his shadow had trailed him, until his return. As Case put it to his followers, the old professor hadn't been out of sight from the time that they had arrived.

Stealing through the ancient house as deftly as they had entered Zern's modern home, the mobsters reached the second floor. There, Case motioned to his men, whispered for them to use even more caution. Advancing alone, Case reached the door of the front room.

It was ajar, and Case could see Professor Herkimer behind a desk, going over heaps of books and papers, apparently compiling some monumental work of scientific literature.

Except for Herkimer, the room was empty. Shouldering the door wide, Case thrust a gun ahead of him and confronted the man at the desk. Herkimer looked up and blinked; Case noted that his eyes had a childish stare. When Herkimer added a welcoming chuckle, Case smiled in return and let his gun slide rapidly into his pocket.

It struck Case that the professor was something of a nut, the type that could be humored.

"HELLO, professor," greeted Case in a smooth tone. "You remember me, don't you? I've brought some friends along to see you. We thought maybe you'd like to take a little ride with us."

Old Herkimer stroked his chin as he studied Case's flattish face. Then, with a slow nod, he spoke wheezily:

"Your name escapes me, but I remember you. It was when I was dean of the engineering college. Wait - do not tell me your name. I shall remember it."

"Fresh air ought to help you," put in Case. "How about the ride, professor?"

"My physician might object. Of course, I could telephone Dr. Nolan and ask -"

"I called him myself, professor," assured Case. "He said a little trip would do you good. Here are my friends. They heard him."

Three thugs had entered. Like Case, they were carrying guns, but they were slow in pocketing them. Apparently Herkimer hadn't observed Case's revolver when it was in sight, but he did see the present display of weapons.

"Just to protect you, professor," remarked Case. "There have been a lot of holdups in Central Park lately. We thought maybe we'd stroll around there, and we wouldn't want any trouble."

"Of course not," wheezed Herkimer. "I appreciate your foresight, gentlemen. One moment, while I get my hat and overcoat."

He rose and turned toward a closet door. By then the crooks were flanking him, reaching to their pockets. Case buzzed them to lay off. He wanted Herkimer to be found wearing hat and overcoat out in the park. The police would think it the result of a holdup and might require a few days to identify Herkimer.

Chuckling happily as he reached past the half-opened closet door, Professor Herkimer seemed the perfect dupe until he found the garments that he intended to wear. He was actually putting them on when his chortle changed to an uncanny laugh that brought a hoarse cry from Case Barbel.

With his mobbies echoing the shout, Case saw the "hat and coat" that Herkimer was getting.

"Hat and cloak" described the garments better.

The hat was a slouch one; like the cloak, it was black. Already clamped on Herkimer's head, the slouch hat hid his features. As for the cloak that he was whisking over his shoulders, it completed the transformation. The elderly professor had become a being in black.

The Shadow!

IN the same cross swing of his hands that brought the cloak tight on his shoulders, The Shadow whipped a brace of automatics from hidden bolsters and came lunging squarely upon the four men outside the closet door.

Only Case had been quick enough to yank his gun; the rest were trying to get their weapons as they dived for shelter. Desk, chairs and bookcases were the only things that promised escape from The Shadow's wrath.

Before Case could aim, The Shadow knocked Case's gun hand upward. Case tried a sideward swipe that breezed The Shadow's head, carrying away the slouch hat, a white wig with it. Diving for the desk, Case knocked a stack of books to the floor. Beneath them was a make-up kit, wide open.

The wig, the make-up box accounted for the singular surprise that the crooks had received.

They had seen Professor Herkimer from outdoors. But while they were watching the window, the professor had received a visitor ahead of them: The Shadow. Straight from Case's apartment, the cloaked avenger had entered the house while crooks dallied outdoors.

The Shadow had evidently warned the real professor and hatched this scheme. He had made up as Herkimer, and had changed places with him during one of the professor's little strolls around the room. Inasmuch as Case had never seen Herkimer, the make-up job had been merely an impersonation on The Shadow's part.

Such facts didn't make it any easier for Case and his three gunzels. The Shadow's guns were jabbing, sending mobsters into wilder dives as he pivoted about the room. A scream told that he had clipped one of the four. Vaulting a low table, The Shadow sagged another with a glancing gun blow and took the fellow's own shelter.

It was then that Case made a desperate effort. Shoving the desk ahead of him, he tried to trap The Shadow in the corner. The wounded thug came bounding in with frenzy. The crook who had taken the glancing gun stroke still had his senses, and tried to grapple. The last man of Case's band chucked a chair at The Shadow and came following right after it.

They might as well have attacked a whirlwind. In the dim light of the room, The Shadow had the blackness and speed of a miniature tornado as he hurdled the incoming desk, hooked Case with a rapid clutch and spun the astounded leader into the midst of his stupefied followers.

Slugging for The Shadow, they found Case instead, and only the wildest of dives saved Case from the guns of his own men. Mere luck started Case toward the door; shooting crazily at everything black, he was yelling for his men to come along. They were firing, too; like Case, the only target that they couldn't find was The Shadow.

They heard his laugh from the door. He was ahead of them, while they had been turning back to fire useless shots. They had gone wild with their bullets and had only a few to spare, a fact which The

Shadow recognized quite well. As he voiced his challenge he launched forward to settle the demoralized four.

Even a batch of reserves - had Case brought any - could not have pulled the gunmen from their dilemma. But aid came their way, though it was unintended. Aid of the only sort that could prove useful, since it intervened between The Shadow and the men who were fully under his control.

The half-opened door of the closet swung wide. From the deep interior came the real Professor Herkimer, a frenzied man who flung himself barehanded upon the crooks.

Though assured by The Shadow that invaders wouldn't have a chance, Herkimer couldn't believe it at this moment. He didn't realize that The Shadow's guns were still well loaded, while the thugs had spent practically all their ammunition.

As one, the scattering mobsters grabbed for the old professor, hoping to use his frail body as a shield against The Shadow. By the very act, they rallied, meeting The Shadow as he loomed upon them.

Caught in the very vortex, Herkimer, the man The Shadow had come to save, was in the most dangerous spot of all!

FEINTING toward the crooks, The Shadow suddenly changed tactics. Tossing one gun aside, he hooked Herkimer with his arm and whirled him away from danger. Shooting as he went, The Shadow let Herkimer sprawl to a corner and kept going in the opposite direction, deep into the room.

The crooks didn't wait; they fled out through the doorway to the hall. One staggered, clipped by a bullet that The Shadow delivered, but managed to keep on.

Only Case showed daring. Out in the hall, he paused as his men clattered on toward the stairs. Then, thrusting his gun back through the door, Case tried to get The Shadow with a last shot, the only one remaining in his gun.

Case saw The Shadow, but aimed too hastily. His finger faltered, his aim swerved, as he finally tugged.

In that momentary interval there was a high-pitched shout, and a figure leaped wildly from the corner. It was Herkimer, back in again, and he reached the path of aim as Case fired.

Taking the bullet, Herkimer staggered, and Case made a mad dash for the stairs. He was lucky again for The Shadow's own aim was halted by the eccentric zigzag staggers of Herkimer, who was between him and the door.

When The Shadow finally reached the hall, Case was gone. Looking back, the cloaked fighter saw Professor Herkimer gasping on the floor. Of two choices - pursuit of crooks or first aid to the chance victim - The Shadow preferred the latter.

As be stooped above the wounded professor, The Shadow could hear the clatter of fleeing mobsters outside the house. The last that they heard was a vengeful laugh that spurred them on to flight. That tone boded future doom for Case Barbel and his tribe. The laugh of The Shadow!

CHAPTER XII. ZERN'S STROKE

IT took a long while for news to reach the Aureole Mine from New York. So long that the men stationed there had no idea, when morning came, that there had been a mysterious gun fray in Manhattan wherein a certain Professor Hiram Herkimer had been wounded and taken to the hospital by the police.

Probably the news would not have changed events at the mine. Things were bad enough in that locality; so bad, in fact, that both Bob Beverly and Harry Vincent had little interest in anything else.

Lying on a table in Bob's tent were ore samples like the last that they had sent to Morton Selwood - glittering chunks of rock that sparkled as gayly as gold, but did not contain a grain of the precious metal.

"Iron pyrites," identified Bob with a scowl. "Whoever named this stuff 'fool's gold' was right. It fooled us when we first saw it. It has me beaten, Harry."

"Why should it?" demanded Harry. "The stuff often shows up in the vicinity of gold mines, doesn't it?"

"Yes," admitted Bob, "but in this case we were working along a shaft where there was plenty of loose gold ore. If there had been a break in between, I could understand it. Of course, I don't know everything about gold mining, not by a great deal, but I've never heard of old ore stopping dead and the other stuff beginning."

"There must be an answer, Bob."

"There is an answer, Harry." Bob's tone was solemn. "One that I don't even like to think about. Suppose you let me keep it to myself until we've done some more work in the shaft."

Harry agreed. They stepped out into the sunlight, where Claude Althorn was assembling his gold-finder. The angular man arose, stroked his shocky hair. He looked tired, but his weather-lined face showed a smile.

"I'll have it working again soon," assured Althorn. "Not much use to you, Beverly, now that you've found gold. But it means a great deal to me."

Nodding, Bob drew Harry along. "Poor Althorn," he said. "He's so wrapped up in that machine of his that he hasn't an idea what has happened. Every time we bring ore down here he just nods and looks pleased. He hasn't seen our latest samples."

They turned toward the path that led to the mine shaft. Harry stopped when he heard a car coming in by the sand road, and Bob became curious, too. It wasn't one of their own cars returning, because everyone was either in camp or at the shaft.

As the car came into sight from a clump of scraggly pines, Bob recognized it.

"Sheriff Cady," he said. "We'd better talk to him. He was pretty decent about that mess we had the night when Peld was killed. Squared it with the coroner and all that. A good fellow, Sheriff Cady.

Cady didn't look like a good fellow when he stepped from his rattletrap car. It couldn't have been the sand road that had soured his disposition, for he was used to traveling such byways. Cady's present mood could best be defined as stern; he seemed to have some official duty weighing on him.

With the sheriff were two deputies. Behind them came a bulky man who looked like a Northerner. In fact, Harry promptly localized him as a New Yorker, and wondered who the man might be.

Looking at Bob, Harry saw a clouded stare upon his friend's frank face. Apparently Bob remembered the visitor vaguely and was trying to identify him.

"Hello, Beverly," boomed the big man. "You ought to remember me. I met you once at Selwood's house."

"I've met quite a few people at Selwood's," returned Bob. "I recall your face, but not your name."

"You'll remember it. You've heard it often, because it's one that Selwood never liked. I'm Frederick Zern."

BOB came alert, exactly as Harry had seen him do once before - the time when Bob had nearly stepped on a rattlesnake.

Harry was not surprised. He had heard Bob mention Zern quite often in uncomplimentary terms. Of course, Bob's opinions were ones that he had picked up from Morton Selwood, but they sounded reliable enough.

"I just came over to take a look at the Aureole," declared Zern in his healthy basso. "I hear you've been doing good work here, Beverly."

"Sorry, Mr. Zern." Bob was turning on his heel as he spoke. "The mine isn't open to visitors. Come on, Harry. We have work ahead."

Harry was still watching Zern. He saw the bulky man turn to Sheriff Cady with an abused air.

"Hear that, sheriff?" inquired Zern. "I told you it was what we would run up against."

The sheriff shouldered across Bob's path.

"Wait up, Beverly," he said sternly. "I allow we've got something here to settle. This man Zern says he's fixing to look at your mine shaft. I fancy he's got a right."

"Only Mr. Selwood has the right," retorted Bob. "He owns the mine. That is" - Bob was adding a correction - "only Mr. Selwood and the other stockholders. I understand he's taken some persons in with him."

"So he has," put in Zern, "and I'm one of them. Take a look at these, Beverly."

Bob looked at the stock certificates which Zern brandished in front of his eyes. Harry saw chagrin mingled with worriment on his friend's face. Controlling himself, Bob made the best of it.

He asked Zern why he wanted to see the Aureole Mine, and when Zern replied that he was interested simply because his own property was dependent on the value of the Aureole, Bob agreed to take him to the shaft.

What promised to be a cursory inspection turned out otherwise. Zern was impressed by the sparkling walls of the original mine shaft and wanted to keep going farther. They reached the extension where the loose ore had been found, and Bob picked up a few remaining samples, hoping they would satisfy Zern.

But the big man produced a flashlight of his own and played it straight upon the end of the shaft.

It did not take an expert to tell the difference in the new-hewn rock. Maybe Zern would have been deceived by fool's gold had be seen it isolated, but its present sparkle, in contrast to the gold ore, was very evident.

It was beautiful, the fool's gold - too beautiful. The very sparkle that had often led gold hunters on the wrong track put Zern on the right one.

"So this is what you're getting at!" Zern's booming voice echoed through the shaft. "Worthless ore instead of gold! No wonder Selwood wants to run things his own way, postponing meetings until a time that suits

him. This mine has been salted!"

Bob's fists doubled. He made a lunge for Zern, but the big man was swifter and had a longer reach. He met Bob with a big paw that reminded Harry of a small-sized ham. Bob was flung back against the side of the shaft. Before he could start another drive, the sheriff intervened.

