

THE ISLE OF DOUBT

Maxwell Grant

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THE ISLE OF DOUBT

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CHAPTER I. WORD TO THE SHADOW

“BURBANK speaking.”

The words were uttered by a man who was seated at a table in a tiny, gloomy room. A shaded lamp in the corner provided the sole illumination, and the dim light showed only the speaker's back. The man at the table was listening intently through a pair of ear phones which were attached to his head.

“Await reply.” Burbank spoke in a quiet tone, after receiving the message over the wire. His hands stretched to the wall and manipulated the plugs of a small switchboard. A click in the ear phones; Burbank again quietly announced his identity, and listened for acknowledgment of his call. After receiving it, Burbank spoke.

“Report from Marsland,” he droned. “Baxton and his mob are at the meeting place. Ready to leave at eleven o'clock.”

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Orders came over the wire. The ear phones carried a sinister click as they vibrated to the uncanny tones of the voice that sounded within them.

“Instructions received,” said Burbank.

Again the manipulation of switchboard plugs; the clicking of a dial as Burbank rang a number. The first connection was restored, and Burbank relayed the orders that had been given him.

“Report actual departure of Baxton mob,” were Burbank's words. “Follow and take position outside of Wilcox home. Await get-away of crooks. Speed it with shots if necessary.”

Burbank leaned back in his chair. His position was one of patient relaxation. While he awaited new telephone calls, his attitude was one of complete passivity.

There was nothing excitable in the make-up of this man who sat with his back toward the light. Yet Burbank was a man of amazing endurance. In place of action, he exercised untiring vigilance. It was this quality that made him a most important factor in the affairs of that amazing personage known as The Shadow.

Here, in this secluded room, Burbank was nearing the forty-eighth hour of an almost constant stretch of duty. During that period, he had served as contact man for those active agents of The Shadow who were engaged in gathering facts which pertained to an impending crime.

Burbank had just received a report from Cliff Marsland, The Shadow's agent in the underworld. That report concerned the zero hour at which “Punch” Baxton, gang leader, intended to fare forth with his mob of gunmen. Burbank had relayed the message to the secret sanctum of The Shadow, over a special wire to which Burbank alone had access.

THE SHADOW!

To fiends of the underworld, that master of darkness was a hidden threat who struck when least expected. They knew him as a being garbed in black, a lone wolf who battled crime with merciless power. But none knew the devious ways of The Shadow—of his active agents who obeyed his bidding—of Burbank, who was always under cover, awaiting messages that told of criminal activity.

A tiny light shone from the wall. Burbank adjusted a plug to receive the call. This report was a brief one. Burbank again manipulated the switchboard, and relayed the words to The Shadow.

“Report from Burke,” he informed. “He is at detective headquarters. Cardona has a squad in readiness. Acts as though he expects an anonymous tip-off.”

There was no call back to this report. Burbank relaxed. He had been awaiting Clyde Burke's call.

Burke, a reporter on the New York Classic, paid frequent visits to detective headquarters. To-day, Burbank had called Detective Joe Cardona, and had given the sleuth a vague inkling that crime was due to strike. Cardona, in response to the tip-off, was waiting in hope of another call from the unknown informant. Clyde Burke had looked in at headquarters to see that Cardona was still on the job.

Another glimmer from the tiny bulb upon the wall. Burbank pressed a plug, spoke, and received a message. He gave orders to expect a return call, then formed connection to The Shadow's sanctum.

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“Report from Vincent,” announced Burbank quietly. “Possum Quill and Lefty Hotz are in their room at the Hotel Slater. Quill has just received a call from Punch Baxton. Quill and Hotz intend to leave the hotel at eleven thirty, going directly to the transfer point.”

The ear phones vibrated weirdly. Burbank listened until the quivering sound had ceased; then made his announcement:

“Instructions received.”

Switching back, Burbank put in a call to Vincent. He gave this agent the instructions that he had received from The Shadow.

“Stay on duty until departure of Quill and Hotz,” announced Burbank. “Report if they stay later than eleven thirty. No report until that time unless they discuss a change of plan.”

Burbank rested in his chair. Long minutes ticked by in this gloomy room, where The Shadow's agent sat in motionless vigilance. Crime was brewing. Deeds of violence would occur to-night. To Burbank, these activities were outside his accustomed sphere. Only in cases of special emergency did Burbank travel abroad to serve his master, The Shadow. In contrast to the monotonous minutes that went by in Burbank's abode, fleeting time showed weird activity in another room of mystery not far from where The Shadow's agent was stationed.

INSTEAD of the mere quiet which pervaded Burbank's room, The Shadow's sanctum seemed under the spell of a mystic hush. In the corner of a creepy realm where blackness lived, two long white hands were at work beneath the glare of a shaded lamp which cast rays of ghostly blue upon the polished surface of a table.

The Shadow, shrouded in blackness beyond the sphere of blue light, was a hidden entity. His hands, moving like detached creatures, were sorting sheets of paper and piles of clippings, which lay upon the table.

One mark alone distinguished one hand from the other. That sign was a gleaming gem that shone from the third finger of the left hand. The Shadow's girasol—a fire opal of priceless value—this was the stone that reflected the lamplight. The strange jewel was ever changing in its hues. From rich magenta, its depths became a deep ultramarine; then varied to an azure shade. All the while, the girasol flashed sparks that might well have come from a living coal amid a heap of dying embers.

There was ease in the motion of The Shadow's hands, yet their speed was incredible when measured. A strange clock rested upon the table top. Instead of hands, it had marked circles which showed the passing of seconds, minutes, and hours. Each second seemed to pause as though waiting The Shadow's order to depart. Here, in this mystic sanctum, ordinary intervals of time were stretched to amazing lengths.

The hands spread a large map of Manhattan upon the table. Deft fingers inserted pins at certain spots. A low laugh came from the gloom as The Shadow's hidden eyes studied the chart. The hands applied a tiny rule to the map. This measuring steel was marked with minutes instead of distances.

To The Shadow, time was more important than space. His keen brain was formulating a schedule of the events that were due to come.

The first pin upon which The Shadow's finger paused marked the place from which Punch Baxton and his mob were leaving at eleven.

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The second point showed the location of the uptown residence of Caleb Wilcox. The Shadow gauged the time required for the marauders to reach that destination. It would take a half hour.

Next, The Shadow noted a white-headed pin, which marked the meeting point to which "Possum" Quill was going at eleven thirty. The hands applied the time rule, gauging the interval between the Hotel Slater and that appointed spot.

From another marked point—detective headquarters—The Shadow measured the time required to reach the spot marked by the white-headed pin.

A soft laugh came from The Shadow's lips.

The transfer point, where Possum Quill and "Lefty" Hotz would be waiting, was ten minutes closer to detective headquarters than it was to the Hotel Slater. The Shadow's laugh indicated that this fact was useful to his plans.

Upon the map rested one ominous pin. In contrast to the bright heads of the others, this pin was colored jet-black. Its location was quite near to the residence of Caleb Wilcox—less than fifteen minutes travel distance separated the two spots.

The black-headed pin marked the location of The Shadow's sanctum, the very place where The Shadow now was. With the marauding mob thirty minutes away from their goal, The Shadow could give them leeway, and still beat them to their destination.

FINGERS plucked the pins from the map. The large sheet of paper disappeared. Only the clock remained upon the table. Lingering seconds crept onward, until the sixtieth second of a sixtieth minute brought a change to each circle on the dial of the timepiece. The strange clock now marked the hour of eleven.

The Shadow waited. The supple hands were motionless. One minute moved by; two minutes; then eight seconds of the third. A tiny bulb glowed from darkness beyond the table. The hands moved swiftly, and produced a pair of ear phones. These passed into the nearer darkness. The Shadow listened.

"Burbank speaking," came the quiet voice over the wire.

"Report," ordered The Shadow, in an eerie whisper.

"Report from Marsland," announced Burbank. "Baxton and the mob have started for the Wilcox mansion."

"Other reports."

"None."

A pause; then came concise instructions from The Shadow's lips —words that sounded weirdly through the darkness.

"Send tip-off to Cardona immediately after Vincent reports departure of Quill and Hotz," ordered The Shadow. "Then call Wilcox residence and await my reply."

"Instructions received," came Burbank's answer.

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The ear phones slid across the table. An invisible hand clicked the switch of the blue light. The sanctum was plunged into darkness. A soft swish announced the motion of an unseen being. Then, amid the weird blackness came a shuddering tone that throbbed forth the sound of sardonic mirth.

The laugh of The Shadow! Rising in ghoulish mockery, that amazing cry cleaved its way through the solid atmosphere. It broke into a chilling taunt, and died away, but in its wake came a myriad of wavering echoes. A host of demonic throats seemed shrouded in those blackened walls; lingering reverberations came back in waves that might have issued from the vaults of another world.

When the last reluctant echo had faded, deep silence pervaded the empty sanctum of The Shadow. The master of darkness had gone. A phantom, he had glided forth upon the quest that would lead him to the spot where men of crime were due.

The Shadow's plans were made. Tonight, his hand would strike. Before it fell, however, all participants in crime would be enmeshed. Until Burbank's call would announce the final report from Harry Vincent, The Shadow would remain unseen.

That would be the final word to The Shadow—the signal that would loose the dread avenger's might!

CHAPTER II. THE THIRD MAN

FIVE minutes past eleven. Harry Vincent, agent of The Shadow, was seated in an easy-chair in his room at the Hotel Slater. He, like Burbank, was wearing ear phones, but the instruments on Vincent's ears served a most unusual purpose.

They were connected to dictograph wire which came from a room across the hallway. Hidden from Harry's view, but brought within his range of hearing, Possum Quill and Lefty Hotz were discussing their part in to-night's crime, as they prepared to leave on their appointed mission.

Harry had learned all the important details. He was still listening in, hoping to glean a few new items of information. While he waited, The Shadow's agent visualized the scene in the other room. He could picture Possum Quill, shrewd and cunning-faced, talking with Lefty Hotz, a hard-visaged gorilla.

Harry had seen both of the men upon whom he was spying. They, on the contrary, had never seen Harry Vincent.

Hence, Possum and Lefty, as they chatted in their room, had no idea that their conversation was being overheard by any one.

Possum Quill, sprawled in an easy-chair beside the window, was flicking cigarette ashes over the top of the radiator. Those ashes were trickling past the microphone which The Shadow, himself, had planted there during Possum's absence.

Lefty Hotz, big and lumbering, was leaning against the doorway that led into a smaller room. He lacked Possum's calmness. His attitude showed that he was nothing more than a henchman of the crook by the window.

“Gettin' close to eleven thirty,” growled Lefty, in an impatient tone.

“Twenty minutes to wait,” retorted Possum, staring idly toward the city lights beyond the window. “Keep your shirt on, Lefty. We're in no kind of hurry.”

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“Yeah,” said the big gangster, “but we don't want to take no chances on missin' Punch Baxton when he gallops up with the swag.”

“I figured it all out, Lefty,” returned Possum, in a weary tone. “What do you want me to do—draw a diagram? We'll be out of here by the time Punch is working on the job. We'll get to the end of that alley before he shows up. There's no use hanging around the place before we're needed.”

“Punch is countin' on you—”

“Don't I know it? I'll be there—and you with me. Say—you might think we were in on the dough, the way you're talking.”

“Aren't we in on it?”

“Sure!” Possum's snort was contemptuous. “We're in it for a lousy grand—while Punch is grabbing off the gravy.”

“It's a soft way to pick up a grand, Possum—just by bein' around so a guy like Punch can scam from one gas buggy to another through an alleyway.”

“Is that the way you figure it, Lefty? Well, let me give you a real idea of values. A thousand dollars is small change for the work we're doing—and I'm a sucker to be bothering with it. Say—it's a twenty-to-one shot that some one will spot that car of Punch Baxton's after he makes the get-away. He's got to transfer to be safe—and he needs a guy that knows how to drive. That's me.”

“I guess you're right, Possum—”

Lefty Hotz did not complete the sentence. Possum Quill, indifferent to his companion's remarks, had picked up a tabloid newspaper, and was looking at the pictures on the front page.

Lefty grunted. Possum Quill was a cool one, sure enough. To-night's work did not perturb him in the least. Lefty knew what would follow. Possum would pay no attention to the passing of the minutes. He would leave it to Lefty—always anxious—to notify him when eleven thirty had arrived.

ORDINARILY, Possum would have read his newspaper in total obliviousness of Lefty's presence. The shrewd-faced crook regarded his husky companion as a huge watchdog. It was Lefty's business to obey Possum's instructions, to battle for him when occasion demanded. As an underling, Lefty was formidable.

To-night, however, Possum Quill spied a photograph that he considered to be within Lefty's sphere of interest. He turned the green-sheeted newspaper toward the big gangster's eyes, and pointed to a picture of a high-walled building.

“There's where the boys made the jail break, Lefty,” informed Possum. “Neat job, eh? Getting over that wall was no cinch.”

“The big house out in the Middle West?” queried Lefty.

“That's it,” said Possum.

“Say”—Lefty's voice was reminiscent—“that old buddy of yours was in the crowd, wasn't he? What was his name? You told me once—”

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“Zach Telvin,” interposed Possum, again perusing the newspaper. “A slick worker, if ever there was one. Only don't go spilling that, Lefty. I don't want any smart dick tailing me on his account.”

“You think he'll look you up?”

“Maybe. We were real pals, Zach and I.”

Silent minutes passed. A small clock on the bureau denoted the quarter hour. The telephone bell began to ring. Lefty clenched his fists, and stared anxiously at Possum.

“Answer it,” ordered the man by the window. “Don't stand there like a dummy, Lefty.”

“Who do you think it is?”

“Punch Baxton, maybe. Find out.”

Lefty picked up the telephone and spoke into the receiver. He covered the mouthpiece, and looked toward Possum.

“It ain't Punch,” said Lefty. “Some guy wants to talk to you.”

Possum tossed the newspaper aside. He took the telephone and delivered a leisurely remark.

“This is Mr. Quill,” he said. “Who is calling?”

Lefty Hotz could hear the click of the receiver. He saw a flicker of surprise upon Possum Quill's shrewd visage.

“Come up,” ordered Possum. “I'll be waiting for you. Make it speedy.”

Hanging up the receiver, Possum walked to the door and opened the portal so that the light of the room showed out into the corridor. He stood there with an expectant gaze.

Two minutes passed—the form of a tall, stoop-shouldered man appeared at the end of the hall. Spying Possum waiting, the visitor hastened forward. Without a word, he received Possum's handclasp. He looked suspiciously toward Lefty, who was standing close behind Possum.

“Come in,” said Possum quietly. “This fellow”—he indicated Lefty— “works for me. Glad you showed up. I'm going out soon.”

THE stranger was dressed in a suit which was new, but ill-fitting. His topcoat, too, had the same appearance. There was a suspicious challenge in his eyes. Lefty noted it; so did Possum.