"Arrest this man!" bawled Zern, pointing out Bob. "And this fellow, too!" He gestured toward Harry. "Hold all of them that you find here. Attach the mine and board it up. We'll get to the bottom of this swindle!"

WHILE the sheriff was wondering how to do all the things that Zern asked, the big man picked up a chunk of ore and slashed it at the side of the shaft.

Pieces of loose rock came away, and with them the last traces of glitter. Both Bob and Harry stared. They could see why gold had seemingly blended into iron pyrites.

Zern was right. The mine had been salted, and in a very thorough fashion. The work itself could have taken months, and was probably of fairly recent date. It brought up a point that Harry had never before considered; namely, that someone had uncovered the lost Aureole Mine and changed it considerably, from the actual condition in which it had been when abandoned.

Harry summed up the whole thing mentally.

Once the Aureole Mine had paid well. The proof was plain in the outer shaft, where traces of gold were too evident to be disputed. But the miners of eighty-odd years ago had reached the limit of the gold. Hoping to strike another vein, they had hewn two passages. They had found some traces of gold in this one leading upward to the right.

Then came a blank stretch, ending in a wall that they had scratched to find nothing more than iron pyrites, that glittered nobly, but showed their true nature under close inspection.

So far all was fair.

Whoever had uncovered the mine could be blamed for having salted it. Someone had deliberately hauled gold ore into the mine and used it to clog the final passage. That same person, and those who aided him, had also dusted the sides of the dead passage with gold.

To Bob and Harry, the loose ore had looked fair enough. In clearing it, they had seen a glittering wall ahead and had presumed it to be good ore. They hadn't thought to examine the dusted side walls. Their whole purpose had been to reach the passage end. Not until they had cleared the passage did they identify the fool's gold at the terminus.

Bob was talking along that very line as the sheriff marched them from the mine. All the way to camp, Zern sneered at the story and insisted that the prisoners be held, though the sheriff was inclined to side with Bob and Harry.

"I'm leaving my deputies here," announced the sheriff when he reached his car. "No one connected with the Aureole Mine can leave until tomorrow morning. I'll be back at sundown, with more deputies."

"And meanwhile," put in Zern, "the sheriff is driving me to the airport. I shall be in New York this afternoon, and by evening there will be an unpleasant surprise for Morton Selwood."

The car plowed away along the sand road. Under the watchful eyes of the armed deputies, Harry and Bob sat down in the doorway of a tent. They were staring moodily at Althorn, still busy with his

gold-finder, when Harry had an idea.

"The sheriff can't hold Althorn!" he exclaimed. "We can prove that Althorn's business was finding the mine, not working it. If Althorn goes over to Hillville, he can call up Selwood and tell him what has happened."

Bob went over to the deputies and presented the new argument. They were promptly convinced that he was right, which meant that the sheriff would hold the same opinion. But they refused to act until the sheriff returned that afternoon.

Back at the tent, Harry and Bob sat down to watch the day drag by. All the while, they chafed at the thought of the odd race against time. It was the hare and the tortoise: Zern, speeding north, intent upon catching Selwood by surprise; the sheriff, plodding about his daily routine, wasting valuable hours, when his return was necessary for Althorn's release.

During those hours, Bob kept harping on the point that only Althorn could spike Zern's game against Selwood. Though Harry nodded, he did not quite agree.

Harry was thinking of another factor that might turn the balance - a person who could decide between Morton Selwood and Frederick Zern and act accordingly.

That person was The Shadow!

CHAPTER XIII. A QUESTION OF EVIDENCE

IN counting upon The Shadow's intervention in the case of Zern versus Selwood, Harry Vincent was not thinking in terms of pure chance. There was a simple fact, small in itself, that could count a great deal.

So far, Harry had kept The Shadow well acquainted with events at the Aureole Mine by sending telegrams which gave specific indications. On this day no telegram would come. From its omission, The Shadow would surely determine that something had gone amiss.

Not that Harry's telegrams were sent every day. He only dispatched them when occasion called. But at present things were going badly at the Aureole Mine, and The Shadow knew it. He would logically expect some sort of message before the afternoon ended.

The Shadow did expect one. It happened, however, that he was otherwise engaged late in the afternoon.

As Lamont Cranston, The Shadow was visiting a hospital with his friend, New York's Police Commissioner Weston. Knowing that Cranston was interested in unusual cases, Weston had taken him to see an old professor named Hiram Herkimer, whose home had been raided by dangerous criminals the night before.

Herkimer wasn't badly injured. The bullet that winged his shoulder had been extracted, and he was propped up in bed, well bandaged. But Weston was sure that Herkimer was suffering from a delirium, judging by the way the professor talked.

A friend had rescued him, Herkimer said. A mysterious friend, a ghost in black. A ghost of the old house where Herkimer lived; or, more specifically, one of the ghosts.

There were hundreds of them dwelling there, though some of them were only occasional visitors. Ghosts of instructors and students, who had known Herkimer while he was dean of the engineering school.

Naturally, with all his talk of a black-clad ghost, Professor Herkimer forgot what the crooks looked like and how many of them there had been. Thus he gave no clue to Case Barbel, which suited The Shadow, who was anxious to settle scores with Case on his own. As long as the law ignored Case, there was a good chance of finding him.

The chance was Dibby. Back at Case's apartment, The Shadow had placed two of his secret agents in charge, with Dibby in their custody. If Case returned, or tried to contact Dibby, it would mean opportunity for The Shadow. So far there had been no word from Case, who had probably cleared town in too much of a hurry to bother about Dibby.

When The Shadow left the hospital room with the commissioner, a physician stopped them in the corridor and showed Weston a confidential report on Professor Herkimer.

From it, Weston learned that Herkimer's babble had not been a matter of delirium. The professor was simply a harmless crank, whose brain had bogged down soon after his retirement.

For two years, Herkimer had been preparing a book on the fourth dimension, gathering every sort of evidence that would prove his theories. His belief in ghosts was actual; he considered them the inhabitants of a fourth-dimensional world.

"Too bad, Cranston," said Weston as he parted with his friend. "From what Herkimer told us, I actually believed that The Shadow must have helped him. But the ghost stuff changes matters. Probably Herkimer met up with a lone burglar who fired a few shots and fled. Nevertheless, I shall see that he is properly protected at the hospital."

SETTLEMENT of the Herkimer question pleased The Shadow as he rode out to Westchester County in his limousine. Just why criminals wanted Herkimer out of the way was a question yet to be answered. From all indications, only one man could answer it: Frederick Zern.

But The Shadow did not want to question Zern.

Evidence against Zern was more important. Twice The Shadow had nearly obtained such evidence. There was the report from Bert Peld, which The Shadow had been forced to let Zern destroy, yet had put to good advantage at the time.

There were the letters with Zern's signature which The Shadow should have captured with their owner, Case Barbel. In that case, ill luck, in the blundering form of Professor Herkimer had balked The Shadow.

In Cranston's leisurely style, The Shadow turned the dial of the limousine's radio and began a short-wave communication with his contact agent, Burbank. From it, The Shadow learned that no telegram had arrived from Harry Vincent.

The Shadow should have learned that fact an hour or two before, and would have but for the long interview with Professor Herkimer. However, the information, or lack of it, left only one move open - a call on Morton Selwood, since there were no reports on Frederick Zern.

At present, The Shadow was on his way to Selwood's, and expected to arrive there soon after dusk.

SEATED in his study, Morton Selwood was staring glumly at the outside darkness when be heard the telephone bell ring. He never answered the telephone himself unless it kept on ringing. The main phone was in the hallway, and Selwood's calls were usually switched through to the study.

The ringing stopped. Selwood heard Brenda's voice, then Jackie's. Somewhat puzzled, he stepped into

the hallway, to see Jackie at the telephone, with Brenda standing by. Turning, the girl smiled toward her father.

"It's Mr. Althorn," explained Brenda. "He is calling from Georgia. I think he wants to talk to you, too, father."

Selwood looked at Jackie, who was saying "Yes, dad," very solemnly, and repeating it often. He asked Brenda to switch the call to the study as soon as Jackie was through.

Brenda promptly hurried Jackie, and as soon as Selwood reached his desk he found Althorn on the wire.

Their talk was very short, but it left Selwood quite aghast. He was holding the telephone quite feebly when Jackie entered.

Seeing Jackie, Selwood roused himself and said to Althorn: "I understand... Yes, I can handle Zern. Hold on and I'll let Jackie talk to you again."

When Jackie took the telephone, Selwood told him to hang up when through talking to his father. Then, with slow step, Selwood left the study and looked for Brenda. He found her entering the living room. He began:

"Brenda, something very serious -"

Selwood cut off abruptly. There was a guest in the living room: Lamont Cranston. Evidently a servant had admitted him at about the time when Althorn's call came through.

Momentarily, Selwood stiffened; then, accepting Cranston's arrival as a fortunate coincidence, he smiled.

"I am going to call a meeting of the stockholders," said Selwood. "Come into the study, Cranston. I can communicate with them from there. I may be able to reach most of them."

As he spoke, Selwood let his smile fade. Watching Brenda, The Shadow saw that she had noticed it. The girl followed them into the study, where Jackie had finished talking to Althorn and had gone back to working at one of his unfinished picture puzzles, which was lying on the floor.

Indulgently, Selwood let him continue, noticing that the picture was almost finished. To help the cause along, Brenda sat down beside Jackie and added pieces to the puzzle.

Meanwhile, Selwood was busily calling the stockholders. Last on the list he called Zern, only to learn that he was still out of town, a fact which relieved Selwood immensely.

With a smile, Selwood turned to Cranston, to confide something for the first time; then, observing that Jackie had not quite pieced together the puzzle, he waited patiently for him to finish.

The picture was just done when the doorbell rang. Motioning for Brenda to leave and take Jackie with her, Selwood stepped to his safe and started to turn the combination.

"There's something I want to show you," he began, "before the others come -"

Commotion interrupted from the hall. For the moment Selwood thought that Jackie had started a fuss and wouldn't go up to bed when Brenda ordered him. But that wasn't the trouble. Frederick Zern came shouldering into the study, pushing a servant ahead of him.

There were other men behind Zern; he pointed out Selwood for them. Selwood was just turning the

handle of the safe to open it. He stopped and made a gesture to spin the combination.

"Stop where you are, Selwood," bawled Zern. "These men have a Federal warrant for your arrest, and they intend to impound the contents of your safe!"

SUDDENLY alarmed, Selwood yanked the safe door open and made a frantic grab for papers that lay within. What he intended to do with them, no one learned, for he was seized before he had a chance.

Then the Federal men had taken charge and Selwood, slumped behind his desk, was making wild protests.

He knew that the Aureole Mine had suddenly failed; he wasn't trying to deny the charge. But the fault was not his; he had been trying to reach the stockholders to explain matters. Cranston was a stockholder and would understand.

It was then that Zern broke into Selwood's outburst.

"I'm a stockholder, too," reminded Zern in scoffing tone. "The only one smart enough to go down and took at that mine we invested in at your suggestion, Selwood.

"The mine is salted; the whole thing is a swindle! All that we need to prove it is the evidence from your safe, Selwood. You'll have your chance to deny the charges" - Zern's expression was very much a leer - "but not to destroy the evidence. From all that I have learned, I would say that it was very much against you."

With the air of a man who had accomplished something great, Frederick Zern turned to The Shadow, only to be met by the gaze of inscrutable eyes from the immobile face of Lamont Cranston.

In his turn, Morton Selwood looked toward his friend, only to view the same masklike expression.

Which cause Cranston would favor, that of Zern or Selwood, only The Shadow knew!

CHAPTER XIV. THE DAY IN COURT

THE arrest of Morton Selwood produced a terrific sensation, which was amplified by news of the discovery of the Aureole Mine, a thing which previously had escaped the notice of the press. Clyde Burke, one of The Shadow's secret agents, naturally scooped the town, for he had the Aureole data all in readiness.

It was good policy on The Shadow's part to let Clyde do so, as it increased the reporter's importance with the New York Classic. Clyde's connection with that tabloid journal often gave The Shadow facts regarding certain crimes, and therefore worked two ways.

Reduced to simple terms, the charges against Morton Selwood were that he had defrauded certain persons to the extent of half a million dollars by selling them worthless stocks. Other indictments were sought, enough to put Selwood in jail for two lifetimes if found guilty on all counts.

It wasn't legal to salt a mine. Nor was such a task a one-man job, which indicated that Selwood could have conspired with others to such purpose. Technically, he had also violated certain regulations in interstate commerce; while the shipment of sample ores from the mine, in connection with a swindle scheme, came under the head of using the mails to defraud.

But the proving of such things would be long and difficult, an interwoven process of law. The point that Selwood's lawyers were after was to prove that there had been no swindle. If they could drive that one

home, they felt that they could knock down the other charges one by one.

Thus Selwood's hearing, held on an early date, took on the aspects of a full-fledged trial. When Selwood arrived, he looked haggard, but confident. He even smiled at his fellow stockholders, all of whom were present, and a few of them returned the greeting. The rest were dour, with two exceptions.

One was Frederick Zern, whose smile, if it could be so termed, meant nothing in the way of friendship.

The other, who did not smile at all, was Lamont Cranston; but his masklike, emotionless countenance gave Selwood more hope than any smile could have.

Selwood's attorneys made no effort to deny that he had sold the gold stock. They did say that he was also an investor in the Aureole Mine; but that claim was flattened by Selwood's own admission that he had paid a trifling sum, years before, for all the stock in question.

Selwood denied that he had salted the Aureole Mine. He stated that he had spent thousands of dollars searching for it, and produced affidavits, sent up from Georgia, certifying to the discovery of the mine through Althorn's gold-finder and the work that had later been accomplished by Bob Beverly, Harry Vincent, and others.

As to his negotiations with stockholders, Selwood declared that they had been honest and sincere. He admitted that samples of poor ore had reached him, but claimed that the shipments arrived on the day after the second and last meeting of the stockholders. He decided to wait, so he said, before calling a third meeting, on the hope that samples would improve.

The Shadow remembered the points in question. He recalled that second meeting, when Zern had examined specimens of ore. He also pictured the next evening, when The Shadow, as Cranston, had visited Selwood alone.

On that night, The Shadow remembered, Selwood had been somewhat skittish about a package just arrived from Georgia.

WHEN Zern took the witness stand, he was promptly challenged by Selwood's Lawyers. They wanted to know why Zern had taken it upon himself to visit the Aureole Mine, and he had a solid answer.

He claimed that he wanted first-hand proof of the mine's worth before attempting to see his own property in the same vicinity. As Zern expressed it, he had been both amazed and horrified when he found that the Aureole Mine was salted.

Such testimony led to the production of the actual exhibits: documents and ore samples taken from Selwood's safe and impounded by order of the court. Selwood smiled when he saw the exhibits, as though sure they would prove his story.

The exhibits were practically dynamite!

By Selwood's testimony, the first sample containing iron pyrites should have been dated one day after the stockholders' meeting. Instead, it was labeled with the date of the meeting itself.

Certain attested statements, to which Selwood had sworn, proved at variance with copies from his files. When shown those statements, Selwood sat stupefied.

Finally, perhaps most damaging of all, was a copy of an old map bearing penciled notations in Selwood's handwriting. The map, dated 1850, showed the actual location of the Aureole Mine!

Here was evidence that Selwood had known where the mine was all along; that he alone could have been responsible for introducing the pay ore that had first been discovered; that he had falsified statements, when selling stock; finally, that he had deliberately withheld facts from stockholders at an official meeting.

The more stupefied Selwood became, the more Zern gloated. Desperately, Selwood's lawyers called in witnesses. They put Brenda on the stand, hoping that she could substantiate some of her father's statements. But Brenda had heard very few of Selwood's conversations with the stockholders, and furnished little help.

They called on Jackie Althorn. The boy looked scared when he took the witness stand. He nodded soberly when he heard Selwood's attorney state that he, Jackie, had often been in the study with Selwood when the latter talked with visitors or worked on matters pertaining to the Aureole Mine.

From the mouth of an innocent child the court was to hear the proof of Selwood's innocence. So the attorney claimed, and he followed by asking Jackie various questions, all favorable to Selwood. To those, Jackie gave solemn replies.

Then came the boomerang.

Showing the exhibits to Jackie, the prosecutor asked if he had seen the specimens of ore, to which Jackie answered "Yes." He questioned if Jackie had seen Selwood label them, and received an affirmative reply. Handing the specimen of fool's gold to the boy, the prosecutor asked if he remembered it.

"Of course I do," replied Jackie. "It was a very pretty one. I saw Mr. Selwood put a sticker on it. Then he put it in a box when Mr. Cranston came. Afterward he put it in the safe."

There was a groan from Selwood.

"The boy speaks the truth," he said to his attorney. "I must have slipped on the matter of the date. I was in a hurry, for I knew that Cranston had arrived. I didn't want to worry Cranston. If I had only been more careful -"

The Judge was rapping for silence. The prosecutor questioned Jackie on the matter of the sworn statements. Jackie recalled that he had seen Selwood reading them at his desk.

"So I was," blurted Selwood, "but I was only glancing over them. These can't be the originals -"

Another rapping of the gavel. The map was shown to Jackie. He was getting used to the courtroom, and smiled brightly when he saw the map.

"Mr. Selwood showed it to me," he declared. "See? It says Aureole Mine. That's where my daddy is."

Selwood was on his feet.

"It wasn't that map!" he exclaimed. "It was another map, a modern one, that Beverly sent me, after the mine was found. Jackie would recognize it if he saw it!"

Mildly, the judge reprimanded Selwood for his outburst. He requested that the other map be produced from the exhibits.

It turned out that there was no other map. Jackie's testimony stood. With a thwack of the gavel, the judge announced that he would hold Selwood in fifty thousand dollars bail for trial.

THE decision struck home to Jackie. Until that moment, the boy had seemed nonplused, as though regarding the courtroom like a scene in Selwood's study, but on a larger scale. When the austere words of the judge were directed at Selwood and the portly financier took them with bowed head, there was a sob from Jackie.

Flinging from the witness chair, the boy dashed to Selwood's side, threw his arms about the man's neck and tried to comfort him. It was a touching scene, even to the lawyers, though it didn't faze Frederick Zern. He was still gloating as he watched it.

Jackie understood that in some way he had hurt Selwood, though the financier denied it, his own voice choking. Brenda tearfully tried to help, even giving Jackie a package from his father that had arrived just before they left the house.

But Jackie shook the package, found that it contained only pecans, and tossed it to the floor. He wailed that he was sick of pecans and didn't want Mr. Selwood to go to jail.

"I'll have to go, Jackie," explained Selwood. "I've paid off debts with all that money they say I took. I haven't the fifty thousand for my bail -"

Selwood's attorney interrupted to tell him that the bail money was already put up. Lamont Cranston had furnished it in cash. Half doubtingly, Selwood turned to see Cranston standing near. Selwood extended a grateful hand. "But you shouldn't have done it, Cranston," he began. "What is the use? I can't possibly fight this forged evidence."

"Forged?" It was Zern who boomed the word as he approached the group. "By whom?"

"No name need be mentioned," snapped Selwood accusingly.

"But whoever did the work must also have tapped that fancy safe of yours," put in Zern with a sneer. "A fine chance I had to learn the combination, the way you always covered the dial whenever I was around!"

At that moment the group formed a tableau. Selwood was standing with Brenda on one side, Jackie on the other. Facing him was Zern, his big hands half raised, as if ready for a thrust at Selwood's throat. Intervening was the tall form of Cranston.

A newspaper photographer had sneaked into the courtroom. He snapped a picture of the group, using a flash bulb to get the photo. The flash startled Zern; it reminded him too much of a trick which he had once used. Jackie gave a frightened cry and buried his head on Selwood's shoulder.

Zern's wince, Jackie's cower, came after the picture was taken. The photograph was to show the group as it had been at the moment of the flash. Just a picture for a newspaper, but one that never should have been taken.

That photograph was to cost a man's life, despite the future efforts of The Shadow!

CHAPTER XV. MURDER BY DAY

THAT evening Selwood learned why Cranston had posted his bail. Friendship and generosity were secondary considerations, the way Cranston put it. He wanted to reclaim the fifty thousand dollars that he had invested in the Aureole Mine, and therefore had considered it worth while to stake a duplicate sum.

"Who salted the Aureole Mine is not the question," declared The Shadow. "I am looking for the reason. The bare facts point to you, Selwood, with a swindle as the game. But the Aureole Mine had a good

reputation in its day."

"And still has," argued Selwood. "Zern is the man who salted it. His purpose was simple enough. He wanted to ruin me, to take over my other interests. Failing that, he had to go through with what he started."

"Even though he has rendered his own Georgia property worthless by damaging the name of the Aureole Mine?"

"Of course, Cranston. The game simply got beyond him. He thought he would brand me as a swindler before I sold my stock. When I beat him on that proposition, his mind turned to revenge, which is quite as sweet to Zern as money is."

The Shadow offered no objection to Selwood's theory. Instead, he returned to his original theme.

"You still control the Aureole Mine," he reminded Selwood. "If you went to Georgia yourself, you could push the work. Should you actually strike gold -"

The Shadow's pause was more emphatic than words. The point struck home to Selwood.

"I would be vindicated!" the financier exclaimed. "Vindicated on the most important charge! If the mine produced gold, I could no longer be accused of any swindle. The other indictments would be quashed."

"Exactly!" replied The Shadow. "But time is short. You must vindicate yourself in time to avoid trial. We must leave for Georgia tomorrow, Selwood."

"We?"

"Both of us. Since my bail money is at stake, we shall probably both feel better if I am with you."

The Shadow's remark was subtle. It backed up his statement that he was thinking in terms of finance rather than friendship. Business methods were the best with Selwood, as the man's nod proved.

"Very well, Cranston," he agreed. "We shall start tomorrow. I shall take Brenda and Jackie with us. I am sure" - he smiled at the thought - "that neither will object. Brenda wants to see Bob, and Jackie ought to be with his father."

"Suppose you tell them the good news," suggested The Shadow. "I have just remembered an important appointment that will take me back to town. Good night, Selwood."

The Shadow's appointment was with Professor Herkimer, who was still in the hospital under police guard. All during the trial, The Shadow had been thinking in terms of Herkimer, and one fact was definite.

Herkimer had studied mining engineering in his day, and that day was a good many years ago. It was logical that the professor knew facts about the famous Aureole Mine.

Facts, perhaps, which would have meant much in the courtroom had Herkimer appeared there. The game, therefore, had been to put Herkimer out of the picture. The failure of crooks to murder him had been offset by Herkimer's injury, which had incapacitated the professor sufficiently to keep him in the hospital.

To The Shadow, however, the courtroom scene had been a mere preliminary. It was just as well that Zern should feel that he had triumphed The Shadow preferred to question the professor without the

interference of attorneys, who would have tried to throw out Herkimer's testimony on the grounds that the old man was insane.

REACHING the hospital, The Shadow found Herkimer still awake. During The Shadow's visit with Weston, Herkimer had confused the two and thought that Cranston was the police commissioner. He chatted affably on every subject, and brightened suddenly when Cranston mentioned the Aureole Mine.

"Ah, yes!" exclaimed Herkimer. "I often mentioned the Aureole Mine to special students. I conducted a few classes, you know, even after I became dean. Yes, I taught up to ten years ago, and I used to tell them that a fortune awaited the man who found the forgotten Aureole Mine.

"But I had so many students. To me, they are but a sea of faces. Should I meet one, I would remember him. Occasionally" - Herkimer's voice became a confiding whisper - "I see them around the house. My students of forty and fifty years ago, but occasionally some later ones. All men who unfortunately died before their time. Ghosts at present, but they still call to see their old professor!"

Further chat was useless. Herkimer had begun on his ghosts and would soon be deep into his theory of the fourth dimension. Bowing himself out, The Shadow told the professor that he would call again the following day.

Morning came, and Professor Herkimer slept very late. It was nearly noon when The Shadow dropped by, and the old man was still asleep.

This was a day important to The Shadow. He was lunching with Frederick Zern and other stockholders interested in the Aureole Mine, and was anxious to hear their opinions.

At four o'clock he was to meet Morton Selwood and see the financier off to Georgia, along with Brenda Selwood and Jackie Althorn. They were going by train, and The Shadow was to make a later trip by plane. He decided, therefore, that he could call on Professor Herkimer after four o'clock.

Awakening soon after The Shadow had gone, Professor Herkimer inquired if his friend, the police commissioner, had stopped by. Learning that the commissioner hadn't, Herkimer ate a late breakfast, then arose and went for a stroll on the hospital roof, which he had been doing of late.

The doctor had ordered a complete rest for Herkimer, which excluded reading matter, because he did not want the old professor to get thinking of his book on the fourth dimension.

But on this day another patient had chanced to leave a morning newspaper on a bench, and Herkimer found it. Glancing at the headlines, he saw mention of the Aureole Mine.

Avidly Herkimer read the details. He turned the pages and came to a photograph. It was the picture taken after the trial, and the faces interested Herkimer.

He saw Zern, glowering like a wild bull at Selwood, who was worried, but holding ground. On one side was Brenda, restraining her father, with Jackie on the other, clinging hard to Selwood's arm. In the center was Cranston, calm as ever, stepping between Zern and Selwood.

Herkimer's eyes lighted with recognition. He read the names that appeared below the picture and gave a gleeful cackle. His tone stopped abruptly, and he stared about the roof, then across the parapet to the world beyond the hospital. A shrewd look registered on Herkimer's face. He was gripped by a conniving mood.

No one could have told what was in the old man's mind - that brain which pictured ghosts wandering in the spaces of the fourth dimension. Tearing the picture from the newspaper, Herkimer stuffed it in his

pocket and left the room.

His guard was waiting for him back at the room, where Herkimer would naturally return. But this time the professor went straight to the ground floor, instead.