That fact explained Possum Quill's next action. The crook invariably discussed all of his affairs in the presence of Lefty Hotz. This time, however, he departed from his usual rule. He glanced at the clock, noted that it was barely past the quarter-hour, then nudged his visitor toward the small adjoining room.

“Let's go in there and talk,” suggested Possum. “You wait out here, Lefty. Knock on the door when the clock hits half past. Not before —understand?”

Lefty nodded. He watched Possum and the visitor go into the inner room. He saw the door close.

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He shrugged his shoulders. Possum was boss so far as Lefty was concerned. Never before had Possum taken a stranger aside for a discussion which Lefty was not to hear, but the gangster accepted the visitor's wary look as sufficient reason for the unexpected procedure.

There was curiosity, however, in Lefty's demeanor. The big gangster shared that feeling with another man whom circumstances had also cut off from Possum Quill's conference. Harry Vincent, across the hall, had heard the words that had followed the ring of the telephone. Peering through the transom, after extinguishing the lights in his own room, Harry had glimpsed the visitor who had come up from the lobby. There was no dictograph connection to the inner room, hence Harry, like Lefty, was waiting for some later word that might explain the purpose of this unexpected visit. Possum Quill had been wiser than he knew when he had taken the stranger away in order to speak with him.

Within the confines of the little room, Possum was cannily surveying his visitor. He saw a man whose face he knew, yet whose countenance wore a visible pallor, and whose eyes were furtive and worried. The stranger, on the contrary, saw Possum's shrewd visage exactly as he had expected to view it.

He sat down on the bed with a sigh of relief. He reached out wearily as Possum extended him a pack of cigarettes. After one match failed, the man obtained his light and took two reassuring puffs.

“Good to see you, Possum,” said the stranger. “Good to see you, pal.”

Possum Quill smiled.

“Say”—his tone was an easy laugh—“you've got nothing on me. I didn't expect to see you for ten years.”

The visitor's face twitched as it formed a wan smile. A short laugh escaped the man's lips.

The words that Possum Quill had uttered were highly significant. Until a few days ago, there had been sufficient reason for Possum to believe that he would not have seen this old acquaintance until after a full decade had passed.

The pale-faced man upon the bed was the very one whose actions had been discussed by Possum Quill and Lefty Hotz only a few minutes before the visitor's entry.

Possum Quill and Lefty Hotz had made a pair of knaves. There was a third rogue in their company, now—Zach Telvin, the jail breaker from the Middle West.

A hunted man, an escaped convict, who had just begun a ten-year term, Zach Telvin had come to New York to find his old pal, Possum Quill.

CHAPTER III. THE DEPARTURE

“YOU'LL help me out, Possum?”

There was anxiety in Zach Telvin's tone as the escaped convict eyed his old associate. Possum Quill, his face emotionless, nodded in return.

A broad grin appeared upon Zach's face. The expression was a contrast to his hunted look. It seemed as though the man had gained a new ambition. Puzzlement showed in Possum's steady gaze.

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“That's all I wanted to know,” asserted Zach. “I needed a pal like you, Possum—and I thought you'd make the grade. Lots of guys would turn a fellow like me down—but you're no heel. You're regular. Say—I'm going to tell you plenty.”

“Spill it fast,” said Possum calmly. “Lefty and I are starting out on a job in ten minutes.”

“A big job?”

“Chauffeuring for a guy that's making a get-away. There's one grand in the job.”

“One grand? Listen, Possum—sit down—I've got to talk.”

New eagerness showed in Zach Telvin's face. His words became rapid as he poured a low-toned story into Possum Quill's attentive ear. Zach hit the high spots as he spoke.

“You know why they sent me to the pen, don't you?” queried the convict. “I was in Birch Bizzup's outfit. We pulled the swiftest bunch of bank jobs that they'd ever heard of, out that way. Then they got us—and what a fight it was.

“Birch got bumped by the bulls. So did a couple of other birds. They landed the rest of us, and sent us away. Came mighty close to hanging first-degree murder on us, on account of a couple of shootings that Birch had done.

“I'm in the pen about a month. Then came the chance to break loose. It was a long shot, Possum, and I wouldn't have gone through with it, but I had a big reason why I wanted to be out. I made my get-away, and here I am.”

Possum Quill sensed that something of high importance was coming. He was not disappointed.

“I was mighty close to Birch Bizzup,” resumed Zach Telvin. “I was right beside him when he took the bump—and he didn't spill a word before he croaked. That's why I kept mum. They never found out what I knew.

“Half a million bucks, Possum—maybe more than that—gold, a little of it—currency, plenty—and Liberty bonds that are good for cash. That's the main part of the swag that Birch Bizzup stowed away!”

“Stowed away?” questioned Possum.

“That's what I said,” grinned Zach. “Birch knew how to boss his mob. They knew he was on the square. He packed all the gravy, and had us waiting for the big divvy when the blow-up queered the game.

“Birch was a smart guy. How he figured where the pickings lay is more than I can dope out, but he always cracked a bank when it was loaded to the gunnels with soft dough. We took the cream, Possum, and Birch stowed it.”

“Where?”

“That's what I know!” said Zach cagily. “And I'm the only guy in the whole outfit that knew anything about the lay. I stuck with Birch one night when he took a pile of swag to bury it.”

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POSSUM QUILL, seated in a chair, was nodding thoughtfully. His attitude was friendly, but there was something in his manner that denoted a lack of complete reliance in Zach Telvin's tale.

Possum Quill was crafty. By avoiding a display of eagerness, he aroused Zach Telvin to a state of anxiety.

“Don't you believe me, Possum?” quizzed the convict. “Listen, pal, I've been riding freights to get here. Look at these clothes—I busted into a tailor shop, and got the first outfit that came near fitting me. I had to get to you, Possum—you're the only guy I could count on. You believe me, don't you?”

“Sure I believe you,” nodded Possum. “I'm ready to help you out, Zach. The only trouble is, it sounds so soft that I'm looking for the catch.”

“It's not soft,” returned Zach. “That is, it may be soft—and maybe it won't be. If you'll listen to me, Possum—”

There was a rap at the door. Zach Telvin leaped to his feet. Possum Quill waved him down.

“It's only Lefty,” laughed Possum. “He's telling me that it's time to be starting. This is funny, Zach. Here you're talking about half a million—maybe more—and I'm going out on a job that only means one grand.

“I'm taking chances, too. If Punch Baxton is in a jam when he reaches the place I'm waiting, it may be tough for me. Well—so long, Zach. You stick here. If I'm not back inside a couple of hours, you'd better scram, because the bulls will have me. If they do—well, they may be coming down this way to check up.”

Zach Telvin leaped wildly forward. He gripped Possum Quill by the arm. There was anxiety in his voice as he pleaded with his old companion.

“It's in the bag, Possum!” exclaimed Zach. “Honest—I'm telling you straight. I'm counting on you. Lay off that job to-night. Don't chance it; Come along with me—”

Another rap interrupted from the door. Possum growled through to Lefty, telling him to wait a minute. The shrewd crook turned to Zach Telvin.

“You say there's plenty in it,” remarked Possum. “You don't say how or where. You want me to pass up the grand that I'm grabbing to-night. Minutes count with me right now, Zach. Spill what you've got in a hurry, and I'll listen—”

“I'll give you the lay, Possum,” gasped Zach, no longer reluctant. “There's plenty in it—for you—for me—for this guy that's with you, if he's O.K.”

“Lefty sticks with me.”

“All right. Bring him along. The swag is on an island—hidden somewhere. We can find it—”

“Somewhere on an island,” grunted Possum. “I knew there was a catch to it. What is the place—a summer resort?”

“It's an island in the Mississippi,” explained Zach. “There's an old house on it—plenty of trees—nobody ever goes there—”

“The Mississippi is a mighty long river,” remarked Possum.

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“I know the spot,” asserted Zach. “Birch took me there, the day after we cracked a crib in St. Louis. Look, Possum—I’ll show you I know the place.”

ZACH grabbed a paper and pencil that were lying on a table. He drew two curving, shaky lines to indicate the river.

Near one side of the stream he made a long oval; to the left, some short, scratchy lines; among these, a heavy, elongated dot.

“There’s the island,” he declared. “Over to the left here is a swamp—that’s how I can tell the place—”

“An island with a swamp,” remarked Possum. “Maybe there’s a lot of them like it—”

“Not with this!” returned Zach triumphantly, as he drew a heavy oval around the dot. “I’ll tell you what this is—an old steamboat that went aground years ago. It’s all swampy around the boat, now.”

“Where’s St. Louis?” questioned Possum.

“Here,” returned Zach, making a small circle, and adding the letters S.L. “It’s about—wait a minute—” He paused to jot down a few figures, then changed his calculation. Finally, he made a square on the left bank of the river, above the island.

“I can’t tell you within ten miles of the distance,” said Zach, “but it’s about fifty miles from St. Louis. This square, though, is a landing about two miles above the island. I know the place, Possum—I know it right enough—”

“And you’re sure the swag is there?”

“Only Birch knew the place, and if any others in the gang had an idea about it, it don’t matter. They either took the bump, or went to the coop.”

Lefty was rapping heavily at the door. Zach Telvin was urging in his glance as he sought to convince Possum Quill of his reliability.

“Coming, Lefty,” growled Possum.

The crook took the paper from Zach’s hands. He tore it into tiny fragments and dropped the pieces into the wastebasket.

A look of bitter disappointment showed on Zach’s face; it changed as he caught a knowing nod from Possum.

The crook opened the door and motioned to the convict to follow him. A glance at the clock showed Possum that it was only a few minutes after half past eleven. Lefty—as Possum had figured—had given his first rap before the appointed time.

“Let’s go, Lefty,” ordered Possum quietly. “This fellow is coming along with us.”

There was a small bag in a corner of the room. Without further words, Possum tossed a few articles into it, including the clock. Nothing else of value remained. The crook pointed to the bag. Lefty, wondering, picked it up.

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“We'll check out,” remarked Possum. “No use in hanging around this joint after to–night. Come along. We'll get started in the car.”

“Punch Baxton ain't figurin' on three of us,” began Lefty.

Possum cut the big gangster short.

“The three of us are going,” he said. “Get that, Lefty! Three of us!”

With a slight grin, Possum picked up the green–tinted newspaper and started to tear out a part of it. He turned the sheet toward Zach Telvin, and let the convict see that he was tearing out the picture of the penitentiary.

“Want this?” questioned Possum, with a laugh. “Sort of a thing you might like to remember—”

Zach grinned sourly as he pushed the newspaper aside. Possum crunched the tabloid and threw it into the corner of the room.

“Come on!” he commanded, in a final tone.

The three men stalked from the room. They turned along the corridor. They disappeared from view, Lefty, the last, carrying the bag.

WITH ear phones still attached to his head, Harry Vincent was standing on a chair, peering through the transom. He had caught the final words that had been said. Possum Quill had given Lefty Hotz no other indication than that they would keep the rendezvous with Punch Baxton.

Three men instead of two; that was what Harry Vincent had observed. The young man's mind retained the details of the last sounds that had taken place in the room across the hall, even to the crinkling noise of crumpled newspaper which had been audible through the sensitive mechanism of the dictograph.

Regaining the floor of the room, Harry removed his ear phones and seated himself at the telephone table. With his pencil busily recording the last details to which he had listened in, Harry raised the receiver of the telephone, and gave Burbank's number.

He was sending word of Possum Quill's departure. After that would come the details of preparing a complete report for The Shadow.

Harry Vincent foresaw the doom of crime to–night. Soon, he thought, Possum Quill, Lefty Hotz, and their unknown companion, would meet with trouble of The Shadow's making. They, like other crooks, were slated to pay the penalty for crime.

Little did Harry Vincent realize that he was on the verge of new adventure; that before that trio could be brought to task, he would be forced to travel far in the service of The Shadow!

One crime might fail to–night, but amid the threat which hovered over deeds of evil, newer and more astounding crime was in the making!

CHAPTER IV. THE SHADOW'S WAY

A HUGE grandfather's clock was chiming the half hour in an upstairs front room of Caleb Wilcox's home. The room was gloomy. Only a thin shaft of light entered from the half–closed door that led to the

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second-floor hallway.

Blackness flitted across the beam of light. That passing patch of darkness signified the presence of The Shadow. He, the mysterious stranger of the night, had entered here ahead of Punch Baxton, and his evil crew.

The clock was slow. The Shadow knew that fact. The Baxton mob was due at any time; the call from Burbank was late. The Shadow's passage through the room had been to gain observation of the hallway; now, his form was back again at its first station—a table near a window of the empty room.

A buzzing sound occurred beside the window. There was a click as The Shadow lifted a French telephone from its hook. His voice was no more than a sinister whisper, yet it brought a prompt reply from the other end of the wire.

“Burbank speaking,” came the words.

“Report,” whispered The Shadow.

“Report from Vincent,” announced Burbank. “Possum Quill, Lefty Hotz, and another man left at eleven thirty-five.”

“Tip-off to Cardona.”

With this terse instruction to Burbank, The Shadow replaced the telephone upon its hook. The keen ears of the phantom visitant had detected sounds other than Burbank's voice.

Swiftly, The Shadow glided to the door. Burning eyes peered from darkness to see stealthy forms that were ascending the stairs.

Eight men in all—thus The Shadow counted them. They were men of a type, common gangsters, all but two. This pair moved toward the front room to hold a short conversation. The Shadow's ears could detect the whispers.

“I'll show you the old man's vault, Punch”—the speaker was a solemn, middle-aged man—“and when you begin to load the swag, I'll slide up to my room. Don't forget to make that downstairs door look like a jimmied job.”

The other man, a squat fellow with an iron jaw, grinned in response.

“Leave it to me, Topper,” he replied. “You lay low and holler along with those other mugs that work for old Wilcox. We'll make a little noise when we scam.”

The two men joined the others.

THEIR conversation had revealed the situation. The man called “Topper” was acting as a servant in the Wilcox home. He had let in the gangsters. Once he had pointed out the location of the millionaire's small but well-stocked vault, Topper would take to cover.

Punch Baxton and his henchmen moved along the hallway, and disappeared into a darkened room. Faint indications of a flashlight were visible. One gangster reappeared. He stood at the top of the stairs. From his actions, there was evidently another man below.

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While the fellow was looking down the stairs, the streak of light that entered the front room disappeared completely. A mass of blackness had blotted it from view. The obscuring darkness disappeared. A tall figure blended with the side wall of the hallway. The Shadow had stealthily left the front room and was approaching the spot where the watcher stood.

Easily and steadily, The Shadow moved toward his goal. The watcher was alert now, looking along the hallway, suspiciously eyeing the door of the front room. Yet the gangster did not see that gliding shape that came so uncannily toward him. The light of the hall was vague, the walls were paneled. The Shadow was merged with darkness.

Slowly, the advancing phantom edged past the man who stood at the stairway. Behind the watcher, The Shadow quickly gained the door of the room where Baxton, Topper, and the others had gone.

His keen eyes spied from the corner of the doorway. They saw Baxton, in the sheltered circle of a flashlight's rays, working upon a steel door in the farther wall. Topper had revealed a special panel that made the vault accessible.

Topper was moving away from the wall. The man stopped near the door of the room, still watching Punch Baxton. It was evident that he intended to remain until the vault was actually opened. The Shadow, too, was awaiting that moment.

A lone enemy of crime, in between two groups of potential enemies, The Shadow had chosen a most dangerous position. That, however, was befitting The Shadow's strategy.

His plans were made. Possum Quill and Lefty Hotz had left their hotel. Cardona was on his way to the rendezvous. The stroke could come at any moment. The Shadow preferred the time when eagerness would lay the marauders most open to surprise.

Punch Baxton was working at the door of the vault. Any second would spell his success in opening it.

In the midst of this crucial situation, something intervened to disturb The Shadow's strategy.

A footstep sounded at the rear of the hallway. It could not be heard by any of the men within the room—not even by Topper, who was near the door. The Shadow heard it, however; so did the man at the front stairs.

The guarding gangster turned. His quick gaze saw a man in shirt sleeves. The arrival was approaching cautiously, a gun in his right hand.

A flight of stairs that led upward showed whence the man had come. One of Wilcox's trusted servants, this fellow had heard the noise on the second floor, and had come down to investigate.

THE door of the vault was opening. The Shadow was not thinking of it now. He had turned swiftly toward the spot where the guarding gangster stood. This crook had seen the servant. His arm was coming up to fire. Quick action was the watchword of all Punch Baxton's men.

The gangster's revolver was coolly leveled. The ruffian's finger was about to press the trigger. At the very top of the front stairs, this gunman had not been observed by the approaching servant. Murder was in the making. One shot from that threatening revolver would mean death.

The shot was never fired. A mass of blackness broke from the wall and shot forward with incredible swiftness. The servant saw only a shadowy form; the gangster saw nothing until The Shadow was upon him.

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A forearm that swung upward with the driving power of a piston smashed against the mobster's wrist. The revolver flew from a numbed hand as the gangster staggered backward. Then, as a startled cry escaped the gunman's lips, a black-gloved fist smashed squarely to his jaw.

The terrific blow caught the gangster completely off balance. The watcher was tough, but a bantam in size. His lack of weight was responsible for a most remarkable result.

The Shadow's smash lifted the astounded gangster completely in the air, and sent him hurtling, backward and head-foremost, clear over the uppermost step of the flight. The would-be assassin whirled through space. He struck the steps halfway down the flight. His body bounced with two long thumps clear to the foot of the stairs.

While the overpowered mobster was on his way to this unobstructed plunge, The Shadow, swinging completely with the power of his mighty blow, regained the edge of the hallway, and faced the door of the room where Punch Baxton was at work.

The gloved hands, as nimble as they were powerful, disappeared beneath the folds of the black cloak which The Shadow wore. Burning eyes peered from beneath the brim of a slouch hat. An instant later, those luminous orbs were sighting a brace of automatics—one gun looming from each of The Shadow's hands.

No gangster shot had warned Punch Baxton and his men, but the crash of the body upon the stairs caused them to leap to their feet. Topper, nearest the door, leaped into the hallway. A shot resounded from the end. The servant, seeing a living man in view, fired without delay. The frenzied shot was wide.

Topper had whipped out a gun. Knowing that he was discovered, he raised his hand to fire in return. The blast of an automatic came from the head of the stairs. Topper sprawled forward, downed by The Shadow's first shot.

Punch Baxton's henchmen were surging toward the doorway. Roaring shots greeted them. One man went down, a second staggered. A third, close behind his fellows, fired at the blackened shape which he could barely see.

His shot, however, was too late. The Shadow, after his first quick volley, was in motion, heading along the hallway toward the front room.

He roared one departing shot. It stopped the lone gangster who had fired. The watcher from downstairs was shooting blindly. He, too, had caught a momentary glimpse of what appeared to be a human form. His shots splattered the head of the stairway—the spot where The Shadow no longer lingered.

Now came the swarming gangsters. They reached the hall with Punch Baxton in their midst. The first arrival turned toward the front of the hallway. He caught the glint of The Shadow's burning eyes, and fired as a taunting laugh announced The Shadow's glide into the front room. The gunman was an easy target for The Shadow's fire, but the black-garbed master was reserving his bullets.

Punch Baxton and his unscathed men were in the hallway. One saw the servant at the rear end of the hallway, but the frightened fellow gained the safety of the back stairs before the gangster could aim a shot in his direction. The man who had fired at The Shadow dashed toward the front room, the others following behind him.

One thought gripped the gangsters. A lone fighter had fled in that direction. They would trap him—slay him by force of numbers—wherever he might be hiding. The gunman who led the mad attack did not realize that

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he was after The Shadow; that his enemy was not in hiding, but was standing amid the darkness straight ahead.

As the mobsters reached close range, The Shadow roared his greeting. Long flashes of flame seared from the barrels of the formidable .45s.

Terrific and unexpected, the barrage caught Punch Baxton and his henchmen flat-footed. The first man toppled; the second sprawled. In the face of this scathing fire, Punch made a dive for the stairway.

One wounded man staggered after him. The laugh of The Shadow echoed through the hallway. It brought despair to dying mobsmen who lay where they had fallen. They had gained the fate which they deserved; the fate of criminals who offered battle to The Shadow.

Shrouded in darkness, The Shadow was standing at the side window of the front room. Deliberately, he had allowed Punch Baxton and one wounded mobster to escape. The two came clattering from the side door as The Shadow watched. With them was another pair of rogues—downstairs watchers—who were also in frenzied flight.

Two cars were parked outside a wall. The mobsters dashed through a gate and gained one vehicle. They started toward the street.

The Shadow made no effort to stop them. Instead, he sought to speed their wild escape. He fired three shots from the upstairs window, as the car spun on two wheels into the thoroughfare.

As if in echo to The Shadow's volley, another automatic barked from far across the street. Cliff Marsland, seated in a parked coupe, was obeying his instructions. His shots, fired to the paving behind the fleeing car, added impetus to Baxton's maddened driving.

Cliff Marsland's coupe shot away. A police whistle sounded far down the street. Baxton's henchmen, believing that they were being pursued, were firing back along the thoroughfare—at nothing.

The Shadow's laugh sounded from the window. An ominous tone of mockery, it betokened doom for those who had fled. The cringing servant at the back of the hallway, joined now by others from above, paused before daring to advance toward the front room.

Blackness blotted the window where The Shadow stood. The blackness faded as a figure descended the outer wall. A bat-like phantom clinging to surface of stone, The Shadow paused, then made his weird departure into the blackness of the night.

When the frightened servants entered the front room a few minutes later, they found no one. One man grabbed the telephone to call the police; another peered everywhere, in search of a hidden person. The alarm was out for Punch Baxton and his handful of defeated raiders. Police were being summoned to this house, where dead and wounded gangsters lay. Yet no trace remained of the lone fighter who had waged the victorious battle. The Shadow had gained a victory over the most desperate crew of mobsters in all Manhattan. That conquest accomplished, The Shadow had departed, fading like a wreath of smoke into the outer darkness! But in the ears of those who had heard it, still lingered the gibing merriment of The Shadow's laugh!

CHAPTER V. THE SHADOW SEEKS

A RAKISH touring car shot past a red light on a Manhattan avenue. It whirled through a broken opening in the traffic, and headed for a side street. As Punch Baxton, the driver, uttered an oath, the strident cry of sirens

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sounded from far behind.

The touring car roared unmolested toward the center of a silent block. Brakes ground as the car came to a standstill. Punch was uttering low commands.

“Scram,” he ordered. “Through the alley. Drag Snooks along, a couple of you fellows. There's a car waiting in the next street.”

The mobsters clambered from the car. Like scurrying rabbits, they headed for the blackness between two buildings. “Snooks,” the wounded gunman, managed to stagger along with the rest of the thugs.

“This is where we make our getaway,” growled Punch, as he pushed open a gate near the end of the alley. “I paid a grand for the car that's here to pick us up. It's worth it—”

The mobsters reached the end of the alley. A new oath came from Punch Baxton.

The car that the gang leader had counted upon was not there!

Punch stepped into the light of the street. As his form came into view, a shot sounded from the sidewalk opposite.

Punch yanked out a gun. New shots blazed forth. In the face of fire, Punch turned back into the alley. His men were scurrying along the way that they had come. Snooks was forgotten. The wounded gangster had fallen and was crying out for aid.

Shots ricocheted after the retreating mobsmen. Those shots were a signal. The beam from a powerful searchlight illuminated the alley. Punch and his men were dashing directly into the terrific glare!

Cursing, Punch turned toward the gateway. His men followed his example. They were face to face with a dozen invaders.

Punch Baxton, toughest gang leader of New York's underworld, asked no quarter. He knew that these were detectives. He would fight them to the end.

One shot was all that Punch fired. His bullet found its mark in a detective's leg; Then came a volley of shots from the direction of the searchlight. Punch Baxton plunged forward, two bullets in his back. His wild-shooting henchmen had made no effort to surrender. They, too, collapsed from bullets dealt by the detectives.

A STOCKY figure entered the limelight. Detective Joe Cardona had set his ambush. He ordered his men to carry out the bodies. Two policemen appeared and approached the detectives. These uniformed men reported the chase that they had made.

Joe Cardona strode along the alley and reached the street, where Punch Baxton had expected Possum Quill to be waiting. The first man whom the detective encountered was Clyde Burke. The reporter followed as Cardona beckoned.

The detective reached a telephone, and called headquarters. Clyde listened to the conversation. Cardona's face became grim and satisfied as he concluded the call.

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“Well, Burke,” said Joe, “you saw some action, didn't you? You've picked up a good story just because you happened to be down at headquarters when a tip-off came in. Here's the inside of it, Burke—I just got it from Inspector Klein.

“This gang raided the home of Caleb Wilcox, the radio millionaire. They beat it when the servants sneaked up on them and opened fire. Then they ran into the trap which I had put out for them.”

“Did they get anything?” queried Burke.

“No,” returned Cardona. “If they had, we'd have grabbed it from them. We didn't know where they were bound to-night—we only got a tip-off that they were going to transfer to another car through the alley.”

“Where's the other car?”

“I don't know,” admitted Cardona. “We laid low so it could come up—but it never got here. The tip-off may have something to do with it, Burke. It looks like a double cross.”

“How?”

“Maybe one of the birds that was to have been in the other car had a grudge for Punch Baxton. Maybe they figured it would be better for us to be here than them. Yeah—that's probably it—a double cross.”

“See you later, Joe,” said Clyde. “I'm calling the office to give them the story.”

When the reporter reached a telephone, he did not call the Classic office.

Instead, he dialed Burbank's number.

A few minutes later, Burke was reporting the fact that Possum Quill had failed to appear within the zone of watching policemen and detectives.

BURBANK, in his sequestered room, received Clyde Burke's report with his usual calmness. Still seated with his back to the light, untiring in his continued vigil, the contact man made telephonic connection to The Shadow's sanctum. A whispered voice indicated that the master had returned to his secret abode.

“Burbank speaking,” said the contact man.

“Report,” came The Shadow's tone.

“Report from Burke,” informed Burbank. “Punch Baxton and mobsmen dead after battle with detectives. No trace of Possum Quill. His car did not appear.”

“Further report from Vincent,” came the voice of The Shadow.

“None,” declared Burbank. “He is stationed at the Hotel Slater. Awaiting instructions. Final report in readiness.”

“All agents off duty,” was The Shadow's order.

This meant that Burbank's vigil would be ended as soon as he received later calls. Clyde Burke and Cliff Marsland would telephone in from wherever they might be. In the meantime, Burbank plugged in and called

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the Hotel Slater.

Harry Vincent, still stationed in his room, was pleased to hear Burbank's instructions. The young man placed an envelope upon the table, and packed the ear phones in a bag which lay beside the bed. Off duty meant that he could go over to the Metrolite Hotel for the night, returning for his bag early in the morning. Harry had a permanent room at the Metrolite, and preferred it to these temporary quarters in an inferior hotel.

NOT long after Harry's departure a key grated softly in the lock of the door. The barrier opened, then closed. The tiny rays of a flashlight flickered. The light went out. A hand pulled the cord of a floor lamp. The tall figure of The Shadow appeared in the shaded illumination.

Gloved hands picked up the envelope which Harry had left. The hands opened the message. The keen eyes of The Shadow studied the blue-inked report. By the time that the reader was scanning the bottom of the first page, the words at the top began to fade away.

All special messages to The Shadow were penned in this disappearing fluid. Moreover, the written words were in a simple but effective code. To The Shadow, the statements were plain; to another, they would not have been understandable; and they would have vanished before the reader could have gained an inkling of the message.

Harry Vincent's report included important statements which had come over the dictograph. To The Shadow, the remarks made after eleven o'clock carried unusual significance. Possum Quill's reference to Zach Telvin, the escaped convict—the arrival of a visitor whose name had not been mentioned—the remarks at the time of departure—all were important.

The Shadow, tall and obscure, his black cloak hiding his lithe form, and the hat brim shading his features, laughed softly as he read Harry's mention of the sound of crinkling paper. A description of Possum's visitor brought another soft echo of mirth. Also, the mention of the bag which Lefty Hotz had carried.

The floor lamp clicked out. The door opened. The Shadow appeared in the corridor. The black cloak swished; it gave a momentary flash of a crimson lining, as The Shadow stooped before the door of Possum Quill's room. The door opened in response to a master key. The black-clad investigator entered the room which the crook had so recently occupied.

The Shadow's purpose was one of sinister portent. To the master of darkness, no victory was satisfactory unless it proved complete. To-night, The Shadow had shattered an invading horde of mobsters. He had spelled doom to a gang whose forays were famed throughout the bad lands.

In letting Punch Baxton elude his toils, The Shadow had done so that Possum Quill might be implicated when the police captured Punch. Somehow, Possum had managed to keep from the danger zone. Possum, a regular worker for Punch when get-aways were necessary, was scarcely more than a minor figure in the crimes committed by the Baxton mob; nevertheless, The Shadow's net should have enmeshed this lesser crook.

What was the explanation of Possum Quill's absence? The Shadow sought the answer in this place. With Punch Baxton dead, Possum would take for cover. The Shadow intended to locate him, wherever he might be.

Possum Quill had received a visitor shortly before eleven thirty. Harry Vincent had seen no definite link between that individual and the man whose name Possum had casually mentioned earlier—Zach Telvin. To The Shadow, however, Harry's report carried a coincidental thought.