Leaving the hospital was a simple process, as Herkimer demonstrated. Taking a taxicab, the professor gave the address of his residence. Arriving there, he entered the gloomy old house and went upstairs, smiling happily as he viewed the remembered walls.

But Herkimer did not stop on the second floor. He continued to the third; then to an attic above.

The professor had a watch; it showed the time as half past one. Laying the watch on the floor, with the newspaper clipping beside it, Herkimer opened a bulky trunk and took out stacks of old year books, examination papers, other photographs and documents.

He began to sort through them, occasionally glancing at his watch.

DURING the course of an hour there were moments when Herkimer chuckled and laid certain items aside.

How he identified them in the attic's gloom was quite remarkable. But Herkimer was gifted with excellent eyesight and did not seem to mind the strain. He continued with his task until he had gone through all the data from the trunk. Then, taking the handful of objects which he had collected, the professor turned toward the stairs.

Those stairs were extremely dark, for the door below was closed. The floor was creaking under Herkimer's tread, as it had whenever he moved about. He caught an answering creak from the stairs, which might have worried some persons, but which others would have taken as an echo.

To Herkimer it signified a friendly ghost. He peered into the darkness, hoping to see a face. He often imagined that he saw them creeping out of darkness.

Faces couldn't frighten Hiram Herkimer; not the faces of the dead. Living faces could be troublesome, though. For a brief moment Herkimer remembered Case Barbel and the others who had tried to murder him.

The face came - one that Herkimer remembered out of the years. A whitish face, up from the steps just below. But sight of it brought a sharp cry from the old professor. It was a face from the past, but that of a living person, not a dead one.

Hands accompanied the face. They stifled Herkimer's cry as they reached the old man's throat and gripped it with a display of brutal strength. Against that grip, Herkimer was powerless. He was meeting a foeman from the stairway, as The Shadow had that night at Zern's.

The hands held their grip until Professor Herkimer went limp. Papers, pictures, drifted from the old man's hand.

Pushing upward, the cruel killer lifted Herkimer's thin form as if it were a scarecrow. Crouched low, the murderer carried the victim to the trunk and dropped the dead form within.

There was a thud as the trunk lid clamped down. Still stooped, the killer probed through the stacked papers. Finding a college year book, he thumbed through it and tore out a page. Then, with his same low crouch, he moved back to the stairway, gathering up the items that Herkimer had dropped.

Creaks descended the stairs. The door below opened, then thumped shut. The gloom of the attic hovered like a ghostly pall, enshrouding the scene of secret crime. Murder had been done, by day, while The Shadow was otherwise engaged.

Slain with the very evidence The Shadow needed, Professor Hiram Herkimer would never reveal the vital facts which chance, plus recollection, had brought his way.

CHAPTER XVI. VENGEANCE TO COME

BRENDA SELWOOD was glancing at her wrist watch when she entered the lobby of the Hotel Metrolite. It was half past three, and time was getting short.

Brenda made a very lovely figure as she gazed about the lobby, for her anxiety added a wistful expression to her attractive features. Then her worriment was banished when she gave an even lovelier smile - one that Lamont Cranston appreciated, as he came her way.

"There is no hurry," he told Brenda. "We can easily reach the station by four o'clock. I received your message, saying that you might stop here first. Where is your father?"

"He wouldn't come," replied Brenda. "He knew that you were lunching with Zern and the others. He wasn't anxious to meet them. He said he would be at the station."

"What has he been doing in the meantime?"

"Shopping around town, buying fancy camping equipment that he thinks we will need in Georgia."

"That should have been fun for Jackie."

Brenda smiled at the comment.

"Jackie didn't think it would be," she said. "He wanted to see a movie. So I left him at one, while I did some shopping of my own. I made sure that the feature would be over in time. It lets out at 3:35, to be exact. So we'll find Jackie at the theater."

Cranston's limousine was outside. They entered it and rode to the theater, a few blocks away. Stanley pulled up in front and Brenda peered from the window, anxious again as she watched people coming from the lobby. Spying Jackie among them, Brenda sprang from the car and scooped her charge from the crowd.

Riding to the station, The Shadow and Brenda were treated to Jackie's graphic rehash of a Western thriller that he had seen. The movie had been filled with cowboys, and Jackie regarded them as a novelty.

To Cranston, Brenda explained that Jackie seldom went to the movies; later she smiled when Jackie asked if their trip to Georgia would take them through Texas.

The limousine reached the station with several minutes to spare. Morton Selwood was waiting at the train gate, and it turned out that the limited did not leave until five minutes after the hour.

Thus, when the big clock showed four o'clock, Brenda and Jackie had gone on board the train, while Selwood was still standing at the crate chatting with his friend, Cranston.

Earnestly, Selwood voiced theories regarding the evidence that had damaged him at the court hearing.

"Zern framed me," he insisted. "It must have happened before the Federal warrant was delivered, because I am sure that nothing happened to the evidence when it was impounded. I regard Zern as a clever forger, who must have entered my home secretly and opened the safe.

"He altered those signed statements. He could have done it by typing new pages on my own typewriter. Where necessary, he could have forged my signature, but in some cases only the early pages were changed, and the signature did not appear until the last sheet, which was unchanged.

"I don't think that I misdated the label on the iron-pyrite specimen. I believe that Zern changed the label, imitating my handwriting. As for the map, the old one, I swear I never saw it! Zern must have dug it up somewhere and forged notations in my hand. Of course, Zern also stole the new map, the one that I once showed to Jackie."

Selwood's face went tense as he concluded. Mere mention of Jackie recalled the courtroom scene. Fists tightening, Selwood muttered imprecations against Zern for having drawn Jackie into the mess. His eyes misty, Selwood spoke:

"I shall never forget poor Jackie, there on the witness stand. His trustful gaze, the solemn way he talked! And afterward, how hurt he was when he realized that his testimony was being turned against me. The poor, unhappy boy -"

"He will be more unhappy," inserted The Shadow, "if you miss the train. You have just two minutes, Selwood."

Starting through the gate, Selwood turned to call back: "I shall see you in Georgia, Cranston?"

"Sooner or later," replied The Shadow. "Certain matters may detain me, Selwood."

"But you should be with me. Suppose I jumped my bail -"

"I can trust you, Selwood. You will be in good company when you reach Georgia."

With Selwood dashing down the steps to catch the train, The Shadow turned away from the gate, his lips - those of Cranston - showing the faint trace of a cryptic smile.

There was much more to the remark than Selwood supposed. The final point was that Harry Vincent still happened to be in Georgia, and would keep a careful watch on persons at the Aureole Mine.

LEAVING the station, The Shadow went directly to the hospital. He found Herkimer's room empty and learned that the old professor was on the roof. But when The Shadow visited the roof there was no sign of the man he wanted.

Looking about for some trace of the professor, The Shadow saw a newspaper tucked under the arm of a bench.

Recognizing that Herkimer might have read about the court proceedings, The Shadow picked up the newspaper and found the torn page with the photograph absent.

Sizing it as the reason why Herkimer had left the hospital, The Shadow set out for the likely place where the professor would have gone, the old house in Westside Place.

It was still daylight, so The Shadow strolled into the rear yard as Cranston. Staring at the ailanthus tree which he had scaled on previous occasion, The Shadow noted that the second-floor window was not quite closed.

He did not credit Herkimer with having chosen so unique a mode of entrance to the house; instead, The Shadow was considering how the route might have served someone else.

The ailanthus, or "Tree of Heaven," as it was popularly called, a rapid-growing species common to Manhattan back yards. Its long thin leaves produced an excellent foliage which could hide a climber even in daylight. The climb itself was easy; the branches were so numerous that even a child would have no trouble.

After a brief glance toward the windows of other houses, The Shadow started up the tree, keeping well within the sheltering foliage. Reaching for the window, he opened it and slid through, finishing with a deft turn which enabled him to close the window in the same motion.

Professor Herkimer was not in the front room. Everything was exactly as it had been the other night. Continuing his search, The Shadow reached the third floor, and eventually the attic, which by this time was almost dark, as the afternoon had waned.

Probing with a tiny flashlight, The Shadow found the stacks of books and papers beside the big trunk.

Wedged from beneath the trunk top was a tiny of telltale white which indicated much to The Shadow. Opening the trunk, he found Herkimer's body.

The bit of white was the cuff of the professor's shirt sleeve. One of Herkimer's arms, grotesquely extended, had been forced down by the clamping of the trunk lid.

There were no clues in the dead professor's pockets. The newspaper clipping, if Herkimer had carried it, had evidently been taken by the murderer. But there were traces of foot scruffs along the dusty floor. Showing under the glare of the tiny flashlight, they enabled The Shadow to reconstruct the crime.

He came to the stairs and pictured the scene where Herkimer had met with the strangler's grip.

Hands from below, powerful with their choke. The Shadow could remember such hands from that encounter at Zern's. In his own struggle with the formidable foe, The Shadow had been treated to jujitsu tactics; but Herkimer, frail and incapable of fight, had been easier to handle.

A low laugh forced itself from The Shadow's lips. The tone was mirthless. It voiced the wish that he, not Herkimer, could have met the murderous attacker. It promised that such a meeting would take place.

Herkimer was dead; better off, perhaps, considering that his mind had been slipping for months. Coming here was Herkimer's own mistake, plus that of the officer who had been left at the hospital to guard him.

But The Shadow felt a sense of blame, even though other duties had prevented him from seeing Herkimer before the victim left the hospital.

There was one way to make amends.

UNQUESTIONABLY, Professor Herkimer had returned to the house with a great idea in mind. Remembering the professor's fanatical ways, The Shadow recognized him as the sort who would risk his life for a proper cause.

Herkimer had risked his life and lost it. The tragedy was that the murderer had escaped with the very evidence that the professor had hoped to use against him.

To trace that evidence was therefore The Shadow's purpose. Once found or duplicated, such evidence would mean that Herkimer had not died in vain.

One fact was evident to The Shadow.

Herkimer's interest in the Aureole Mine could be translated in terms of persons, not in those of the mine itself. He had been talking of the mine more than people the evening before, hence his attitude was somewhat indifferent. But when the circumstance reversed itself, Herkimer's interest was roused.

People had always interested Herkimer. His talk of ghosts was proof of it. So were the stacks of papers and books beside the trunk. Going through those piles, The Shadow found essays, examination papers, college catalogues and yearbooks - all mementos of Herkimer's long professorial career.

The Shadow concentrated upon the yearbooks. Their many pages offered more chances for an over-sight on the murderer's part than did the piles of papers. In a way, it promised to be a blind hunt, for it was possible that the killer had taken certain books intact. Herkimer's collection was by no means complete; the yearbooks were of random dates.

Still, The Shadow made a rapid study, and in one, a book bearing the date of twelve years before, he discovered that a page was missing. The absence was very obvious, for the page belonged among those showing individual photographs of the junior class, in alphabetical order, and there was a gap that jumped an entire letter.

In other parts of the book, however, The Shadow found names of juniors beginning with that missing letter.

What The Shadow needed was a complete yearbook of that particular date. It would not be difficult to obtain from the college where Herkimer had taught. But such a book would not be found in the professor's attic, nor did The Shadow expect to uncover other evidence.

Leaving things as he had found them, The Shadow went downstairs. In gathering darkness, he reached the ground. His next stop was the Cobalt Club, where, as Cranston, he had a dinner engagement with Police Commissioner Weston.

His friend, the commissioner, arrived with news.

"An odd thing, Cranston," he said. "You know that eccentric chap, Professor Herkimer? For some reason he was expecting me to come to the hospital and see him. He must have been piqued, for he walked out of the place this afternoon."

"Have you heard from him since?"

"Yes," nodded Weston. "He wrote to the hospital. This letter" - the commissioner passed an envelope to The Shadow - "was delivered in the late mail."

The letter was simple and direct. It stated that Herkimer was leaving New York, and would notify the hospital of his address later, so the bill could be sent to him. The letter was written in Herkimer's scrawly hand with his signature. Unless Herkimer had actually written it before his death, it was a remarkable forgery.

Recalling Selwood's emphasis on the matter of forged documents, The Shadow was inclined to regard the letter as such. Weston, however, accepted it as genuine, and therefore was not concerned about Herkimer. Mentally, The Shadow commented that the situation was shaping just as Herkimer's murderer wished it.

As The Shadow wanted it, too. With a lead to the killer actually at hand, The Shadow preferred to work on the case alone, knowing that an unsuspecting criminal could be more easily trapped than when

hounded by the law.

LATER, The Shadow called his contact man, Burbank, and gave orders for relay to Clyde Burke. Instructions were for Clyde to check on the matter of the college yearbook and accumulate data on the missing names.

Burbank had a report for The Shadow. It had come from Moe Shrevnitz, a cab driver in The Shadow's service. Moe had been dogging Frederick Zern at intervals, since Zern had finished conferring with stockholders of the Aureole Mine. He had picked up Zern as a passenger and taken him to the airport, where Zern had left on a plane for the South.

Again a low, mirthless tone crept from The Shadow's lips. He knew that Zern's destination would be Georgia. It reminded The Shadow of his own objective, the Aureole Mine. There The Shadow expected to encounter Herkimer's murderer.

Crime of the past would be wiped out by vengeance to come.