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The crumpled newspaper in the corner! Keen eyes saw it as The Shadow turned on the light in Possum's room. This was the paper that Possum had crushed while making a jocular remark to his unidentified companion.

The Shadow picked up the newspaper and spread it open. He saw the picture of the penitentiary, and noted the tear running inward from the margin of the sheet.

The Shadow laughed softly. He had suspected the identity of Possum's visitor. This told him who the man was.

Zach Telvin, escaped convict, had come to visit Possum Quill!

Why?

If the fleeing man had sought only shelter, he would not have made the long and dangerous trip to New York. The Shadow knew that there was some other reason for Possum's arrival here. Keenly, The Shadow linked that reason with Possum's failure to keep the rendezvous with Punch Baxton.

One thousand dollars: that was the price which Punch was to pay for Possum's services. For Possum to be absent, as he had been, meant that hope of greater gain had lured the crafty crook. It also signified that Possum had departed from Manhattan. New York would not be a safe place for Possum Quill to remain after pulling a trick on Punch Baxton.

Where had Possum gone?

THE SHADOW sought the answer. His tall form, vague in the muffling folds of the black cloak, moved into the little room where Possum had conferred with Zach Telvin. A light came on; The Shadow's piercing gaze sought everywhere. The sharp eyes spied fragments of paper in the wastebasket.

Possum Quill had torn Zach Telvin's rough chart into many pieces. Putting those bits of paper back together was a difficult task, yet The Shadow began it with amazing swiftness.

Ungloved, The Shadow's hands worked upon the table beneath the light of a side bracket. The girasol glittered and cast its shimmering sparks. In the simple work that lay before him, The Shadow exerted the same skill and precision that he used in other enterprises. The fingers made no false moves. They planted the paper fragments piece by piece, until Zach Telvin's crude chart once more lay complete.

As effectively as if he had been present at the meeting between Possum and Zach, The Shadow studied the rough diagram. He recognized the large oval as an island in a river. The letters S.L.—the tabulated figures—these gave him the clew to the Mississippi. The square mark was obviously a landing place.

Carefully, The Shadow considered the short lines with the outlined dot in their midst. This was a projection of the island. Upon this point only did The Shadow show a trace of doubt. Shoal water or swamp—a rock or some other distinguishable object located at that spot.

The Shadow laughed softly. Paper and pen appeared in his right hand. In blue ink, The Shadow traced a duplicate of Zach's crude chart, and added figured summaries beside it. Then followed coded notations. The Shadow folded his paper, and placed it in an envelope. He wrote another note, placed it with the envelope, and sealed both in a larger wrapper.

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With another pen, The Shadow wrote the address of Rutledge Mann, Badger Building, New York City. The hand that wore the girasol swept up the fragments of paper, and let them flutter into the wastebasket.

The light went out. The Shadow moved to the other room, quickly drew the microphone from behind the radiator, and gathered up the hidden wire that led beneath the carpet toward the hallway.

Back to Harry's room; the wire stowed in the bag with the ear phones, The Shadow's work was done. With a mocking whisper upon his lips, the black-clad master disappeared along the corridor.

THE SHADOW had solved the mystery of Possum Quill's strange departure. He had recognized the identity of Zach Telvin. The details of the raids made by "Birch" Bizzup's gang were familiar facts to The Shadow. The newspapers had made much of the case, and had commented upon the inability of the police to discover the stolen spoils.

To The Shadow, all was plain. Amid the ashes of Punch Baxton's crimes, he could see the beginning of a new episode in which Possum Quill intended to play an important role. Eager crooks were on their way to an isle of doubt, seeking to discover buried wealth.

They would not be alone in that quest. The Shadow, too, was in the game. It was The Shadow's move, and he was one who moved by stealth. The ceaseless war with crime was one which required The Shadow's presence in Manhattan at this time; but The Shadow had a way when he set out to seek the unusual in criminal activities.

The isle of doubt! The Shadow would pave the way to that mysterious spot. He would follow when the time was ripe. The triumph of evil men would be short-lived when The Shadow chose to make his counterstrike.

The Shadow knew! And The Shadow's long talons would reach out to another section of the country, even though The Shadow himself must, for the time, remain fighting gangdom in New York!

CHAPTER VI. THE MAN FROM THE EAST

A STEAMBOAT was chugging upstream against the current of the mighty Mississippi. A young man, standing near the prow of the ship, was studying the shores which bordered the broad path of the wide, curving stream.

Despite the greenness of the banks, the Mississippi provided a sense of sleepy desolation. The warm sun gave the young man a feeling of laziness. As he gazed along the river, he speculated upon the peculiar turn of events which had brought him here—to a locality where Harry Vincent, agent of The Shadow, had never expected to travel in The Shadow's service.

The morning after Harry's vigil at the Hotel Slater, in New York, Harry had received a telephone call, instructing him to appear at the office of Rutledge Mann, a Manhattan investment broker. Rutledge Mann, a chubby-faced individual who took life in leisurely fashion, was one who served as secret contact man for The Shadow.

The investment office was actually a blind, although Mann did good business in the Badger Building. Only The Shadow's agents knew of Mann's actual duties. Harry Vincent, when he had visited the investment office, had expected word from The Shadow.

He had been surprised, however, to learn what was required of him. Harry had thought that accounts were squared with Possum Quill, Lefty Hotz, and the third man who had accompanied that pair of crooks.

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Instead, Harry had been instructed to follow on the trail of the men whom he already knew, and to look for the stranger who was with them. This third man, Harry had learned, was an escaped convict named Zach Telvin. The trio's destination was an island in the Mississippi.

How had The Shadow learned these facts? Harry could not surmise. The Shadow's capacity for deductive solution of crime was something that Harry could not even imitate. It was Harry's duty to follow The Shadow's bidding. He had done so. Aboard a steamboat chugging up the Mississippi, he was now approaching the vicinity in which the island lay.

There were numerous islands in the river, hereabouts, but Harry had seen none that answered the description shown in the sketch which The Shadow had sent him. Thus Harry continued to watch the river ahead, while he speculated upon the vanished fame of the Mississippi as an avenue of navigation.

Very few boats had been sighted along the river. Those that Harry had seen were chiefly tugs, towing scows. Harry looked in vain for passenger vessels that would match descriptions of such old-time ships as the Robert E. Lee. Even this boat upon which Harry was a passenger was scarcely more than a tawdry freighter.

THE boat rounded a bend. Harry, staring straight ahead, observed a narrowing of the river between two wooded shores, far up the stream. His eye caught sight of an object that aroused his immediate interest—an old-time steamboat, close beside the right-hand shore.

Two smokestacks, side by side, awakened Harry's recollections of stories that he had heard concerning the old Mississippi. There was no smoke coming from the funnels; Harry decided that this ancient vessel must be lying to, near a wharf.

"An old-timer, eh?" Harry put the question to a mate who was standing near by.

"Sure enough," said the man.

"Not many of them navigating the river," suggested Harry. "It's odd that that one is still going."

"That boat!" the mate laughed. "Say—that old packet ain't moved along the Mississippi for thirty years."

"Anchored?" queried Harry, in surprise.

"Aground," returned the mate.

"Strange," said Harry. "She's there in the main stream—"

"Not by a jugful," interposed the mate, with another laugh. "That old relic would have cracked up long ago during high water or flood time. That ain't the main stream. Look over there."

He pointed toward the right, and Harry observed a bend that was opening to view. The mate again pointed toward the stranded steamship.

"See the list on her?" he queried. "That's the packet River Queen. There ain't been no fire in those boilers since before I was born. There used to be lots of wrecks along the river—lots like that one—but most of them has washed away."

"Why not the River Queen?" asked Harry.

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“On account of the spot where she lies,” explained the mate. “She's alongside an island. That narrow strip of river used to be a cut-off, in high water—one of those places where the river chews through.

“The pilot of the River Queen must have chanced a short cut and run his tub aground. Anyway, there she is. What's more, that cut-off was one that was fading out instead of growing. Each year it got shallower and shallower. No steamboat could go through there now—even a tug might hit trouble.

“That island has been growing out into river. Swampy land—you'll see the long reeds all up around the River Queen when we get close. That's why the old boat has stayed. She's fast in the mud and mush —anchored to stay. You'd have a tough time blasting that packet loose from her moorings.”

The lower end of the island was enlarging as the mate spoke, and Harry could begin to see all that the man had mentioned. The plodding steamship was veering slightly toward the right. It was taking the widened course that swung around the island.

Harry was interested in the story of the stranded ship. It was not until his plodding boat had come within a quarter mile of the island and the mud-bound packet that a sudden thought occurred to Harry. The Shadow's chart flashed into mind.

An island, near one shore. Shoal water or swamp—it was the latter. A projecting rock or some object amid that swamp—the River Queen answered the description. A steamboat—not a rock!

Harry had found the isle of doubt!

The Shadow's agent turned to the mate. The man was biting off a chew of tobacco as Harry put a question.

“Is there a landing anywhere above the island?”

“Sure,” nodded the mate. “The old Saunders Landing, a couple of miles up. We're putting in there.”

“How's the farm land or plantations hereabouts? Cheap?”

“You bet; but any guy's a sucker to buy it.”

“Why?”

“Going down in value right along. The old Saunders plantation was for sale. They say a fellow from St. Louis bought it. Maybe he wants to get rid of it.”

“Maybe I'm a sucker,” said Harry thoughtfully. “Nevertheless, I'm looking for property around here.”

“You'll find plenty of it,” asserted the mate. “The river moved out a couple of miles up the line. Stranded the town of Knoxport. The place has been dead ever since. If you're looking for land, you might as well drop off at Saunders Landing.”

“That's what I'll do,” decided Harry.

THE steamboat was passing the island. The wreck of the River Queen was lost from view. Thick woods dominated the island. A mass of green obscured the interior from sight.

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As the steamboat progressed and entered a straight expanse, Harry could see small crags jutting from the head of the isle. Up the river, on the left side, he made out a small, but well-kept landing.

When the boat came to dock, Harry Vincent stepped down the gangplank. He was eyed curiously by barefooted gamins and lounging Negroes who had come to see the steamship dock. Among them was a husky white man, wearing knickers and leather puttees, and displaying brawny arms from a sleeveless shirt. He was superintending the unloading of some large cases from the boat.

Harry approached the man. He waited until the job was ended. The steamboat was sliding away into midstream; Negroes were loading the cases on an old truck. The brawny-armed man looked at Harry.

“Want to see me?” he questioned.

“I’m looking for the Saunders plantation,” stated Harry.

“Yeah?” questioned the man. “That’s where I’m from.”

“Fine!” exclaimed Harry. “I heard the place was for sale. I wanted to look it over.”

“It’s not for sale now,” returned the bare-armed man. “I’m working for the gentleman who just bought the plantation. It belongs to Weston Levis, from St. Louis. He’s living there now.”

Harry drew a card from his pocket and proffered it to the man. The card bore Harry’s name and the announcement that he was a New York real-estate agent.

“Perhaps,” suggested Harry, “it would be worth my while to call on Mr. Levis.”

“Suit yourself,” returned the man, extending his hand. “Glad to meet you, Mr. Vincent. My name is Hadley. I’m the superintendent or overseer or whatever you want to call me. Come along, if you want. We’re riding up to the plantation now.”

Hadley took the wheel of the old truck. Harry clambered up beside him on the driver’s seat, and tossed his bag into the back, where three Negroes were seated with the cases that they had loaded. Hadley jammed the truck into gear. It rolled along a dirt road, and took a fork toward the left.

The rough road paralleled the river for a quarter of a mile. Then it came into a clearing, beside a tiny cove. Harry had not seen this spot while coming up the river, but he noted with elation that the island and the wreck of the River Queen were both visible from this spot. Hadley brought the truck to a stop in front of an old plantation house.

“Here we are,” the man announced. “Mr. Levis is inside. Come on —I’ll introduce you to him.”

Leaving his bag in the truck, Harry alighted and followed Hadley toward the house. The door opened and a kindly faced old gentleman appeared. He was attired in a white Palm Beach suit, and he gazed quizzically at the stranger who was accompanying Hadley.

Harry knew that the man at the door must be Weston Levis. With his glib story in readiness, The Shadow’s agent approached. There was nothing but calmness in this sultry scene, yet Harry Vincent sensed that adventure might well be lurking over the old plantation. With the isle of doubt visible down the stretch of the Mississippi, this would be the spot from which to act!

CHAPTER VII. HARRY GETS ACQUAINTED

HARRY VINCENT and Weston Levis were seated in the front room of the plantation house. The new owner of the Saunders tract had invited Harry there immediately upon hearing Hadley's introduction. In the coolness of a broad, open-windowed room, Harry found himself facing a man who seemed to possess a youthful vigor in spite of advanced years.

“So you are from New York,” Levis was inquiring. “It is rather unusual for a visitor from the East to stop at this isolated landing on the Mississippi.”

“Surprising, yes,” smiled Harry. “At the same time, Mr. Levis, I am somewhat bewildered to discover a gentleman of urban characteristics living in this region.”

“I am in retirement,” declared Levis. “I am classed as an elderly man, Mr. Vincent. After forty years of business in St. Louis and other cities, I have been warned by my physician to take a rest. I was advised to go to California, or to Florida. I compromised by coming here.”

Levis paused as a servant entered with a tray and glasses. Harry was offered a cooling drink, which he accepted. Levis also took a glass and, after a short sip, proceeded.

“You are the first visitor to my new residence,” remarked the old man. “This plantation is not for sale; nevertheless, you are welcome to its hospitality. Even if I should emerge from my retirement, I shall keep the plantation as a vacation spot. I like it here on the Mississippi. I have chosen well.”

The old man was gazing over the rim of his glass. He shook the ice against the sides, took another sip, and laid the tumbler aside.

“Three months ago,” announced Levis reflectively, “I received my ultimatum. Increased business interests had led me into many channels. I had acquired my share of wealth. I was a director in many progressive enterprises. At last I began to feel the effects of ill health.

“Retirement, the doctor said. I protested. I could not leave the Mississippi district. Then the idea struck me to locate somewhere on the river, to remain close by, while I regained my former energy. Harvey Wendell—a man who has long served me in a secretarial capacity—came to me one day and told me of this plantation. I purchased it for a song. Now, a few weeks after my residence has begun, you arrive with the desire to buy the same place. Quite odd, I must declare.”

HARRY saw that it was time to offer an explanation. Duplicating Levis' casual manipulation of a drinking-glass, Harry replied.

“Odd, yes,” were the young man's words. “Particularly because my purpose is different from yours. I represent men in New York who have seen possibilities in the development of the Mississippi Valley. Naturally, with the proper financing dead regions may be brought to life.

“I was particularly interested in Saunders Landing, because I learned that the town of Knoxport was once a thriving place—now lost from sight because of a change in the course of the Mississippi. I thought that with this plantation as a nucleus, it might be possible to build up a prosperous town that would gain the place which the old one held.”

“To be, in turn, isolated by a new activity of the river,” smiled Levis. “The Mississippi is a stern master, Mr. Vincent. Nevertheless, your plan has merit. But why centralize on Saunders Landing? There are other spots

THE ISLE OF DOUBT

along the river that have the same potential.”

“I should like to locate them,” remarked Harry.

“I can aid you,” returned Levis. “Remain here a while, if you wish. I have a motor boat which you can use. Short trips up and down the river may enable you to find the type of land which you consider.”

“Excellent!” exclaimed Harry. “I thank you for your invitation, Mr. Levis. I do not wish to impose upon you, however—”

“You will not be doing so,” interposed the old gentleman. “On the contrary, Mr. Vincent, I shall be pleased to enjoy your company. That is the one thing I lack—companionship. Wendell, my secretary, is a methodical sort of fellow, who seems to be overburdened with the many loose threads of my business interests. Hadley is engaged in putting the plantation into shape. I am alone a great deal of the time.”

“Do you have many men upon the plantation?”

“Yes, but in the daytime, only. They are working under Hadley's direction. Later, we shall house them on the premises. Eventually, Mr. Vincent, I may be living the life of an old-time planter.”

“Interesting,” observed Harry.

The conversation continued. Weston Levis talked of his business career, while Harry Vincent stared occasionally down the river toward the spot where the tilted wreck of the River Queen showed beside the isle of doubt.

All the while, Harry was engaged in speculation. Levis had remarked that Harry's visit here was an odd one. The statement was merited. Having given a satisfactory answer, Harry was now considering the old man's presence. Perhaps there was a special reason why Levis, too, had chosen this isolated spot.

One statement might furnish the clew. Levis, according to his own declaration, had not chosen this plantation for retirement. His secretary, Harvey Wendell, had been responsible for the acquisition of the estate. Had Wendell had a purpose in picking this lone spot?

Harry realized that he must meet the secretary soon. Therefore, he sought to establish himself as completely as possible with Weston Levis, in anticipation of Wendell's arrival.

Their beverages finished, Levis offered to show Harry the plantation. The two men strolled out to the veranda. Levis spied Harry's grip where Hadley had placed it beside a pillar. The old man ordered a servant to take the bag to a guest room. It was evident that Levis had been sincere in his statement.

HADLEY joined the two men as they strolled toward another clearing. Afternoon was waning, and the quiet lull of the Mississippi seemed to pervade the atmosphere. Weston Levis, courteous and benign, had accepted Harry Vincent as a friend. Hadley, too, expressed a genial attitude.

Harry realized that he had fallen into luck. He saw the motor boat as he neared the cove with his companions, and knew that with this craft at his disposal, he would have every advantage in covering the river district. Weston Levis, a retired business man, and Hadley, a hard-working overseer, would never suspect that Harry was here for a purpose other than the one he had represented.

THE ISLE OF DOUBT

As chance had it, Weston Levis pointed out the wreck of the old steamship down the river. Harry Vincent remarked that he had seen the River Queen when traveling up the Mississippi.

“The boat has been there for many years,” said Levis. “I remember the old packet when she first went aground. I have often traveled the Mississippi by steamboat.”

A clanging bell announced the dinner hour. Harry Vincent accompanied Weston Levis into the house. They had scarcely seated themselves before a figure appeared in the doorway. Looking up, Harry caught the stare of a stocky, dark-haired man whose face was firm and challenging.

“Ah! Wendell!” exclaimed Levis pleasantly. “I want you to meet Mr. Vincent—a real-estate man from New York. He intends to stay with us a while.”

Harry had risen from the table. Wendell advanced and thrust out a hand. Harry returned a powerful, viselike grip. Harvey Wendell took a chair and joined the others at their meal. Weston Levis chatted for a short time, then seemed to weary. Wendell took up the conversation.

“So real estate is your business?” he inquired of Harry. “Well, without disappointing you, I’ll tell you that you’ve picked a bad section.”

There was challenge in the man’s words; challenge in his tone; challenge in his very attitude. All the ease that Harry had gained now changed to cool caution. There was something in Wendell’s manner that evidenced doubt as to the authenticity of Harry’s claims.

“Lots of queer ideas about the Mississippi,” continued Wendell, “but I never heard of a real-estate promoter figuring this location worth while.”

Harry knew that the man was baiting him. He realized, also, that Wendell was a type of individual too shrewd to serve merely as a secretary to a retired business man.

A glance toward Weston Levis convinced Harry that the old man was completely used to Wendell’s brusque manner. Harry could now see a hidden motive in the secretary’s action of urging Levis to purchase this plantation.

Was there a connection between Harvey Wendell and the island down the river? Harry could not guess. It was possible, he thought, that Wendell was an adventurer who had gained a foot-hold in the management of Weston Levis’ affairs, and simply resented the appearance of any one who might suspect what he was doing. That would account for Wendell’s urging Levis to come to this secluded spot.

At the same time, the proximity of the island which Harry believed was the goal of three crooks, might be more than mere coincidence. According to the word that Harry had received from The Shadow, Zach Telvin, an escaped convict, was leading Possum Quill and Lefty Hotz to that isle. Could Wendell be a secret pal of Zach’s?

Speculation—that was all. In The Shadow’s service, Harry had learned to deal with facts, not fancies. He ceased his meandering and concentrated upon Harvey Wendell. The secretary was bringing up the subject of real estate.

Weston Levis owned property in the East. Wendell had classified the old man’s deeds and titles; he referred to them now as he conversed with Harry. Under apparent desire to learn of property values, Wendell was sounding out the visitor’s knowledge of real estate.

THE ISLE OF DOUBT

Harry Vincent suspected the ruse. He handled the situation well. It was Harry's business to play parts. His knowledge of real estate was genuine; in fact, Harry had credentials in his grip, should they be required. He answered every question that Wendell put forward. Nevertheless, the secretary's suspicion still remained in evidence.

AFTER dinner, the three men went into the large front room. They sat in mild light, smoking cigars. Harry Vincent, facing toward the window, could see the moon-bathed Mississippi, with the isle of doubt a blackened outline upon its surface. The wreck of the River Queen was also visible, like a tiny satellite beside a larger orb.

Casually, Harry discussed his plans for the morrow. He was the one who put the questions now. He asked about properties along the river. Weston Levis called upon his secretary to answer.

"You found this plantation, Wendell," remarked the old man. "Tell Mr. Vincent about some of the other places in this vicinity."

"Nothing much to talk about," returned Wendell gruffly. "There are other old plantations—but they're all tumble-down. The best way to find them is to cruise along the river bank, and look for old landings. Every landing means houses inshore."

"That will be my occupation to-morrow," decided Harry. "Mr. Levis has promised me the use of his motor boat. I appreciate the favor, for it will enable me to cover this territory very effectively."

Harvey Wendell went out of the room in order to go over the day's account sheets. Hadley came in, chatted a few minutes, and went upstairs. Weston Levis, laughingly remarking that he was classed as an invalid, decided that his bedtime had arrived.

"Finish your cigar, Vincent," he said. "You know where your room is located."

"I'll be turning in very shortly," replied Harry. "That trip up the Mississippi made me sleepy."

After Levis had gone, Harry strolled to the veranda. He finished his cigar while he stared down the river toward the isle of doubt. When he turned toward the screen door of the plantation house, Harry was momentarily startled to see a man standing within the transparent barrier. It was Harvey Wendell.

"Turning in?" queried the secretary.

"Yes," answered Harry.

Wendell pushed the door open.

"I'll be hitting the hay myself," he said, "after I get the correspondence done."

He pointed across the hall to a small room where Harry saw a desk, filing cabinet, and portable typewriter. Wendell strolled to the door of the room. A smile appeared upon his sallow face as he bade the visitor good night.

HARRY VINCENT'S room was at the back of the second floor. A short cleared space, then woods—that was all Harry could see from the window.

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After retiring, Harry began to wonder further about the part that Harvey Wendell might be playing. Cautiously, The Shadow's agent tiptoed from his room and reached the head of the stairs.

He could barely hear the intermittent tapping of the typewriter. The noise ceased; then began again. Harry continued to listen. The typing ended. Harry heard the door of the little office open.

Peering from a corner of the stairs, he saw Harvey Wendell come from the downstairs room. The man paused in the hallway and stared toward the steps. Harry kept out of sight.

The screen door clicked slightly. Again peering, Harry saw the secretary go out to the veranda. The screen closed. Harry waited. Had Wendell remained upon the porch, or was he going elsewhere?

A hall window opened at the front of the house. Harry stole in that direction. He glanced from the second-floor window. At first he saw nothing but the dim glow of moonlight. Then his eyes were attracted by a moving object.

Harvey Wendell was moving across the clearing. The man had nearly reached the opposite side when Harry saw him. As The Shadow's agent watched, he observed Wendell enter the clump of woods.

The secretary did not reappear.

Listening, Harry fancied that he detected the sound of rattling oarlocks. Silence followed. Minutes dragged. Harry Vincent returned to his room.

The Shadow's agent was now convinced that Harvey Wendell was playing some secret role. In all probability, neither old Levis nor Hadley suspected it. That would make Harry's task all the easier.

Harry Vincent had become acquainted with the people at the old plantation.

From now on, he could begin his investigations of the isle of doubt. But the island, alone, would not be Harry's only object.

The Shadow's agent was determined to keep a secret watch upon the actions of Harvey Wendell. Perhaps, through them, he could discover a clue to cross motives which had entered this field of hidden crime.

Not for one moment, however, did Harry forget the need for caution. His part was that of secret investigator. He was merely the aid who prepared the way for the coming of the one who could solve the mystery that enshrouded these spots along the Mississippi.

With the advent of The Shadow, the schemes of skulking crooks would soon be learned, and the hidden motives of Wendell would also be discovered.

These were convictions in Harry Vincent's mind as the young man returned to his darkened room, and sat in silence, wondering how soon Wendell, the prowler, would return.

CHAPTER VIII. ON THE ISLAND

LATE the next afternoon, Harry Vincent stepped from a rickety pier into the little motor boat which he had tied there a few hours before. He pushed the craft into the stream, and headed outward toward the vast flow of the Mississippi. The motor boat began its chugging progress up the river.

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Harry's plans were working well. The pier which he had just left was several miles below the old Saunders Landing. Harry had traveled a considerable distance—with calculated effect.

At a railroad station a mile back from the river, he had found a telegraph office. He had sent a communication to New York. It told of Harry's temporary residence at Levis' plantation, and mentioned the distance above the island which Harry suspected to be the isle of doubt.

Weston Levis was not expecting Harry back until late. Hence, The Shadow's agent did not hurry his boat as he forced it against the heavy Mississippi current. Twilight was approaching, and Harry was timing his progress in anticipation of darkness.

Twinkling lights had appeared at spaces along the river banks when Harry Vincent sighted the black hulk of the island. The River Queen was barely visible off the shore. Harry softened the tone of the motor, and by the time he had neared the island, his boat was scarcely more than a gliding speck lost upon the darkened surface of the river.

Harry shut off the motor entirely. He took an oar and used it as a paddle, edging the boat forward in the still water just below the isle. He was out of the current; the little craft responded to Harry's muffled strokes.

Smoothly, Harry docked the motor boat beside an overhanging bank. He tied the mooring rope to a sapling, and stepped ashore. A few minutes later, he was lost in the cover of the woods.

Darkness was thick; nevertheless, Harry managed to make stealthy and effective progress. He guided his steps just within the fringe of trees. Slight light from the space above the river enabled him to pick his way along the shore.

This island was not wide. Harry intended to circle it, keeping close watch toward the interior. He hoped that he would be able to spy anything unusual that might lie in the center of the isle.

It was not long before he made a lucky discovery. Harry's footsteps crunched upon a flattened gravelly patch of earth. Harry had stumbled upon the remains of a forgotten path which led in from the shore of the island.

Harry followed the path. It ended in a thicket.

Carefully pushing his way through the brush, Harry found himself close beside the wall of a deserted house. This was a lucky discovery. If men were hiding upon the island, they might be using the building for their headquarters. If, instead, they preferred the woods, the house could serve as Harry's place of outlook.

CREEPING along the wall, Harry turned to the rear of the house which jutted back into the woods. After a few paces, he stopped short. A tiny glimmer of light was coming from a rear window.

On hands and knees, Harry reached a spot below the window. A patch of light was visible here. Harry slowly raised his head and peered through a crack between two boards which blocked the window.

Three men were seated in the room; two upon the floor, one on an old bench which constituted the sole article of furniture in the kitchen of the abandoned house. The oil lantern which provided illumination was resting upon the bench beside the man who was seated there.

As Harry Vincent stared, he recognized every one of the roughly clad trio. The man on the bench was Possum Quill. On the floor was Lefty Hotz; beside him, the visitor who had come to the room at the Hotel Slater. This was the man whom The Shadow had identified as Zach Telvin, the escaped convict. The conversation which

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Harry Vincent now heard justified The Shadow's deduction.

“Well, Zach”—Possum Quill was speaking in a smooth but disgruntled tone—“we're here on your island. Where's the swag?”

“That's up to us to find out,” retorted Zach.

“We've had no luck yet,” declared Possum.

“What do you expect?” queried Zach. “You don't think Birch Bizzup would have left the dough laying loose, do you? It'll be hard to find—I told you that when we came here.”

“We've been at it a couple of days,” said Lefty, gruffly siding with Possum.

“Yeah,” retorted Zach, “and we've gone through the old boat and this house. They were the first two places to look, of course. But it's likely that Birch picked somewhere better. Give us time—we'll find it.”

“Out here in the sticks,” growled Possum. “Plowing around an island like a bunch of Boy Scouts. You sure horsed us this trip, Zach.”

“Horsed you?” Zach was angry in tone. “Say—if you birds had stayed in New York, you'd have been nabbed with Punch Baxton and his mob. The bulls got those guys—and if I hadn't showed up to give you this steer, you'd have taken it, too.”

“Maybe,” voiced Lefty.

“Maybe?” Zach laughed. “You know what Possum said himself. A fine job—all for one grand—and you'd never have collected. Don't tell me. When you read that New York newspaper, both of you were glad you hadn't stayed in the big town.”

“Zach's right, Lefty,” declared Possum. “We're better off here. We've got a chance for a big haul—if we can find the spot we want. I'm leery, though.”

“Why?” queried Zach.

“Some other guy may know the lay,” said Possum.

“The boys were all bumped off, I tell you,” came back Zach. “That is, all except a couple of punks who went to the Big House along with me. They weren't in the break—”

“I'm not figuring them,” interrupted Possum. “From what you say, Birch Bizzup was a smart gazabo. Maybe you weren't the only guy that was close to him. Suppose he had another worker—an inside man.”

“Birch never said nothing about any such guy.”