Vengeance, inspired by The Shadow!

CHAPTER XVII. TRAILS IN THE DARK

BRENDA SELWOOD stared from the front of her tent toward the darkness beyond the camp lights. Her hand tightened on the little revolver that she had come to regard as priceless during her three days' stay in Georgia.

She was alone, for the men were all busy at the mine. Jackie was in a tent near hers, but he was asleep, as usual.

There couldn't really be any danger, for the sheriff had but recently scoured the county. Old Dokey never left his swamp shack, so they said, hence the half-wit could not be considered as a menace.

Nevertheless, Brenda did not like the blackness. It seemed to stir as she watched it, almost assuming a human shape that flitted along the fringe of lights.

A voice spoke from near the tent. Brenda turned, gave a gasp that changed from startlement to relief as she saw a man she recognized.

"Good evening, Mr. Vincent," she said. "I... I'm glad you came back from the mine."

"Bob thought I ought to take a look here," returned Harry, "just to see that all was well. You seem troubled, Miss Selwood. What's the matter?"

Brenda explained. She admitted that the wavering blackness might have been her imagination. It had glided away toward the swamp just as Harry arrived.

"I'd better look around," decided Harry with a smile. "I won't need a gun. These ought to do."

Harry pulled two chunks of quartz from his pocket. One was dull, the other showed glittery flecks. Brenda recognized them as samples used in testing Althorn's gold-finder. Harry evidently expected to encounter nothing more than a small, prowling animal in the brush.

Brenda watched his flashlight dwindle as he moved away; he held the quartz fragments as if to throw them.

Away from camp, Harry stopped at the whispered word:

"Report!"

Out of close-by blackness, a tiny ray of light supplanted the larger beam that Harry extinguished. Showing the quartz specimens, Harry tapped one and said: "Test positive." Then, indicating the other, he added: "Test negative."

"As expected," spoke The Shadow. "Report on progress at the shaft."

"Still working upward," reported Harry. "Nothing but iron pyrites, although Althorn's machine indicates gold beyond. We need to strike it soon. Selwood has only a few days more.

Pocketing the quartz specimens, Harry produced a telegram. It was from Clyde Burke, and the message was both cryptic and urgent. It said that a full shipment could be expected in Georgia, but it did not specify a shipment of what.

It meant that Dibby had heard from Case Barbel. The crooks who followed orders bearing Zern's signature had headed back to their original zone of action. They had probably wanted Dibby to come along, but The Shadow was quite sure that the fellow had excused himself.

At present Dibby was conducting all telephone conversations with guns prodding his ribs for The Shadow still had agents in charge at Case's hide-out.

Calculating the time limit, The Shadow decided that Case and his crew were close at hand by this time. He instructed Harry to make the most of Brenda's scare, which The Shadow had himself provided, while trying to signal Harry. From now on it would be preferable to have men at the camp.

RETURNING, Harry told Brenda that all was well. But when he reached the mine shaft, he gave Bob a different story. Something had been prowling near the camp; whatever it was, it had gone, but it might be better to post guards.

Bob concurred. He said he would return to camp alone, and that Harry could bring some men along in fifteen minutes.

When he arrived at the camp, Bob found Brenda still tense. He gave a cheery greeting and proceeded to treat matters lightly to allay Brenda's traces of alarm.

"You'd better turn in," said Bob. "We're quitting work, and the men will be back shortly. Meanwhile, I'll take a look around, like Harry did."

Brenda was pleased that her solitary vigil was ended. She went into her darkened tent and undressed. She had trouble finding her pajamas, for they were dark, like the blankets of the cot on which they lay. But when she located the pajamas and was putting them on, their silken touch made her feel quite foolish.

She had bought everything in the way of proper camp attire, except pajamas. Suitable for a boudoir, but not for tent life, the silk garments seemed out of place here in the wilds.

Fortunately, Brenda wouldn't be wearing them outside of the tent. At least, so she thought, until she heard the choking of an automobile motor's throb from somewhere on the camp road.

The sound meant strangers, who evidently didn't want their approach to be recognized. Before she realized it, Brenda was out of the tent, looking frantically about for Bob. She saw lights up by the shaft,

knew that the men would soon be coming down with Harry and her father, who was working like the rest.

They would look out for Jackie. The thought struck Brenda as she paused by the boy's tent. Lack of sounds from within indicated that Jackie was still asleep, and therefore wasn't worried. It was Brenda's job to find Bob, who couldn't be far away.

Diving back into her tent, she put on a pair of sneakers; without bothering to lace them, she scooped a flashlight from beneath the pillow and slid out through the loose back of the tent.

Bob had gone toward the swamp, so Brenda took the same direction. Clear of the camp, she blinked her flashlight, hoping that Bob would catch the signal. But Bob wasn't as near as she supposed, for Brenda reached the swamp edge before she caught the glow of a flashlight some distance ahead.

As Brenda skirted along the swamp, the light blanked itself. Instinctively she put out her own light and crept forward. If Bob had some reason for extinguishing his light, it was better for her to do the same.

There was another light still farther ahead, a dim, square glow - the window of Old Dokey's cabin. Momentarily the light faded then returned, as though thick smoke had trickled across it.

Alarmed at first, Brenda finally decided that the thing was imaginary, like the shape that she had fancied gliding near the camp.

Brenda was doubly wrong.

The Shadow was actually at the window of Dokey's cabin, peering into a room that was furnished with a heavy table, a battered chair, and a tumble-down cot, with an assortment of soap boxes, tin cans, and other souvenirs that Dokey had collected.

Dokey himself was absent.

Off in the darkness, The Shadow heard prowling sounds. He was away from the window when they came closer. He heard a muttery voice that must have belonged to Dokey. It was a question whether the half-wit was talking to himself or actually speaking to someone else.

Dokey reached the cabin door and pulled it wide. In the glow, he unfolded a sheet of paper. His grins, chuckles, and nods told that he could read, though his manner was slow. He was able to follow certain instructions, too, for when the half-wit had finished reading the note, he struck a match and started to apply the flame to the paper.

The Shadow was stealing forward. His gloved hand moving at a regular rate, was faster timed than Dokey's slow motion. The Shadow would have snatched the note at the moment the flame reached it if others had not intervened. Others who did not see The Shadow.

The first was Bob Beverly.

SPRINGING from a spot straight in front of the old shack, Bob was in the light before he reached Dokey. Hearing Bob's surge, the half-wit swung about and blundered backward into the doorway.

His action took him from The Shadow's grasp as well as away from Bob. Dokey also blocked off most of the light, thereby hiding the thing that followed.

Another attacker swooped in from the darkness. He wasn't after Dokey; he was blocking Bob. The Shadow heard Bob's surprised shout as the fighter met him in a most effective style.

Like a thing sprouting from the ground itself, Bob's antagonist shot upward from a crouch. The clutch that took Bob underneath the arms promptly sent him into a long, diving sprawl.

In the doorway, Dokey was howling gleefully, nodding his shaggy head as he waved the sheet of paper, which was entirely aflame. Its ruddy light showed Bob, coming to his feet, about to return the attack of his unknown foe. The crouched assailant was in darkness, for the glare of the paper did not carry far.

But that killer, who had once attacked The Shadow and later slain Herkimer, was unable to hide his next action. A glitter in the gloom betrayed the knife that his hand was swinging straight for Bob's incoming form!

Already The Shadow's hand was whipping from his cloak, bringing an automatic. The stab of the gun was the final and most startling incident of the four-way fray, and the most timely. It was the first indication of The Shadow's presence, except to Brenda, who had actually seen him from her more distant angle.

The Shadow's aim was toward the flashing knife blade. The bullet must have breezed the hand that slung the dirk, while the sharp explosion of the gun also had a part in disturbing the murderous throw.

The knife scaled high, for fingers released it a split second too soon. The blade whirred over Bob's shoulder, close past his ear.

Bob didn't halt his lunge. He dived straight for his attacker, only to gain new evidence of the killer's prowess. Met by another upward lunge, Bob was whirled about and sent headlong, a human missile directed at The Shadow, who was flung backward by Bob's arriving weight.

Rolling away, The Shadow aimed into the dark, hoping to pick his target by some sounds of flight.

Brenda's sudden cry drowned other noises. Dashing toward Dokey's shack, she had encountered opposition. The girl had turned on her flashlight, thinking she was far enough away to be safe. But Brenda, too, was halted, a full sixty feet from the cabin.

Her light gave a momentary flash of a bulky, half-crouched figure that suddenly gripped her and wrested the light from her grasp.

The flashlight was scaling in one direction, and Brenda's shrieks indicated that she was rolling in another when The Shadow's tiny but powerful torch sliced the darkness, cutting a straight path to Brenda's assailant.

It showed the man's bulk in full, revealed his thick-featured face and the huge hand, with which he was drawing a heavy gun. The Shadow's fierce laugh carried recognition with its challenge. Identifying it, the bulky man answered with a furious snarl.

They had met again, this time on an equal basis, on a wide-open ground: The Shadow and Frederick Zern!

CHAPTER XVIII. THE WAY BELOW

FOR the next few minutes the efforts of two battlers dominated the scene, if blackness broken only by the jab of guns could be called a scene at all. As Zern dodged from the beam of the tiny flashlight, The Shadow extinguished it, rather than betray his own position.

Reaching Brenda, Bob seized the girl and dragged her to the lower ground, away from harm. They were in darkness, both of them, but Bob couldn't help The Shadow, for Brenda struggled, unable to realize

that it was Bob who had gripped her, and that this was a rescue, not an attack.

As for Dokey, the half-wit had sprung from his shack, slamming the door as he went, thereby cutting off the panel of light. Only those two spouting guns, testimony of a duel between The Shadow and Frederick Zern, furnished any indication of what was going on.

Neither marksman could score along that brush-laden ground. Usually The Shadow could pick targets in the dark, but he wasn't finding Zern.

Agile despite his bulk, Zern was putting up a shifty, zigzag retreat past boulders higher on the slope. At times his dodges seemed utterly to trick The Shadow, for the black-clad marksman tongued shots far wide of Zern's direction.

In his turn, Zern was quite at loss.

He couldn't calculate The Shadow's maneuvers at all. Not only did the stabs from the .45 come at unexpected moments, but The Shadow's shifts were irregular. He was covering a lot of ground, as if to hoax Zern into faulty moves.

So surprisingly did the two shift about that Bob, when he had finally quieted Brenda, was unable to guess which was which. Quite baffled, Bob merely crouched with his revolver, waiting for some clue that might put him right.

The thing that told was the glare of an electric lantern, blazing suddenly from rocks well distant. Into that shine came Zern, waving an empty gun and bellowing for the owners of the light to cut it off.

There was a laugh from darkness, taunting, trailing, that gave impetus to Zern's flight. The stumble that Zern took had a most fortunate aspect.

As Zern flattened and rolled beyond a rock, The Shadow supplemented his laugh with a gunshot. The slug must have whistled past Zern and come quite close to the man with the lantern, for the light went off. Slow to follow Zern's suggestions, the big man's friends had promptly taken The Shadow's hint.

At the instant the glare disappeared, Bob caught an impression of The Shadow driving forward. His lunge, as the light went off, had quite the semblance of an intended dive. The reason was known when two shotguns ripped from the place where the light had been.

There was no mistaking the weapons; their muzzles spouted like miniature volcanoes, and Bob could hear the rattle of shot ricocheting from rocks.

The Shadow's laugh still trailed. Zern's two followers cut loose with their second barrels. Instead of silencing The Shadow, the echoing blasts produced new mockery; this time the laugh rose in a weird crescendo.

It told the opposition that their thrust was through. Like Zern, they had emptied their guns at a being as elusive as a phantasm. By his dive to the shelter of low rocks ahead, The Shadow had gone beneath the line of fire. Still with shots to spare, he had turned the battle to his favor.

Flight was the only course for Zern and his pair of shotgunners. They took it, scattering wildly, each hoping that The Shadow would follow one of the others. Bob, who by that time remembered he had a gun, guessed that The Shadow was pursuing none.

"Zern is the man he wants," Bob told Brenda. "Harry was right; that fellow in black was for us, not against us. He's too smart to beat the brush when the chances are two to one that he will find some small

fry instead of Zern. Come on - we'll help him."

"But how?" gasped Brenda.

"By getting back to camp," returned Bob. "We'll take the lower route along by the swamp. We'll pick up Harry and the rest to help us.

FLASHLIGHTS regained, Bob and Brenda kept them out of sight as they sped along the swamp edge. Bob thought that he could outrace Brenda, but he didn't. He was wearing cumbersome camp attire, with heavy boots, whereas Brenda's silk pajamas were as light as running gear.

Shouts from the camp guided them up the slope. Harry and some of the workers had returned from the shaft and had heard the distant gunfire. Seeing the flashlights when Bob and Brenda turned them on, Harry and his companions weren't sure whether the arrivals from the swamp were friend or foe. Bob was yelling out his identity when a high, frantic shriek drowned him.

It was a thing so sudden, so close, that Bob did not recognize its piteous note. He sprang for the brush, saw something in the light and grabbed for it.

A moment later he was viewing the quivering, tear-stained face of Jackie Althorn, while the boy, uncertain who his captor was, raised new cries to bring the rescuers from camp.

Bob Beverly might have fared badly, for Jackie was wresting away from him, and Harry's men, now knowing Jackie's voice, had trapped Bob in the glow of their flashlights.

Amid the brush, clad in rough clothes that any prowler might have worn, Bob looked like a stranger. Guns were aiming, ready to down him before he could again seize Jackie, who was floundering into the bushes. It was Brenda's intervention that prevented a terrible mistake.

Valiantly, the girl flung herself into the path of the flashlights, waving her arms. Sight of Brenda was sufficient. Her slim form, shapely in her flimsy garb, occupied the spotlight. Though Brenda's tousled hair obscured her face, the men from the camp knew who she was. They lowered their guns and hurried forward.

Jackie saw Brenda against the approaching light and ran to her. Then Bob had joined them and the boy was sobbing out his story. Shooting of guns had awakened him, and he had been very scared. His call for Brenda hadn't been answered.

"I was putting on my clothes," wept Jackie, "when I heard men dashing into camp. I was afraid" - he buried his head on Brenda's shoulder - "that they'd hurt you. That's why" - he paused to choke a sob - "why I was coming to look for you."

Jackie's bravery impressed the listener. The boy was quite bedraggled from his tangle in the brush. He had put on shoes and trousers before leaving his tent, but was still wearing a dark pajama jacket. Bob told him to go back to the tent and finish dressing. Then, to Brenda, Bob added:

"You'd better get dressed, too. None of us will be staying around camp tonight. This means what it did before" - Bob's tone was grim - "that someone is trying to block our work up in the shaft. It's a race against time, and we're not going to let Zern beat us." With that, Bob told his men to spread and search for the marauders. But he was more interested in finding the car that Brenda mentioned than in going back to Old Dokey's shack.

"They'll stay away from there," assured Bob. "They must have seen our lights, otherwise they wouldn't have gone after us."

Harry had started for the sand road. He came back, bringing a set of spark plugs which he had removed from a car that he found there. Bob grinned at Harry's ingenious method of cutting off Zern's departure.

"Let Zern stew around," said Bob, "along with those chumps of his. How are things going up at the shaft?"

Harry reported that Althorn's gold-finder was buzzing away, that Selwood was superintending the digging. Far up in the shaft, they could not have heard the gunfire from the shacks.

"We'll join them," decided Bob, "and keep working. We can let Brenda and Jackie keep watch. Don't worry Selwood, or Althorn either, with any talk of what has happened. My guess is that we're getting to the gold, otherwise Zern wouldn't be trying to block us."

Bob was set in his opinion that Zern and the men with shotguns would keep away from Dokey's shack. He mentioned that Dokey had received a note and burned it, but felt that the incident had merely been Zern's way of negotiating with the half-wit.

Dokey could not be a menace in himself, otherwise there would have been trouble from him long before this.

Though Harry did not agree with Bob's opinions, he acted as though he accepted them. Harry was not worried about new events down by the shacks. He was sure that The Shadow must have remained in that vicinity after Zern and the other gunners had scattered.

Harry's guess was a bull's-eye.

AT that moment, The Shadow was not just close to Dokey's shack, he was inside the ancient hovel. He was taking a survey of the place, and among the things he noticed was Dokey's table. It was odd that Dokey should have one strong piece of furniture when everything else was rickety.

The table was very heavy. It did not budge when The Shadow tried to lift it. Looking for an explanation, The Shadow observed that the planks on which the table stood, while old and weather-beaten, were stronger than the other floor boards.

There was something else that did not jibe with the frail structure or the cabin. Where wall met floor there was a narrow base molding all around the shack.

Formed from short strips of wood, the molding yielded when The Shadow stooped and tested it.

The cloaked investigator could hear approaching sounds outside, coming from the swamp beyond the shack: Dokey's voice, mingling with the harsh tones of others. They were coming to this cabin; should they find The Shadow, he would be trapped, for he would be in the light, while they could still keep to outer darkness.

It was a nerve-tingling situation, which The Shadow accepted as if he had no nerves at all. The tramp of footsteps was closer, their arrival imminent. Too late, The Shadow half lifted from the floor, raising an automatic. There wasn't time for him to spin through the doorway and get outside before his enemies arrived!

Even The Shadow's handling of the gun seemed folly. He wasn't aiming it at the door at all. The hand that held the weapon was pressing beneath the heavy table, as though The Shadow hoped to use it as a temporary shield in battle. But the table was still tight against the floor.

Nevertheless, the table moved!

It hinged upward, outward, and the floor went with it! It was a trapdoor that The Shadow had discovered while working on the baseboard.

With a slithery twist, the black-cloaked fighter went through the opening into a black gap that looked as deep as an abyss. But The Shadow was counting on a foothold, and found it, just below.

Perched on a stone step, he let the table-laden floor come downward, stopping it just short of its catch as the cabin door swung wide.

Huddled in his hiding place, the muzzle of his automatic keeping the wedge open, The Shadow peered from the crack and observed the men who entered. Shaggy-haired Dokey was in the lead; behind him came a rough-clad crew, half a dozen strong.

Dokey's companions were Case Barbel and the latter's crew, plus a few new recruits.

Frederick Zern was not with them, but Case made prompt mention of the missing men. Addressing Dokey, Case queried:

"So you saw the boss? Got a note from Zern himself? Good boy, Dokey!" Case clapped the shaggy man's shoulder. "Only I don't like the rest you told me."

"Yuh," grunted Dokey. "Shadow! Bah!"

"Zern got away all right?"

"Off there." Dokey pointed in the general direction of the camp. "No chance they find him."

"Then we'll wait," decided Case. He pulled a letter from his pocket and showed it to Dokey. "This tells what we're supposed to do. I knew Zern would be around; his letter says so. But part of his game is to keep under cover. All we've got to do is wait until we hear from him."

Case stretched himself in the rickety chair and motioned for his men to sit down on cot and soap boxes. The Shadow let the trick floor ease into place; his probing fingers found the crack that enabled him to push back the floor strip. Turning his flashlight downward, he studied the pit beneath.

It gave access to a narrow passage leading from beneath the shack; not toward the swamp, but in the opposite direction. Calculating that he would have time for an investigation, The Shadow followed the tunnel.

AT first the tunnel was damp and sloggy, but as the level rose, the ground became hard-packed.

A long burrow, that underground way. At last the red clay walls showed rocky strata; then came debris ahead, chunks of loose stone that looked like ore.

There were golden sparkles under the glint of The Shadow's light. The wall ahead was brilliant, not with fool's gold, but with the genuine metal!

The roof was arched in jagged fashion at the terminus of this secret shaft which had brought The Shadow a quarter mile from Dokey's. In a hewn space at the side wall lay sticks of dynamite, with pickaxes and other equipment. But there was something else that interested The Shadow more.

From an angle off beyond the cavern's jagged roof, The Shadow could hear a steady tap-tap of hacking strokes delivered against rock. The sounds were faint as they carried through the stony ledge itself; in fact, The Shadow classed them as fairly distant.

With a low, weird laugh that the rocky walls absorbed and echoed back like a hollow cough, The Shadow turned about. An automatic drawn from beneath his cloak, The Shadow was beginning his return trip to the shack beside the swamp!

CHAPTER XIX. RAIDERS BY NIGHT

BRENDA SELWOOD was watching from a snug nest - the rocky opening of the Aureole mine shaft - with Jackie Althorn crouched beside her. She had her gun, a flashlight - and Jackie was ready to run up into the shaft and summon Bob Beverly and other men should they be needed. It seemed much safer here than at the camp, and Brenda gave a contented sigh.

"My turn!" spoke Jackie. "You said I could watch, Brenda."

Handing Jackie the flashlight, Brenda kept the gun. She drew the boy back as he tried to clamber too far above the edge of the opening. Propped on his elbows, Jackie listened a half minute, then whispered, somewhat eagerly:

"I hear something, Brenda!"

Listening, too, Brenda felt convinced that Jackie was imagining things. But the boy was persistent; he wanted to creep out and look around.

The fact that she didn't hear anything was the reason why Brenda told him that he could. After all, she had the gun, and it might be a good idea to let Jackie crawl about and satisfy himself that he was wrong.

Jackie crawled farther than Brenda expected. His flashlight dwindled to a firefly twinkle beyond the brush. Brenda felt real alarm, because she didn't want to call to him, and there was a brief period when the light was out. Then, to Brenda's intense relief, it reappeared, with Jackie creeping back from another angle.

This time it was the boy's half-scared whisper that gave Brenda a new chill.

"You were right, Brenda," he said. "Nobody there. But I heard people farther away."

"Down at camp?"

"No. Over the other way. I sneaked after them, Brenda!" Jackie's tone was happy. "That's why I was gone so long."

"You saw them?"

"I heard them talk. One was growly" - Jackie gave an imitation - "like Mr. Zern. He said: 'We'll go there,' and the other said, 'Yes, sir.' That's what they did, Brenda!"

To Brenda's strained fancy, the brush was already astir. Pulling Jackie down beside her, she started him up into the shaft. Dim lights ahead pointed the way, and Brenda gave an urgent point.

"Hurry, Jackie!" she exclaimed. "Tell Bob to come at once. There is not a minute to lose!"

She watched Jackie race up through the shaft until he had made the first turn. By then Brenda had almost forgotten the opening that she was supposed to watch. Turning back to it, she reached for the rocks, drew herself upward. Not finding her flashlight, she realized that she had left it with Jackie.

The gun seemed doubly important as Brenda gripped it. She was ready to start shooting at the slightest

sound, and she kept the muzzle poked straight ahead. But the thing that happened, the direction from which it came, caught her wholly off guard.

Two rings of steel pressed the back of Brenda's neck, coming from the rocky shelf behind her. The voice that rumbled to her ears was from another angle, but also a safe one. "You're feeling a shotgun, Miss Selwood." The tone was Zern's. "Both barrels of it. I advise you to drop that toy pistol. This is not to be a test of weapons."

Brenda let the little weapon clatter on the rocks. Zern dropped in beside her from the ledge. Two men followed him and thrust the girl into the shaft.

In the dim light, Zern indicated his followers, who were holding their shotguns crooked in their arms. With a mock bow, Zern gestured along the shaft:

"You may go first, Miss Selwood."

BRENDA went first. All along the way, she felt as if guns were bristling at her back. But Zern's men were still holding the shotguns lowered, though Brenda could not see them. They were stolid, long-faced chaps who seemed to take this excursion as a matter of routine.

Zern, alone, was smiling, though not at Brenda. He wasn't watching the dejected girl as she tramped along in the heavy boots that went with the khaki knickers and flannel shirt of her camping attire. Zern's eyes were always ahead; his smile was one of anticipation. At every turn, Brenda expected to see Bob show up with other men. They would certainly be alert the moment that they spied her, and in that fact lay hope. But the march continued, with no sign of the rescuers, until they were so near the final fork that Brenda was ready to give a desperate shriek.

Already acquainted with the mine, Zern seemed to recognize the taut state of Brenda's nerves. He drew a revolver, planted it in Brenda's back, and undertoned:

"Not a word! I shall do the talking when we get there."

They came upon the group at the very end of the upward passage. The scene was odd, but it gave a simple explanation of the thing that puzzled Brenda.

Under the glare of lights, men were standing idle with picks and other tools, Bob and Harry among them. Brenda saw her father and Claude Althorn, bent over Jackie, who was half lying on the ground. The boy was sniffling, and the noise he made was sufficient to cover sounds of the approachers.

Brenda realized that Jackie must have tripped in his hurry to reach the end of the shaft. As a cry baby, Jackie was an artist whenever he hurt himself. Time and again Brenda had known him to howl over trifles, forgetting everything else.

True to form, Jackie was all wrapped up in something that had happened to him; and his wailings had made him neglect his mission.

Pushing Brenda to one side, Zern ended the concern over Jackie by announcing himself in a heavy voice, which he backed with a display of his revolver. His two companions jutted their shotguns forward in brisk style. The whole group faced them, startled.

"Hello, Selwood!" boomed Zern. "Surprised to see me, aren't you? Just like these fellows were" - he gestured his gun from Bob to Harry - "when I came here before. Don't get excited, this is just a routine visit."

Selwood motioned to his companions and shook his head. He didn't want them to start trouble with their guns. In a fitting gesture, Selwood raised his hands as a suggestion for the others.

"Getting dramatic, aren't you?" sneered Zern. "Trying to make it look as if I'm in the wrong. Your crowd tried the same thing out in the open a while ago, only in a different way. Their idea then was to shoot me and tell the sheriff afterward. Right now your act is a pretense of injury. You're putting me in the light of an outlaw."

"It won't work, Selwood. I have my rights, and that's what brought me here. You're trying to beat that court decision, and the only way is to find more gold in the Aureole Mine. There's only one way to accomplish that, Selwood. It means another salting job."

ADVANCING, Zern stowed his gun away, leaving his stolid companions in full charge. He examined the ore that the workers had hacked away, but found it rich only in iron pyrites. Still, Zern was not ruffled.