“Birch wouldn't have told you, Zach. I'm not saying anything for certain—I'm just figuring. Somebody else may know about this hidden swag. If there is such a bird, he's had month or more to look for it.”

“Listen, Possum. Birch Bizzup was smart. You said plenty when you made that statement. Maybe Birch did have some connection that I didn't know about. But what of it? This hiding place was Birch's own idea. He only let me in on it because he needed me to help him lug the swag.

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“Say, Possum, I came up here with Birch, and the two of us had a load of real goods. I stuck down by the shore; when Birch came back, he didn't have the stuff with him. It was all he could do to carry it alone.”

“He left you on the shore, eh?”

“Yeah,” returned Zach, “and he started around the island in the boat.”

“Maybe he went over to the mainland.”

“I don't think so, Possum. He must have landed at another spot on the island. I figured it that way at the time. I still figure it that way now.”

“You win, Zach. I guess the swag is here. Just the same, I suspicion another guy in it somehow.”

“I don't, Possum—at least I don't figure the other fellow or anybody Birch might have known could have got the goods. Look here—suppose when we find the swag—are we going to bother about covering up?”

“No—I don't think there'd be much reason to bother.”

“Well—suppose some wise guy got here ahead of us—figuring, like us, that he's the only one on the lay. He'd have left some tracks, if he'd picked up the swag.”

“Yeah. That sounds likely.”

Silence descended upon the trio. Harry Vincent slipped away from the window. He reached the corner of the house and crouched there.

Harry was satisfied. He had discovered that the crooks were on the isle. He had learned that they had not yet found the wealth for which they had come. This would be real information for The Shadow.

HARRY lingered cautiously. He intended to make a very careful departure. Care was essential. He watched the shaft of light that came from the window, then began to back from the side of the house. Suddenly, he stopped.

The Shadow's agent had detected something beyond the light from the window. Harry heard a slight sound. He had a hunch that some one else was entering this picture.

While Harry waited, the figure of a man appeared within the range of light. Harry saw a face come into view, as the stranger raised his head to peer through the cracked boards of the window.

Staring, Harry recognized the face. It was the sallow countenance of Harvey Wendell!

All Harry's suspicions of the secretary crystallized in the space of a few seconds. Wendell's absence from the plantation, yesterday afternoon; his secret departure late last night; his presence here!

What cause would Wendell, as an old man's secretary, have to visit this island?

There could be only one answer. Harvey Wendell must know the secret of the buried wealth!

Adding facts, Harry saw merit to the suggestion, which he had heard Possum Quill utter but a few minutes ago. Harvey Wendell was a crafty individual. He was the type who would have worked as Birch Bizzup's

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secret accomplice. The secretary of a business man—a crook by actual profession. Such was Harry Vincent's prompt summary.

Harry could see a reason now for Wendell's supposed discovery of an excellent plantation where Weston Levis could live, in retirement. It had given Wendell the opportunity to make excursions to the island.

Had Wendell already discovered the hidden funds? Harry was considering that fact as he watched the black-haired man peer into the window. Wendell's expression was barely discernible. It showed eagerness to hear what was going on. Harry knew then that Harvey Wendell could not have completed his quest before the arrival of the crooks.

Harry watched and waited. He was in readiness for any emergency. In his pocket, Harry carried an automatic. He was sure that Wendell was also armed, for he could see the secretary's hand resting upon his hip. Several minutes passed, then Wendell suddenly ducked away from the window.

Harry knew that the secretary had come from the lee shore of the island, and was probably headed for a rowboat which he had left there. In his turn, Harry pushed through the bushes and regained the path. He made good progress to the bank where he had left the motor boat. Harry pushed the little craft from the shore.

FIFTEEN minutes later, Harry had drifted well below the island. He started the motor, let the chugging gradually increase, and gave the boat speed upstream.

Harry skirted the island, and headed for the light that twinkled on Saunders Landing. Then, as he reached a spot on a cross line with the cove at the plantation, Harry sped the boat across stream and coasted into the little dock that rested in the shelter of the cove.

As he turned off the motor, Harry caught the click of oarlocks. He could see a hazy outline moving into the cove. He called a greeting.

“That you, Vincent?” came a growling response.

“Right,” responded Harry.

A flashlight turned on. A rowboat came up beside the motor boat. Harry recognized Wendell as the secretary turned the light upward.

“Just out for my evening row,” remarked Wendell. “Got my work done early for a change. Thought you'd be back before this.”

“I took a long trip down the river,” responded Harry.

The boats were docked. The two men were walking side by side along the path that led to the clearing.

“How'd you make out?” queried Wendell.

“Not so good,” rejoined Harry. “The places around here look mighty tawdry. I'm going to cover more, though, before I quit.”

“Heard you chugging up the river,” remarked Wendell. “We held out some dinner for you, after the servants left.”

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At the house, Harry found his plate waiting in the dining room. Weston Levis joined his guest at the table. Harvey Wendell stood by the door, making no comment. Harry wondered if the secretary had any suspicions. Wendell betrayed none. Finishing his meal, Harry pulled a paper and pencil from his pocket.

“Can I send a telegram from here?” he asked, looking toward Wendell.

“Sure,” replied the secretary. “We'll telephone it into the office at Knoxville.”

Harry thought that he detected curiosity in Wendell's expression. Withholding a smile, Harry addressed a telegram to Rutledge Mann, in New York, and wrote out the message:

GOOD PROPERTY ALREADY OCCUPIED STOP HAVE GAINED NO RESULTS STOP AWAITING
REPLY

“Wendell will send the telegram if you wish,” remarked Weston Levis.

“A night message,” said Harry, handing the paper to the secretary. “Collect.”

Harry's slight smile appeared when the man had gone to telephone the message. To the secretary, the wording would seem obvious. By “good property occupied,” Harry had evidently referred to this plantation. “No results” could be applied to to-day's trip down the river. The words “await reply” were natural.

But the night message carried a deeply hidden meaning. When it reached The Shadow, through Rutledge Mann, the message would be properly interpreted.

“Good property occupied” meant that the crooks had reached the island. “Have gained no result” signified that they were baffled in their quest. “Await reply” showed that Harry needed new orders from The Shadow.

Harvey Wendell was phoning the message. Harry Vincent saw him in the little office, as Harry, with Levis, walked through to the front room. There was reason now for Harry to smile.

Harvey Wendell, like the crooks whom he had seen to-night, was interested in what was passing on the isle of doubt: Two factions were at work—Harry could see the coming clash of crook against crooks, in a battle for illicit wealth.

There, at the telephone, Wendell himself was unwittingly aiding in the cause of justice. He was sending through the message that would bring The Shadow into this strange complexity of cross-purposes.

When The Shadow entered such a field, the designs of evil men were doomed to fail!

CHAPTER IX. THE SHADOW PASSES

AT noon, the next day, Harry Vincent received an answer to his telegram.

Harvey Wendell, at the desk in the office, took the message when it was telephoned in from Knoxville. The secretary typed off the words and brought the telegram to Harry.

MAKE NO NEGOTIATIONS FOR ANY PROPERTY STOP CONFERENCE EXPECTED STOP
PREPARE REPORT

The telegram was signed by Rutledge Mann. Harry smiled sourly as he showed the message to Weston Levis.

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“Who is Rutledge Mann?” questioned the old man.

“New York investment broker,” returned Harry. “He has been conducting the deal with the promoters. All was set when I came out here. I could have arranged a purchase for a plot of land such as this plantation—and the deal would have gone through.

“But when I wired that no suitable ground was available, it brought on a conference. By the time they're through, they'll have decided to develop land along the Missouri or the Yazoo, instead of the Mississippi. That's the way those promoters work.”

“How will that effect you?”

Harry shrugged his shoulders.

“I don't know,” he confessed. “They may decide to have me continue in this locality; they may send me elsewhere. Possibly I may be recalled to New York. It will only be a matter of two or three days before I hear positively.”

“I hope you will receive word to stay longer,” said Levis. “This has been an enjoyable acquaintanceship, Vincent. I have come to regard you as an old friend.”

Harvey Wendell was eyeing Harry narrowly. The Shadow's agent evidenced no concern. Harry was positive that Wendell could have no inkling to the real purport of that telegram.

The instructions to make no negotiations meant that Harry was to stay away from the island. The reference to an expected conference signified that Harry would soon hear from The Shadow. The words “prepare report” told Harry that he should have a complete record in readiness.

After lunch, Harry sat on the veranda with Levis. There was no reason for another motor-boat trip to-day, as Harry's interest in Mississippi properties was temporarily in abeyance. Harvey Wendell was in the little office. Harry knew that Wendell, too, could make no move.

With others in possession of the island, the masquerading secretary could not visit that spot until after nightfall. Harry would be on watch then, to observe the man's actions.

THERE was only one slight doubt in Harry's mind regarding his suspicions of Wendell. It was possible that the secretary might have been rowing down past the island, with no particular purpose—and by mere chance have noted the light from the isolated house. Such a theory, however, seemed highly improbable.

While Harry was thinking of Wendell, the man appeared to announce that the typed letters were ready for Weston Levis' signature. The elderly man arose and went to the screen door.

“You will excuse me, Vincent,” he said. “The work of reading the letters will require only a few minutes. Come along, Wendell.”

Harry remained alone on the veranda. The young man arose and strolled out on the lawn. Hadley chanced to appear, and waved a greeting. He came over to talk to Harry.

“Like it around here?” questioned the overseer.

“Very much,” replied Harry.

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“Sleepy place,” said Hadley, “but it's a nice locality. I like it better than St. Louis.”

“You came from there?”

“Of course. I was sort of landscape architect on the old estate which Mr. Levis sold when he bought this place. I wasn't very keen on coming up the river. But I've been working for the old man a good many years.”

“As long as Wendell?”

“Him? Wendell?” Hadley grunted. “Say—he's a chiseler, that guy. How he jammed his way into his soft job is more than I can figure. Levis had to have a secretary that could travel places—that's how he got Wendell.”

“In and out—that's Wendell. You don't know where he goes or what he's about. Maybe he doesn't know himself. Well”—Hadley paused to shrug his shoulders—“I guess the old man needs him, so that's that.”

Hadley was still standing around when Levis reappeared from the house. The overseer approached the old man to report on work about the plantation. Harry went back to the veranda, and sat in an easy-chair. He stared reflectively toward the sparkling river—off toward the isle of doubt and the wrecked steamer.

THE SHADOW knew all about that island now. Harry's telegram of yesterday afternoon had given essential information. Last night's message had supplied the news that the crooks were there. Harry's suspicions of Harvey Wendell constituted a matter that The Shadow would learn later.

How soon? Harry considered that subject as he leaned back in his chair and stared drowsily toward the blue sky beyond the woods that banked the farther shore of the Mississippi. Harry felt drowsy; in a few minutes he was fast asleep.

Weston Levis continued his conference with Hadley. The two men departed toward the inland field. When they returned an hour later, Harry was still slumbering. Harvey Wendell appeared, carrying a stack of addressed envelopes. The slam of the screen door half awakened Harry Vincent from his nap.

Then came another sound—a distant drone that gained in its intensity. Harry sat up and blinked. He saw Wendell and stared questioningly. A smile appeared upon the secretary's sallow, pasty face.

“Just an airplane,” informed Wendell. “Following the river. They come along here every now and then. If they get off the regular course, they pick the Mississippi and take it down to St. Louis.”

Harry stepped from the veranda and looked toward the sky. Wendell was close beside him. Levis and Hadley had ended their conversation. The thrum of the plane was louder; the ship itself had come to view. It was flying at an altitude of a few thousand feet. A swift monoplane, this man-made bird was winging its way at a modified rate. It passed directly over the plantation, veered slightly as it traced the river bend, and lost in altitude.

“He'll give it the gun when he gets farther down,” commented Wendell. “They all slow up a bit along here—the river course is pretty twisty.”

Harry watched the plane. The silvered wings were glinting in the sunlight as the ship continued on the river course. Instead of taking the leftward bend which characterized the main channel of the Mississippi, the monoplane seemed to guide itself toward the island which caused the divergence of the great stream. As the airplane covered the distance which lay between the plantation and the isle, Harry observed a peculiar phenomenon. The direction of the sun's rays produced a blackness underneath the silvered wings. Just as the

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plane neared the island, that spread of darkness assumed the proportions of a grotesque shadow.

The plane above the island! A natural result of the aviator's course. Yet, to Harry Vincent, there was singular significance in the scene. Harvey Wendell had turned away. Weston Levis was walking back toward the house. Hadley was departing. Harry remained, staring down the river, under a fascination which he could not voice.

The airplane had passed. To all but Harry, its passage was now a forgotten event. There were men upon the island over which the plane had swept. Those men, as Harry knew, were crooks, but they would see no significance in the mere passage of an airplane heading down the river.

But Harry Vincent, as he still watched the plane's thrumming progress toward the horizon, realized a new sense of security. A chain of connected events throbbed through the young man's mind.

The Hotel Slater, in New York—this isolated plantation on the Mississippi—Harvey Wendell, the pretended secretary—crooks in hiding—telegrams with double meaning—all were linked.

Harry had received his message from Rutledge Mann. More than that wired answer had come. This airplane, a chance traveler through the sky, was joined with all that had gone before!

THE plane was no more than a speck in the distance. Harry's gaze lowered to the green wooded surface of the isle of doubt. Harry's eyes also noted the derelict shape beside the island—the wreck of the River Queen.

Harry had found the spot which he had been deputed to discover—the little island which was the goal of men who sought ill-gotten wealth. Harry had been upon that isle. Yet he was not the only one who had studied that clump of green in an effort to learn the secret shared by men of crime.

Eyes from the monoplane had seen the isle of doubt as well. Harry Vincent, alone, could guess the identity of those eyes. They were the eyes of The Shadow!

The airplane had passed from view. Harry Vincent turned toward the veranda, quietly concealing a smile of elation. He knew that his hunch was correct. The Shadow had come to the Mississippi Valley. High in the air, the master who battled crime had passed above the isle of doubt!

CHAPTER X. THE SHADOW SEES

SHORTLY after midnight, a quiet, dignified man appeared in the lobby of a large St. Louis hotel. He stopped at the desk and inquired if there were any messages for Mr. Lamont Cranston. He also gave his room number—618.

The clerk found a notation in the box and brought forth a package that lay beneath the desk. The quiet man received it and walked toward the elevators. He stopped on the way; returned, and spoke to the clerk, as though by afterthought.

“I may be leaving town to-night,” he remarked. “However, I shall retain my room here. If any messages arrive, be sure to hold them until I return or call.”

“Very well, Mr. Cranston.”

The clerk watched the tall figure that again started toward the elevators. There was something distinctive about Lamont Cranston that attracted the attention of the hotel employee. In appearance, manner, and speech,

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this guest was unique.