"A lot more work to do," he jeered, "before you can get to rock that you can fake. I guess I won't have to worry until morning. By then I'll have the sheriff over here. By the way" - Zern stopped, half turned about - "these men with me are squatters. They used to know a chap named Bert Peld."

"I knew Peld, Selwood" - Zern's tone was a confiding one - "but I didn't think it was any business of yours. At least, not until I had looked into matters. I sent Peld down here for just one thing: to protect my interests. I find that he did so, to the extent of making friends with the actual squatters.

"If Peld was in back of the fight the night the mine shaft was discovered, it was his own idea." Zern paused; fixed his shrewd eyes straight on Selwood. "Unless you were in back of it! I wouldn't put it past you, Selwood - hiring crooks to cloud the issue, since you have been branded as a crook yourself!"

It was too much for Selwood. He sprang forward, using Zern's body as a bulwark against the shotguns. In that moment Selwood showed remarkable ferocity, far more than would have been expected from a man his age.

But Zern was too quick for him; he had his revolver out before Selwood arrived. The threatening muzzle stopped Selwood short.

"You've shown your hand," gibed Zern. "Just as I thought you would. I've waited long for this, Selwood -"

There were sounds from farther back in the shaft. Hearing them, Zern recoiled, twisting against the side wall, his gun away from Selwood. But the removal of one threatening weapon was of little advantage to Selwood; of less to Bob, Harry, and the others.

In place of Selwood's revolver, they were covered by half a dozen others, handled by newcomers. Case Barbel and his crew had arrived to take over the scene. With a grin; Case looked at Zern and caught the big man's glare.

"Sorry, chief," apologized Case. "We got those blinks you sent us, but we were slow coming up from Dokey's shack. I didn't know that you'd taken over on your own."

Zern supplied a deep grunt.

"It was just as easy without us," admitted Case in a complimenting tone, "but we were only doing what you told us. Anyway, chief, now that we're here, we might as well hold these guys until you get out."

Slowly, Zern nodded.

"Come on," he said to the men with the shotguns. "We'll go first. Only, I'd better check with you. What did I say about any shooting?"

"There isn't to be any," returned Case, "unless these mugs start it."

"Good enough," approved Zern. "We'll be waiting for you."

Zern turned on his heel and strode away, the two squatters with him, solemn as ever. Case called after him:

"Do you want to take the kid? Or shall we bring him, like you said?"

Throwing a glance at Jackie, Zern decided:

"He can go with me."

Nudged sharply by Case's gun, Jackie forgot his sobs and ran after Zern, as though taking the only possible choice. To the rest the tension had increased. The look that Bob gave to Harry was expressive. It was a question: Should they risk it?

Harry's answer was a negative headshake. Zern had said there was to be no shooting. It was better to wait. A few minutes more might bring rescue in the person of The Shadow. Harry had held such hope before in situations worse than this.

Had Harry Vincent known all that this dilemma meant, he might have realized that he and his companions were beyond The Shadow's present aid!

CHAPTER XX. CRIME'S ZENITH

WITH Zern and the squatters well along their path to the mine mouth, where they had taken Jackie, Case Barbel and his men began a slow retreat, keeping their guns in readiness.

As they passed the turn in the descent, Harry and Bob quickly produced guns. Others followed their example, but Bob restrained them.

"Take it easy," he cautioned. "They'll be laying for us, watching from every turn along the line. Isn't that the way you size it, Harry?"

Harry nodded.

"We might as well be on the move, though," he suggested. "Being ready may be as important as keeping cool."

Slowly they moved outward, expecting at every bend to see some sign of Case and the mobsters. Constantly Harry and Bob were prepared to press the other's back. They hadn't much trouble with the workers, nor with Brenda. But Selwood and Althorn couldn't seem to keep in line.

It was quite understandable.

Selwood's feud with Zern had reached the breaking point. Whatever the merits of their respective cases, Selwood wanted a chance to reach the man who had hounded him. The threat of death did not seem to bother Morton Selwood.

As for Althorn, his eyes were those of a crazed man. Before those eyes, his boy, Jackie, had been wrested from him. Horrified thoughts seemed to be racking Althorn's brain, registering themselves upon

his withery features.

There was no sign of Case's men until they reached the final turn. Then, spotting the retiring crooks some fifty yards ahead, Harry and Bob became firmer than before. It wouldn't do to attack, they argued, until Case and his men had reached the entrance of the mine, where Zern and the squatters waited with Jackie.

When that happened, a sharp and desperate attack - in which Harry and Bob were willing to bear the brunt - might drive the crooks outside. If it succeeded, there would be a chance for further action.

Harry, more than Bob, believed that claim. For Harry was hoping that the first sounds of gun fray would bring The Shadow.

Selwood decided that Harry and Bob were right. He withdrew and joined Brenda, leaving only Althorn straining to get past the young men who had become the leaders. Both Harry and Bob relaxed, believing that Althorn alone would be no problem. They met with a surprise.

With a shrill, wild yell that echoed along the shaft, Althorn flung his arms wide. The sudden fury of his unexpected lash warded away both men who tried to grab him. Loose, he dashed along the shaft, waving a gun that he jerked from his pocket.

"He's left me here!" howled Althorn. "He's double-crossed me! They're going to blast the mine and entomb us! Come on, all of you! We're doomed if you don't!"

Finishing his shriek, Althorn aimed his gun and pulled the trigger. The roar that came was sufficient for six guns, not merely one. Althorn's wild jab attracted a similar response from near the mine mouth. The spurts came from the muzzles of waiting guns, handled by Case and his fellows.

Like a spinning top, Althorn whirled along the mine shaft and flattened after a twirl of a dozen yards. That sight was sufficient to hold back the rest, whether they believed in Althorn's prophecy or not.

Yet the very fury of Althorn's crazed attack hastened the actions of Case and his men. They did exactly what Harry and Bob had hoped. Like rats, the thugs went scrambling up through the hole ahead. They were smart enough to shoot back as they went, delaying any drive that might follow.

Behind that scramble was a startling purpose.

As Case came out with his men he grabbed a loose rock at the side of the opening. The stone rolled free, revealing an electric switch hooked to a heavy wire that buried itself in the earth.

"There's the switch, Zern!" yelled Case. "Right where Dokey planted it. You've plenty of time to give it a -"

Case's own hand was stretching out, as though willing to do the work if Zern so preferred. Zern lifted his foot with a sudden swing and drove Case's hand upward.

Instead of reaching for the switch himself, Zern made a mighty lunge in Case's direction, swinging his gun for the crook's head before Case could recover from the unexpected kick.

At the moment of Zern's action, his squatters swung on Case's mob, ready to blast them with the shotguns if they tried to make a false move.

In a matter of mere seconds, Zern and the pair with him had declared themselves opposed to those men of murder!

THE reversal was amazing; a thing that would have astonished the victims who were still within the mine. But it was as nothing compared to the counterthrust that came in crime's favor.

Zern, huge and powerful, seemed master until a thing of human dynamite came at him.

That thing was Jackie Althorn.

Leaping from a rock across the opening, the runt reached Zern and hooked him with embracing arms that clamped like bands of steel. Zern didn't recognize who had grabbed him, hence he was not the least restrained when he swung his gun for a head below him, thinking it belonged to a crouched crook rather than a figure of boyish size.

But Jackie's bobbing head went clear of the slugging weapon. The twist of his body was but an indication of the mighty strength locked in it.

With a fury equaled only by its power, Jackie's upward heave swept Zern's big bulk clear from the ground, launching the man in an overhead fling that carried Zern clear across the mine mouth.

Flaying his arms in air, Zern had become a human projectile, catapulted by a foe who had twice his strength packed into a body only half Zern's size!

Zern's squatters were right in their leader's whirling path. As they received his hurtling form they were bowled to the ground, losing their grip on the all-important shotguns with which they had cowed the crooks.

Case Barbel, seeing what had happened, knew, for the first time, who crime's real leader was.

Jackie Althorn!

With Jackie grabbing the switch to blast the opening of the mine shaft, Case yelled for his gunzels to slaughter Zern and the squatters. This time crime's purpose was arrested by a challenge so close, so fierce, that it again reversed the scene.

The laugh of The Shadow!

IN from the dark came the weaving figure of the black-cloaked avenger, driving straight for Jackie Althorn. The starlight showed the midget killer grimacing from his rock, turning to meet his super-foe.

With one hand, Jackie held the fatal switch; with the other, Brenda's gun that he had picked up on the way out.

He wanted to match bullets with The Shadow, did this fiend in boyish form. He thought he could show the same deftness with a gun that he had displayed when grappling with The Shadow on the stairway in Zern's home.

But The Shadow's gun had found its aim; more vital in this moment than a thrust toward a killer's heart.

The Shadow had picked Jackie's hand; the one that was to time its pressure along with Jackie's trigger tug. The Shadow was fading as he aimed, but the point of his gun was constant. He was baiting Jackie and at the same time making his own thrust deliberate and sure.

Only one other person was near - a crook who was scrambling to the ledge, near Jackie, but away from him. That thug didn't want to be close when the duel came, but he was fated to participate through a freakish circumstance that came at a most untimely instant.

A revolver blasted from the ground: Zern's gun, which the big man had held all during his long sprawl. Aimed for Jackie, the shot was wide. It clipped the thug who was on the ledge. Knocked off balance, the crook was jerked downward, backward, clear over Jackie's shoulder, just as The Shadow fired.

The pitching thug took the bullet that should have found Jackie's switch hand. Jackie fired past the plopping figure, but missed The Shadow, whose fade was elusive. At the same time, Jackie's left hand did its trick - that of pressing the switch.

There was thunder from the rocky opening of the mine shaft. The ledge quivered and broke with a crackling split. Into the cleft went the crippled thug, his last howl drowned by the roar of smashing rock.

Jackie, too, was pitched from his perch by the unexpected overcharge, but his light weight saved him from the fury of the earth's upheaval.

A somersaulting shape, the pygmy killer was tossed beyond the crumbling mass of stone and dirt that entombed a dozen helpless people within the Aureole Mine.

Striking like a rubber ball near Case and the astonished thugs, Jackie bounced away, to escape The Shadow's next shot. His bound wasn't swift enough, for The Shadow's aim was prompt, but again a barrier intervened.

A great mass of stone sliding behind Jackie's flying form became a passing shield as The Shadow fired. Then Jackie was away, shrieking for Case and his mobbies to take cover.

They did, ducking behind rocks that had come their way. Even nature's forces had conspired to aid the foemen of The Shadow.

But The Shadow, too, had allies: Zern and the two squatters. Reaching them, The Shadow propelled them from open ground off into the brush. Shots rang out, too late to reach them, but the continuance of that fire told that crooks were in pursuit.

For once it seemed that The Shadow was in full flight as he and his new companions headed toward old Dokey's shack.

Crime had reached its zenith. But to hold it at that highest point, criminals needed to follow up their gain. They thought that they were on the way to final triumph over The Shadow. But the cloaked fighter was thinking in other terms.

Through seeming flight, The Shadow was seeking the only course by which he might nullify the catastrophe that would otherwise mean final doom for the prisoners within the Aureole Mine!

CHAPTER XXI. THE LAST STROKE

WHEN the crash of rock blocked the entrance to the mine, the fury of the shock was felt far more below the surface than on the ground above. Each split of the shattered ledge sent thunderous roars through the mine shaft. Even the air was driven back in huge waves.

Those concussions flattened the trapped group led by Harry Vincent and Bob Beverly. The lights along the shaft were instantly extinguished, obliterating the scene of chaos. Even worse were the crackling sounds that followed, bringing minor cave-ins from the roof. But when the tumult died there were voices in the dark.

The trapped victims had survived the blast. Fortunately they hadn't started for the mouth of the shaft too soon. They knew that the exit was closed; that it would be dangerous to approach it. Even in the

tomblike passages there would be a while to live. The present question was to learn if any persons had been injured.

Groans indicated that there might be victims, but when Harry supplied a flashlight and turned it toward the faces near him he found that the only groaner was Althorn. His trouble came from the bullets that he had invited earlier. Many of the rest were shaken, but none were seriously hurt.

It was Bob who suggested that they move back into the shaft to get away from weakened walls near the opening. Bringing Althorn along, they made a hopeless procession, for the route that they took could offer no solution to their one need: escape.

As the slow march continued, footsteps dragged. Few could give up the slim comfort of being near enough to the crushed outlet in case aid came. To ease the worry, Bob and Harry told the rest to wait; then went ahead together, deeper and deeper into the mine.

"No use in telling them, Harry," said Bob glumly. "I've known of cases like this before. Getting that junk out would be tougher than digging a new shaft."

"How long do you think we can last?" inquired Harry.

"Not as long as we'd like," returned Bob. "But we've got to keep their spirits up. I'd even suggest going ahead with the work that we were doing. It would be better than nothing."

They were at the fork in the passage when Harry shook his head. He turned about, suggesting that they rejoin the others. It seemed an age since the explosion, though Harry's watch, at which he had frequently glanced, marked the time as a mere fifteen minutes.

Harry could almost hear the watch ticks in that entombing silence. Then he was sure that he did hear them, until Bob suddenly noticed the sound. Dropping to the floor, Bob pressed his ear against the rock.

"It's here!" he exclaimed. "No, farther over. It's uncanny, Harry, to think that someone could be below. Do you hear it, too -"

Tensely, Harry nodded.

"We've got to get to work!" snapped Bob. "Whoever it is, or whatever it is, those tappings are meant for us! Listen! It's like something beckoning, telling us to come!"

The tapping was of human origin. Its irregular strokes proved it. But as Harry placed his ear to the floor a change came over his face. Springing to his feet, he grabbed Bob's arm.

"Not telling us to come!" he exclaimed. "Telling us to get away! Those tappings are in Morse, warning us of danger. Let's get back to where the rest are."

THEY hurried down the shaft, away from the mysterious noise. Reaching the others, they had no time to give the news before the culmination came.

From up the shaft they heard a muffled blast, much like the explosion that had ruined the outlet, but deeper in its force. A great hope gripped Harry Vincent as he spoke one word:

"Come!"

They reached the fork. No longer did it mark the division of one shaft into two. There were three passages, the new one a great cavity in the floor. Turning his flashlight into the opening, Harry could see

jutting sides, which offered plenty of holding places to a cavern below.

Blackness glided from the path of Harry's light. As he called to the depths, Harry's hollow tone was recognized, and answered by a sibilant voice: The Shadow's!

Beckoning for the rest to follow, Harry slid through. Those words that his chief had uttered told that this was more than rescue. The Shadow needed Harry, Bob, and the rest - all of them who had guns and could handle them. As his companions filtered down into the welcoming cavern, Harry pointed to a long black shaft.

To the others it meant an outlet; to Harry the path signified a destination to which The Shadow had headed. He had work for them to do.

This cavern, from which The Shadow had dynamited a way to the Aureole shaft above, was the beginning of another trail that promised a solution to mysterious occurrences that still had Harry puzzled.

It was a long trip, in which Harry outdistanced many slower plodders. But Bob was close behind when Harry saw a square of light coming from the top of the passage and heard the echo of guns from the same source.

The shooting was louder as he reached the passage end; then, as he clambered up through an open floor, Harry was almost in the fray itself.

The place was Dokey's cabin, and men were crouched at door and windows, shooting out into the dark. With them was The Shadow, his hand raised in a warning gesture. A needed gesture, too, when Harry and then Bob saw the men who were battling in The Shadow's cause.

They were three, those fighters: Zern and the two squatters!

Timed to the sudden ending of the fire from within the shack came wild yells from outside. Men with guns were smashing through the door and windows. Zern and the squatters, out of ammunition, were clubbing at them to hold them back.

Then, as the door ripped wide and surge came through, The Shadow flung himself into the fray. His guns, exhausted during the retreat to the cabin, were serving him as bludgeons.

Case Barbel was leading the attack, and old Dokey was with the mobbies. Slung aside by The Shadow's attack, crooks were rolling into the shack, swinging about to aim at the cloaked fighter when they saw Harry and Bob.

Men from the mine, men that the crooks had counted as dead! Reserves, brought by The Shadow!

Foemen did not have to guess that Harry and Bob had bullets in their guns. The two were proving it with point-blank aim. More guns were thrusting up from the opening floor, joining the fire, as other rescued men appeared to take vengeance on the tribe that had sought to doom them.

Zern and his men had crawled to corners, away from the fray in which they were no longer needed. The Shadow was just within the doorway; he had slugged down Case and others.

As groggy crooks reeled out into the dark, The Shadow pointed his reserves after them. The eager surge of those fresh fighters led by Harry and Bob brought a strange laugh from The Shadow's hidden lips.

With a turn, the black-cloaked avenger stepped farther into the cabin, then reversed himself by a quick twist as a figure bulleted in from outside. Into a sudden crouch, then up again, The Shadow was grappling

with the living cannon ball that had tried to catch him off guard.

He was at grips with Jackie Althorn.

HALF bewildered, Frederick Zern watched the fray. He understood how he had come to grief when battling that pint-sized monstrosity. He saw The Shadow match the extraordinary jujitsu tactics and send Jackie scaling across the room.

Snarling, venomous, no longer pretending his boyish part, the so-called Jackie caught at the hinged table to save himself from a trip into the cavity beyond it.

Then, as The Shadow waited, prepared to meet and smother the panting fiend's next attempt, Jackie's lips voiced a snarl. His eyes were looking into the pit. Enraged by what he saw, he started a downward thrust with his hands just as The Shadow sprang for him. A gun blazed up from the blackness.

The shot was true. Jackie launched to the space beneath and landed, dead, beside the sagging form of the man who had dragged himself through a long underground route to deliver the fatal shot.

The man was Claude Althorn. His tortured face wore a grin that was freezing to a death leer which The Shadow could understand. But Morton Selwood and his daughter Brenda, coming along the passage, were stupefied at witnessing the death duel between father and son.

Chatter of guns had died outdoors. Harry, Bob, and their companions were returning. The Shadow's lips intoned a mirthless laugh, a knell that marked the end of crime.

Stepping to the doorway, he was blotted by blackness which received him. Frederick Zern saw the gleam of arriving flashlights, but in that brief interval The Shadow had faded into night.

It seemed that The Shadow had left the final stroke to Althorn, who, by delivering death to Jackie, had exposed the fact that the two were former partners in crime. But there was more to come: the explanation of the riddle that lay behind these bizarre consequences.

That answer, the full story of crime and treachery, would be provided by The Shadow when he returned in another guise. A distant laugh, vague, uncanny, trailing like the breeze that carried it, was The Shadow's promise that truth would soon be known!

CHAPTER XXII. THE LURE OF GOLD

IT was afternoon when Lamont Cranston arrived at the Aureole Mine on what was supposed to be his first visit. He was bringing evidence which would explain the entire case after various facts were fitted to it.

The whole thing hinged on a yearbook, dated a dozen years before, which showed the individual pictures of a college class. This book had all its pages, and on the one which The Shadow displayed to Morton Selwood and Frederick Zern was the photograph of a boy whose face both recognized.

The name "Richard Chardon" was beneath the picture, but both Selwood and Zern exclaimed:

"Jackie Althorn!"

They saw Cranston nod. Turning to each other, the two men stared. They had become friends since the night before, and this matter concerned both of them.

"Why, this book is a dozen years old!" expressed Selwood. "It means that Jackie must have been grown

up!"

"More than that," calculated Zern. "This would make him at least twenty-eight years of age."

"Not quite twenty-four," responded The Shadow quietly. Then, turning to Bob and Brenda, who had come to the tent, he queried: "Did you ever hear of Dick Chardon?"

"Did I?" exclaimed Bob. "You mean the boy wonder who was graduated from college at the age of twelve? I didn't go to the same college, and I'm glad of it, for the profs were always slapping his example at the other students."

The Shadow showed the yearbook to Bob, whose expression became one of amazement when he saw the Chardon picture. The Shadow continued in Cranston's steady tone.

"A case of arrested development," he explained. "The boy's brain was ahead of his body. Dick Chardon matured at the age of twelve. It was a thing that warped his life. Apparently he continued his studies a few years longer under the private tutorship of Professor Herkimer, who trained him to be a mining engineer. But as far as the world was concerned, Dick Chardon vanished."

Bob Beverly nodded. He remembered how everyone had suddenly lost sight of the child prodigy; that it hadn't been long before the juvenile wonder was forgotten.

"Handicapped in the world he had come to hate," described The Shadow, "Dick Chardon sought to gain in physique what he already had in brain. He increased in strength, though not in stature, and trained himself to every physical accomplishment that he could acquire. He became a freak of freaks, a man of mighty prowess who had every semblance of a boy.

"He wanted wealth. He remembered the lost Aureole Mine that Professor Herkimer had often mentioned. Chardon came here to find it and discovered Old Dokey on the ground. Both were bitter against the world, and they became a powerful team, for Chardon had enough brains to more than make up for Dokey's lack."

The statement was graphic. Listeners could picture the years wherein Chardon and Dokey had worked underground from the old shack to tap the real vein of the Aureole Mine.

"Inasmuch as the gold was on your property, Selwood," The Shadow resumed, "it was necessary for Chardon to discredit the Aureole Mine. The real shaft had gone off its course, and he wanted it to continue to go astray. So Chardon contacted Althorn, who was a faker in his own right. Chardon became Althorn's boy, Jackie."

"Do you mean," queried Selwood, "that Althorn's gold-finder was a fake?"

"It was," put in Harry Vincent, who had just joined the group. "You know that quartz test we made the other night? I've just been inspecting the samples. The one we thought had gold in it had none, but the other did have gold. Althorn made the same mistake and bluffed us with the gold-finder."

HARRY produced the chunks of quartz that had come from The Shadow. He struck one with a hammer and knocked away the gold-flaked surface, showing raw quartz beneath. But when he hit the other chunk, denting its milk-colored surface, traces of gold came into sight.

Bob brought over the gold-finder and began to tinker with its buttons. It wasn't many minutes before he had it working. He found the hidden switch that made the indicator jump. Althorn's hoax was fully explained.

"I understand the rest of it," boomed Zern to Selwood. "They salted the mine themselves from their own hidden shaft. They wanted to ruin you, Selwood, so that the Aureole Mine stock would have sold for old paper. Then they could have bought it up and worked it for themselves."

"And Jackie forged that evidence against me!" exclaimed Selwood. "How easy it was, considering how I trusted him. I never tried to hide the safe combination when Jackie was around.

"Letters, affidavits, labels - Jackie forged them all. He must have planted wrong specimens of ore that Althorn sent him with those pecan shipments. He faked the old map, too, and took the new one."

"You speak of forgery!" shouted Zern. "What about those letters that the sheriff found on Case Barbel? I swear I didn't write them, Selwood, though they bear my signature. You have been kind enough not to mention them since last night, but now we can talk about them. Chardon, or Jackie, whichever you want to call him, was playing us against each other!"

Zern had struck the crux of the whole game, a thing which The Shadow had discovered long before. It had been sheer deduction on The Shadow's part.

Facts told him that Morton Selwood had been framed through forged evidence; therefore, in the evidence, he had discounted the letters held by Case Barbel that bore the signature of Frederick Zern.

Experienced in tracking down forgers, The Shadow knew that persons capable of signing other names were always chary when they used their own. Signing letters to Case would have been sheer folly on Zern's part had the big man been a crook.

Many more things could have been mentioned. One, how Jackie had ordered Case to Zern's, figuring that The Shadow might be there. Able to leave Selwood's when left alone in the house, Jackie had gone to Zern's himself. There he had encountered The Shadow and dashed back to Selwood's.

Again, only last night, it had been Jackie who met Bob in the dark, outside of Dokey's. The Shadow had been shooting for him in the dark during what seemed to be a duel with Zern, who had come up with his squatters at just the wrong time.

But Jackie had managed to get back to camp. Later, when Jackie left Brenda at the mine mouth, he had flashed the signal bringing Case and the thugs. Again, Zern had blundered into things.

Jackie's bawling over his pretended fall had been sheer fakery. But Zern had proven himself resourceful in a pinch when Case and the gunners accepted him as chief. Zern had gone along with them to settle matters outside, because he mistrusted Selwood.

But Jackie, clever enough to include his own removal in orders to Case, had gone along, too. His one mistake was leaving his fake father, Claude Althorn, to be entombed with the rest.

Althorn's usefulness was through, so Jackie had double-crossed him. But The Shadow had turned the betrayed crook into an instrument of vengeance against the pretended boy who was actually a master brain of crime.

THERE was a slight smile on Cranston's lips. The Shadow was thinking of another matter, important to himself, in determining Zern's innocence. Zern would find it valuable, too, when the New York police found Professor Herkimer dead in his own attic.

Zern had an alibi for the afternoon when Herkimer was murdered. He had been in conference with stockholders of the Aureole Mining Co.

But Jackie's alibi wouldn't stand. The law could easily reconstruct his case: how he had sneaked from the movie where Brenda left him, gone to Herkimer's house and slain the professor; how Jackie had mailed a letter forged with Herkimer's signature to the hospital, and returned to the theater to catch the finish of the picture.

Of all persons, Herkimer had been the greatest obstacle. What the professor didn't know about the Aureole Mine he made up for with his recollections of Dick Chardon.

To others, the newspaper photograph might have shown a mere boy in the courtroom group, but Herkimer had identified Dick Chardon, the man, in Jackie Althorn, the child.

The quest for gold was finished. It was found, and it belonged to the owners of the Aureole Mine. Morton Selwood, the man who had begun the legitimate project, stood vindicated, as did Frederick Zern.

Dick Chardon, brain of crime, had lost his evil life in the secret quest for fortune, as had his fellow conspirators in the ugly game.

Justice, not gold, had been the inspiring motive in The Shadow's cause. Yet, with victory won, he felt the lure of gold.

It was the gold of the Georgia sun, low in the afternoon sky, promising a few hours' more light for the Shadow's swift return by plane to New York.

Those hours were needed, for new work lay ahead. Work that would begin with dusk, when shrouding gloom would cloak The Shadow in his search for new endeavors, wherein he could champion the cause of right!

THE END