In viewing Cranston's face, the clerk had seen a firm, well-set countenance that possessed a marked impassiveness. It was impossible to make a conjecture as to Lamont Cranston's age. It might have been judged at anywhere between thirty and fifty. A visage so chiseled that it appeared almost masklike—such was the face of Lamont Cranston.

Tall, upright in carriage, and of sweeping stride, Lamont Cranston impressed the observer as a man of great latent power. He moved with a pace which was almost leisurely, yet which carried him forward with surprising swiftness.

In speaking, Cranston had a steady, even tone that carried no unusual note when one heard it; yet every word that Cranston uttered seemed to embed itself within the listener's mind. While the clerk watched the guest enter an elevator, he could still fancy that he was hearing the words which Lamont Cranston had spoken.

Despite the routine which now engaged the clerk's attention, the man could not shake off the presence of the singular guest who had discussed such minor matters as a package and possible messages which might arrive during his absence.

IN the meantime, Lamont Cranston had reached his room. Standing by the window, the tall figure was strangely still. Lamont Cranston, idly staring toward the lights of the city, had assumed the appearance of a blackened statue.

More amazing than that form was the silhouette that lay upon the floor. Stretching across the thick carpet lay an elongated splotch of blackness that terminated in a hawk-nosed silhouette. Like a sinister shape from another sphere, that streak of darkness betokened a presence that seemed more than human.

As Cranston turned from the window, the silhouette vanished. The shadowy stretch shortened as Cranston approached the wall. A long white hand pressed the switch. The major portion of the room was plunged into darkness; only one corner remained illuminated. There, a small, shaded incandescent cast a bright glow upon a writing desk.

Cranston, as he approached that spot, was almost invisible in the gloom. His hands, as they stretched forward beneath the light, crept into view with a curious action that made them seem like detached creatures of life. White hands, long-fingered, they showed a sensitive touch combined with latent strength. In appearance, the hands were identical; but one bore an emblem which marked it from the other.

A jewel of radiant hue—that was the token which shone from the left hand. A gem that flashed uncanny light reflected the illumination of the lamp. Sparks seemed to leap upward, while the weird stone glimmered with the colors of a living ember. That gem was the identifying mark of the personage who wore it—for it was unique in all the world.

The jewel was The Shadow's girasol!

Harry Vincent had been correct in his belief that the plane above the isle of doubt had been piloted by The Shadow. The master of mystery had arrived upon the Mississippi. He had passed the place of his quest. Here, in St. Louis, he had revealed himself in the adopted identity of Lamont Cranston, wealthy visitor from New York.

When The Shadow's hands appeared alone beneath the glare of lamplight, they invariably had a purpose in such action. Not long after they had arrived in view, they produced the flat, gray-covered package which The

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Shadow had received from the clerk at the desk in the lobby.

The fingers broke the seal. A stack of photographic prints appeared. Quickly, easily, the hands ran through the set. These pictures were aerial views, obtained by still photography. All depicted portions of the Mississippi River.

Among them were pictures which had been clicked above the island which lay near Weston Levis' plantation. These were the photographs that The Shadow desired. The others were nothing more than extras.

THE isle of doubt as seen from the air, was quite different from the river view. An elongated oval, it showed completely in the photographs. The thick trees were rounded bumps that seemed like tiny bushes. Amid them, unprotected by branches, was the roof of the deserted house.

Every contour of the island, each tiny cove and jutting cliff, now showed plainly as The Shadow viewed the pictures. Features unnoticed from the ground were plain in the snapshots which had been taken from a higher altitude.

Beside the island, the wreck of the River Queen appeared as a trifling toy, its flat decks whitish, its smokestacks tiny circles of black. The muddy river bed which held the derelict made a queerly shaped smudge on all sides of the boat.

The single photograph on which The Shadow concentrated was one which clearly demonstrated the remarkable results obtainable through aerial surveying. It showed the reason why the vast current of the powerful Mississippi had chosen the longer course around the little island instead of forcing its way through the narrower but more direct channel.

The jutting crags—gray, misshapen outlines in the photograph—that marked the upper end of the island, were actually the continuation of hidden reefs which showed beneath the surface of the water. Projecting from the head of the isle toward the mainland, this streak of rock formed a natural jetty that diverted the river current.

The submerged rocks also accounted for the formation of the marshy land that had embedded the wreck of the River Queen. Projections of underwater rock extended at intervals from the lee shore of the isle; these served as gatherers of silt. The course of years had brought about the marshy accumulation that now appeared as an extension near the lower end of the island.

The whole contour of the swamp exhibited a spotty irregularity. This sector was by no means a complete morass; it consisted only of clumpy splotches of quagmire that appeared above the surface of the water. The remainder of the bog was submerged—reeds, growing from muck, projected above the water.

Thus the swamp was not a portion of the island; instead, it was a district which might be easily navigated by a flat-bottomed rowboat or light skiff, provided the craft was kept clear of the frequent mud banks.

The River Queen itself had served as an accumulator of mud. On the side of the ship toward the isle, heavy marsh was evident upon the photograph. The swamp, however, faded away on the outer side of the ship. Approach to the River Queen would not prove difficult from that side, although the boat appeared to be in the thick of a troublesome bog.

Why had the old steamboat aided in the gathering of silt? The answer—one which might have puzzled a river navigator—was plain in the photograph. The bow of the old vessel was wedged against a rib of rock that came like a reef from the island. Once the River Queen had been stranded, a natural stoppage had been formed by the angle of boat and rock.

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Yet that did not explain the steamship's permanent position. Current, forcing its way into the point where bow of boat met rock would naturally have caused the River Queen to swing away. The eyes of The Shadow were keen as they studied the telltale photograph. The long index finger of the white right hand traced its way along the picture.

SLENDER lines in the bog beside the River Queen gave the answer. That point of rock was not the only element in the wedging of the derelict. The tilt of the old boat indicated more. The story of the years was evident. The River Queen, when she had run this cut-off, decades ago, had encountered a mass of jagged rocks which the pilot had failed to observe off the shore of the island.

The boat had been abandoned. The river, lowering, had evidently failed to rise to that former flood height. The morass had formed, and now the River Queen would lie at permanent anchor until its timbers rotted. Solid rocks were mud covered; only the mechanical eye of the camera, accurate from the height of many feet, had managed to record the presence of the trouble-making reefs which had caused disaster to the old steamboat.

The situation of the River Queen established, The Shadow studied the island itself. Except where the flat roof of the house and the bald spaces of rocks were visible, the isle showed only as a mass of trees. There was no clearing, no spot that might serve as a special location.

Winging above the isle of doubt, The Shadow had used a camera to obtain a preliminary survey. The photographs had brought definite facts concerning the surroundings. The island, itself, would have to be investigated on foot in order to gain further results.

The hands of The Shadow replaced the photographs in the packet. The hands moved away. The room lights came on, and Lamont Cranston, tall and inflexible of expression, again stood in view.

Two bags lay in a corner of the room. With them was a large dress-suit case and a long, cylindrical canvas bag that might have been a container for a large roll of blankets. Cranston placed the smallest bag upon the long roll.

Going to the telephone, Cranston called the number of a St. Louis garage. He gave his name, and asked if the car that he had ordered was in readiness. Receiving an affirmative reply, he gave instructions to bring it to the hotel.

He then made a call to the desk—a summons for a porter. The man arrived a few minutes later. When he heard Cranston's response follow his knock, the porter entered to find the guest standing beside the window, quietly smoking a cigarette.

“The long canvas bag,” remarked Cranston, in his even monotone. “Also the small bag that is with it. Take them to the street. Wait for me there.”

“How about them other bags?”

“I am not taking them. I am still retaining this room.”

When Lamont Cranston appeared upon the sidewalk in front of the hotel, he found the porter standing beside a sedan that had come from the garage. A man approached from the car, and inquired if this was Mr. Cranston.

“All right, sir,” said the man, after receiving an affirmative reply. “You'll find the machine in great shape. Just sign this receipt—never mind taking me back to the garage. It's only a couple of blocks.”

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The porter stowed the long bag and the little grip in the back seat of the sedan, while Cranston was signing for the car. He had paid in advance when he had ordered this vehicle. The detail completed, Lamont Cranston tipped the porter, stepped into the car and drove away.

HALF an hour later, the sedan was speeding along an open road that paralleled the bank of the Mississippi. Past the suburban area of St. Louis, Lamont Cranston was traveling by land, back along the route which he had traversed by air. Since his arrival in St. Louis, this stranger had obtained developments of aerial photographs. His plane was at the airport, stowed in a hangar, awaiting his return. He was driving away in a chartered automobile, but the room at the hotel was still reserved by Lamont Cranston. Although Lamont Cranston had established himself as an identity in St. Louis, his departure was more than the simple absence of a man who had come and gone. Later, Lamont Cranston would return to his hotel. The length of his absence would depend entirely upon circumstances.

But with his departure, Lamont Cranston had also ended his identity for the time. The driver of the swift sedan that was swinging along beside the Mississippi was no longer a man who called himself Lamont Cranston.

Instead, that car was piloted by a mysterious being—a personage who was completely shrouded by the interior darkness of the front seat. Invisible hands clutched the wheel; those hands were incased in thin black gloves.

A pair of sharp eyes burned as they watched the turning road ahead. Those eyes alone marked the presence of the living being who was driving forth to a mysterious quest. The Shadow had dropped his assumed identity. His cloak upon his shoulders, his slouch hat upon his head—these garments had come from the little bag which the porter had brought downstairs.

The garb of The Shadow! Like a mantle of darkness, those black accouterments had transformed this personage into a mystic creature of the night. The Shadow, master of deduction, was riding onward to the spot where adventure lured.

Summoned by his agent's messages, assured that lurking crime was soon to break, The Shadow had winged westward from New York, and on his way had not only made certain observations, but had recorded the scene upon the Mississippi.

Viewing the island itself, studying the photographs which he had taken, The Shadow had seen the situation which he was now to face. Simply and effectively, he had gained information which others had failed to obtain.

Three crooks on the isle of doubt; Harvey Wendell, investigating from the old plantation; Harry Vincent on watch, awaiting the arrival of The Shadow. These were the elements of the situation which The Shadow was prepared to meet.

With it all, The Shadow possessed a strange, unanticipated advantage. From the air, The Shadow had seen. The results of his findings would soon be put to the test.

For when The Shadow sees, The Shadow knows!

CHAPTER XI. BEFORE DAWN

THE big sedan came to a stop. A foggy drizzle had arisen; its heaviness above the road indicated the proximity of the Mississippi. Yet the mist-blanketed headlights showed a dirt road that led from the main highway toward the direction of the river.

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A soft laugh came from unseen lips. This was evidently a spot for which The Shadow had been watching. The driver of the sedan twisted the wheel, and the big car moved slowly along the dirt road.

The course of the byway twisted slightly to the left. It ran through thick woods until it came to a small, stump-filled clearing. On the right, visible between the trees; was a thick mass of fog—a phenomenon which indicated the Mississippi.

Picking a spot between trees on the land side of the clearing, The Shadow drove his car directly into the forest. The wheels rose as they slowly passed over large stones; the radiator and fenders plowed through bushes that snapped back like whipcords. The car came to a stop, completely hidden among the thick foliage. The door opened. Something jostled as an object was removed from the back seat.

The clearing was a spot of Stygian blackness when an invisible figure picked its way between the stumps. Fog and night were no detriments to The Shadow. The master's goal was the brink of the river. He gained it and deposited a large, soft burden upon the sloping bank.

This place which The Shadow had chosen was a spot which had been partly cleared to serve as a landing, then had been abandoned. It had shown on the aerial photograph. It could not be seen from the river, yet it was only a quarter mile below the blackened island which was now invisible in the thick fog.

A tiny flashlight glimmered. The eyes of The Shadow gazed upon the long canvas roll. This was the object that The Shadow had carried from the sedan. Black-gloved hands set to work in the darkness. At intervals, the light shone as a guide to the next step.

These intermittent flickers revealed The Shadows actions. The end of the bag came open. Out from it slid a round-shaped object that appeared to be a rubber mat with an outer edge that resembled nothing more than a flattened inner tube.

A small compressed-air tank came into momentary view. The light went out, and a hissing sound marked the passage of air into a receiving valve. When the flashlight's rays reappeared, the circled margin of the rubber mat had become a tightly inflated wall. The light gleamed upon the canvas bag; the tank slid out of sight, and a blackened hand produced a stubby, wide-bladed paddle.

The glare showed toward the river bank. The air-walled contrivance slipped into the stream. Out went the light, as a form stepped into the peculiar craft. The paddle swished in the water. A slight rippling sound continued.

Enshrouded by fog and darkness, The Shadow was venturing forth upon the broad Mississippi, traveling in a collapsible rubber boat which he had inflated for this purpose.

THE river, here, was placid. The blanketing mist seemed to have a lulling effect, as The Shadow propelled his special boat upstream. The current was almost negligible, for the boat was nearing the protecting shelter of the isle of doubt.

Away from the shore, the little craft was as lost as if it had been in the center of a wide sea. Not a semblance of a river bank was visible. There were no marks by which The Shadow could guide his course; yet the steady strokes kept on, as though controlled by well-designed purpose.

Stroke after stroke, The Shadow had paddled far enough to gain the lower end of the island; still, there was no sign of bog and reeds.

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There could be but one answer. The Shadow had kept an uncannily accurate course close to the main bank. He was wide of the splotchy marsh which projected from the isle.

The circular boat began to spin. It swung to the right. Paddle strokes were inaudible. The blade never left the water; its return motion was an edgeways action. The boat seemed to glide of its own volition, making its uncanny way through the water.

Then came scraping sounds; the scratching of reeds after a cross-river course. The boat was in shallow water, its flat bottom skimming the oozing mud beneath.

Like a giant specter of darkness, a huge bulk loomed in the fog. The tiny boat came to a whirling stop; a sure hand caught a broken timber. The Shadow, picking his way with incredible precision, had reached the wreck of the River Queen!

Shortly afterward, the tiny rays of the flashlight manifested themselves. The glow was no larger than a silver dollar. The guarded gleam was pointed downward. It showed upon the rotting deck of the derelict. Within a hundred yards of the isle of doubt, The Shadow was beginning a tour of exploration.

Why had he chosen the boat instead of the island? Did The Shadow intend to use this derelict as his headquarters, before he looked in upon the crooks who were stationed on the isle of doubt? Or was there some secret purpose in The Shadow's visit here?

Only The Shadow knew the answer.

The glimmer of the flashlight—ever guarded—came at infrequent intervals. It moved with the unexpected changes of a firefly's course, twinkling here, then there, as its owner made his progress along the decks.

At last the light vanished. When it shone again, the rays were less guarded. The Shadow had entered the interior of the ship.

The gleams of the flashlight showed deserted cabins, they revealed the interior of a large, empty hold. They came at last to a room that was filled with large contrivances of rusted metal—the boiler room of the River Queen.

The flashlight swept in all directions. The lower floor of the boiler room showed murky water. The list of the old ship was apparent. Standing upon a flat platform at the lower side, The Shadow scanned the inner wall of the ship. The light fell upon a battered doorway that denoted an exit to the submerged lower deck of the River Queen.

This represented the center point of the old steamboat—the spot where the derelict was most firmly implanted, according to the photograph that The Shadow had so carefully studied. The water that had flooded the lower portion of the boiler room had not trickled through this route, although the old door was by no means watertight. The leakage had come from broken timbers beneath.

The narrow deck beyond that door was unquestionably buried in the mud that had formed about the lower side of the old ship. There was a similar opening on the other side of the boiler room; following the raised floor, The Shadow reached that point, and opened a broken barrier. The flashlight glimmered through the heavy fog; the rays showed mucky, reed-filled water several feet below.

THIS was an outlet from the boiler room. Did the door on the lower side still afford a means of exit? To learn that seemed to be The Shadow's purpose.

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The flashlight shone at short intervals as the weird investigator retraced his steps. The light went out; wood creaked as the door gave way beneath The Shadow's strong pressure. The flashlight glimmered, clicked off, and a soft laugh whispered through the boiler room. After that, deep silence reigned.

The ship seemed deserted. Long minutes passed; at last, a sign of The Shadow's presence was once more manifested. Creaking boards, the flicker of the flashlight; then a stealthy form ascended from the boiler room. The Shadow picked his way through darkness, and reached the spot where he had moored his boat to the side of the mud-bound ship.

Once more, The Shadow was on the surface of the Mississippi. The little rubber boat slid away from the side of the River Queen. For a hundred yards, the course was directly toward the mainland; then, in the clear water of the cut-off, the boat spun and resumed an upstream progress. It passed the head of the island.

There, The Shadow paused. His keen ears caught a faint sound. While the little boat drifted downstream, the guarded noise came closer. The rubber boat was no more than a floating circle upon the surface of the broad river; the form of The Shadow was so motionless that it seemed like a portion of the tiny craft.

The noise that The Shadow had heard was the creaking of a pair of oarlocks. A splashing followed; then a rowboat passed within ten feet of the invisible craft in which The Shadow floated. The man at the oars was breathing heavily. His boat passed on, headed upstream. The Shadow made no motion. His drift continued, after the rower's noise had ceased far above.

The rubber boat floated into the shelter of the rugged rocks that marked the head of the island. Here, after gripping a branch that projected from the shore, The Shadow disembarked. Through a carpeting of rain-soaked grass, he glided, invisible, toward the center of the island.

With amazing ability to find his way through darkness, The Shadow reached the abandoned house. He arrived at the front door of the building, softly crossed the threshold and caught the gleam of a light from a rear room on the ground floor. There were no doors in the building; those had evidently been removed. From the darkness of a side room, The Shadow gained an angled view into the kitchen. The oil lamp was visible upon the bench, its light showing the rest of the room.

THE three crooks were awake. Zach Telvin was standing by the wall; Possum Quill and Lefty Hotz were half lying upon mattresses. The Shadow, completely obscured by darkness, caught the words that Zach was uttering.

"I'm getting leery of this place," declared the convict. "I'm ready to admit that maybe you're right, Possum. I heard somebody plowing around out back—I'm sure of it. That's why I took a look out there."

"Any footprints?" questioned Possum.

"No," returned Zach. "The grass is packed, and there's no mud. But I followed over to the shore, and I thought I heard a noise like a guy rowing along the river."

"Maybe some hick was paddlin' home," put in Lefty.

"This late?" queried Possum. "In all that fog? Guess again, Lefty. Not a chance. Well, Zach, you brought us here. I was leery from the start. What do you want to do now? Scram?"

"Not me," retorted Zach. "I say get busy—that's all. Maybe somebody's spying on us—maybe he's after the same swag we want. The best bet is to get him when he shows up again—that's all."

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“You heard the boat rowing up the river,” remarked Possum. “If the fellow in it had been here, he was going away when you heard him. Remember the time the motor boat went by at night? I figured it was bound to the old plantation on this side of the landin'. Maybe the same fellow was in that boat.”

The crooks pondered. Lefty Hotz was the first to make a suggestion—one that was promptly rejected.

“Let's lay for the guy,” growled the big gangster. “Let him come ashore again—then gang him.”

“Nothing doing,” declared Possum. “We want to know who he is, first. There's no reason why we shouldn't be on this island.”

“There's good reason why I shouldn't be anywhere,” interposed Zach. “I'm not far from where I made the jail break. Don't forget that, Possum.”

“I'm not forgetting it,” said Possum. “It means you've got to lay low, that's all. It also puts the kibosh on Lefty's idea of starting trouble before we know what we're about. Say”—Possum paused to look at Zach—“you don't think that this fellow in the rowboat could have been prowling around that old wreck, do you?”

“No,” returned Zach. “I figured he slid away from the island here. That boat's a tough place to get to, anyway. Remember the trouble we had when we went out there just when it was getting dark? Wading through that swamp—say, if we hadn't used those boards we took with us, we'd have been in a nice mess.”

“Don't forget the snakes,” growled Lefty. “Those what-you-call-'ems —”

“Water moccasins,” remarked Zach. “They're bad. Lucky one of us didn't get bit.”

“I'm still figuring on the boat,” declared Possum. “It wouldn't be so hard to get to the wreck from the other side. We've still got that skiff that we hid in the woods. We could get out to the old steamer by rowing over to the mainland, and coming in to it.”

“What for?” queried Zach. “The guy didn't go there—”

“Maybe not,” interposed Possum, “but the chances are he will, if we play the game right. To-morrow night, we'll take to the woods.”

“Then what?”

“The guy will come here, and he'll find us gone. He'll figure we're still somewhere on the island. He'll be likely to come the night after that—or maybe in the daytime.”

“Then where'll we be?”

“On the steamboat. We'll be the ones to watch the island. Turn the tables on the smart gazabo.”

“Suppose he heads for the boat—”

“Great. We'll be ready for him there. That's just the spot I'd like to get him.”

POSSUM'S plan was a vague one; nevertheless, it offered real possibilities. The crooks knew that they were being watched; it was wise to take some method of retaliation.

THE ISLE OF DOUBT

Had there been a serious objector, Possum's plan might have been questioned, but circumstances made both his companions agree to follow his leadership.

Lefty Hotz was Possum's henchman. The big gangster had always followed the guidance of the smart crook. Zach Telvin, alarmed because of his status as a convicted criminal, was ready to fall in line with any scheme that might make some trouble for the unknown visitor.

“Unless that guy is just some hick who wants to stick his nose into trouble,” declared Possum Quill, “you can bet that he is another smooth worker who was close to Birch Bizzup. I don't mind a guy like that being around. It only proves that you've given us a real tip about this place, Zach. But we're not making friends with anybody.

“We'll get him before he has a chance to get us. If he's smart enough to uncover the goods we're after, we'll grab him before he can scam with the coin. That's our ticket. Lay low on the island to-morrow night. You can keep out of sight, Zach—I'll watch this house.

“Then, if the guy makes a trip to look through the woods, he won't find us the next day or night—whichever time he comes. We'll be on the old steamboat, high and dry. We'll play ring around the rosy with this smart egg until we get him where we want him.”

Possum Quill arose from the floor. He strolled over to the bench, made a motion as though to pick up the lantern and changed his mind. He thrust his hands in his pockets, and brought out a revolver in his right, a flashlight in his left.

“I'm going to take a look,” he growled, with sudden determination. “See if I find anything you missed, Zach.”

Swift strides took Possum toward the open doorway. The flashlight gleamed in the crook's hand. It blazed a path of light into the next room, but it did not reveal The Shadow. Timing his actions with those of the crook, the phantom had glided away toward the front of the house.

Possum turned the corner. Again, his light gleamed toward the spot where The Shadow had been. The illumination struck the front doorway. This time, The Shadow was in its path. The black-garbed stranger had stepped from the house; he was standing against a mass of foliage.

Possum Quill started and uttered a low exclamation. He saw the outline of a vague shape; he caught the sparkle of two eyes that were upon him. As Possum thrust the flashlight forward and swung his gun upward, the waver of the illumination produced a strange result.

The figure of The Shadow melted away. Dropping below the swath of light, the tall figure dwindled to pygmy shape.

“What's the matter, Possum?”

The call came from Zach Telvin, in the kitchen. Possum Quill did not heed it. Too late to fire, he leaped to the door of the house. Foolishly, he made himself a perfect target for a concealed enemy.

There was no shot, however, from the blackness.

POSSUM was swinging his light back and forth, covering bushes and grass-grown paths when Zach arrived. Possum gave a growling laugh when he again heard Zach questioning about the trouble. Lefty, too, had arrived.

THE ISLE OF DOUBT

“Fooled myself,” said Possum. “That’s all. These trees and bushes—with the rain on them. Thought I saw a guy looking at me from outside. He couldn’t have got away—I’d have seen him and heard him. Just the way the light hit the trees—that’s all.”

The crook prowled about the vicinity of the cottage, with Zach Telvin and Lefty Hotz at his heels. There was no sign of a living person. The men went back into the old house. After they had gone, a stealthy figure emerged from the shelter of a large tree.

The Shadow had let the crooks alone. Until he knew what cross-purposes were at work, he preferred to allow them to continue on their failing quest. The Shadow had other investigations to make—other plans to follow. He knew what the crooks intended to do. He could deal with them later.

Shortly afterward, the strange round boat of rubber pushed away from the isle of doubt. Its course was again against the current of the river. When it came to shore in the lifting fog, it was beside the little dock of Weston Levis' plantation.

A flat-bottomed rowboat was drawn up on shore. The Shadow eyed the craft, with the guarded circle of his flashlight. The boat was under the shelter of a tree; the lower portion of its side showed that it had but recently been removed from the water.

Some one from this plantation had been down the river. It was not Harry Vincent—for The Shadow's agent had been instructed not to visit the island. The Shadow, now, was finding evidence of the cross-purposes that existed in the search for hidden wealth. He was on the trail of Harvey Wendell.

The Shadow's laugh was a low whisper as the tall being moved through the clearing and melted into nothingness before the sheltering wall of the old plantation house.

When the fog had nearly cleared, an hour later; when the first streaks of early-morning light were forcing their way over the eastern horizon, there was no sign of the black-clad stranger who had visited the plantation.

The rubber boat was gone. The river was a stretch of blankness, from the dock at the plantation, over the broad expanse of water, to the isle of doubt and the time-beaten wreck of the River Queen.

Dawn had arrived. The Shadow's work was done. His plans had been completed. He had returned to the secret spot where he had left the parked sedan.

CHAPTER XII. THE SHADOW'S MESSAGE

WHEN Harry Vincent awoke at eight o'clock, the first object that he noticed was an envelope which lay upon the chair beside his bed. It was not strange that Harry should have looked at that spot. He had laid an envelope there the night before.

But Harry had placed his envelope face up; this envelope, apparently the same one, was face down. A very simple phenomenon, but in The Shadow's service, such occurrences often had important meanings.

The envelope which Harry had placed upon the chair had contained his complete, coded report to The Shadow. Always, when The Shadow was to receive a report in person, his agents left their envelopes in conspicuous places.

THE ISLE OF DOUBT

This envelope, apparently, had been touched, but not opened. That was sufficient cause for Harry to open it. He did so, and immediately learned that this was a different envelope from the one that he had placed upon the chair.

The Shadow had been here. Weirdly, the master of the night had entered the house unseen and unheard. He had taken Harry Vincent's report. In its place he had left an envelope which contained definite instructions. Harry read the coded lines of The Shadow's message.

The writing faded as soon as Harry had completed his perusal. The Shadow's instructions were simple—as simple as the procedure of putting the new envelope upside down so that Harry would immediately notice it.

The Shadow's ways—The Shadow's orders—both were invariably designed with full knowledge of his agent's abilities and limitations. As surely as had Harry noticed that envelope, so surely could he follow the instructions which he had gained.

To-night, Harry learned, he was to bring the motor boat to the wreck of the River Queen. The old steamship, so The Shadow informed him, was quite accessible from the shore side, even with the motor boat, if approached directly amidships.

By making another of his trips down the river, Harry could return after dark and visit the steamboat by stealth, as he had previously visited the isle of doubt.

That part was up to Harry; and it gave the young man another idea—to go up the river, this time to come back just after dark, and drift by the plantation until he reached the neighborhood of the derelict.

Harry's duty on the old boat was tersely specified in The Shadow's message. The agent was to descend the companionway and follow the passage to the boiler room of the old vessel.

Having located that spot, he was to keep careful watch to make sure that no one approached. The motor boat was to be in readiness below the bow of the stranded River Queen.

Two factors impressed Harry. One, that there was a slight possibility of visitors aboard the River Queen; two, that The Shadow, himself, might have need of the craft that Harry would have available: namely, the motor boat.

Did The Shadow need Harry as a guard? Did he need him to aid in some punitive expedition?

Both situations were possible; but they were unusual. Generally, The Shadow worked alone. Harry realized that some strange business might be afoot to-night, some business that would do much to clear up this mystery.

Whom did The Shadow expect to interfere? The crooks had not, to Harry's knowledge, left the island. Harvey Wendell, whom Harry had cause to regard as an evil factor as potent as the lurkers on the isle, was spying on Zach Telvin and his friends. There was no reason, Harry believed, to suspect that Wendell would have a purpose to board the old derelict.

Wendell had gone out again last night, however. Harry had heard the secretary sneak from the house. The fog had prevented Harry from watching where Wendell went, but Harry was sure that the man had taken to the river. Had The Shadow encountered Wendell?

THE ISLE OF DOUBT

Puzzling cross-purposes! Yet Harry felt sure that they would soon be explained. Events had a way of reaching a quick culmination when The Shadow arrived in the field. As he went downstairs to breakfast, Harry felt a strong sense of security. He was ready for any danger that might lie ahead.

Weston Levis breakfasted with Harry. Wendell did not come downstairs until afterward. It was evident that the man had overslept. The morning passed. Wendell went out before lunch and did not return.

During the placid noonday meal, Harry began to discuss his own affairs with Weston Levis. He remarked that he would like to visit some spots above Saunders Landing, while awaiting further news from New York. During the conversation, Harry learned that there was another landing six miles up the river, on the opposite side.

“I might go up there and look around,” Harry suggested. “That is, if the motor boat is available.”

“It is available,” smiled old Levis.

“Thanks,” said Harry. “I’ll wait until later, though. It’s pretty hot in that open boat. A clear day—a heavy sun—I think if I start after three o’clock, I would be acting wisely. I can have my dinner at the upper landing—I suppose there is an eating place there.”

“There is,” remarked Levis.

AS the afternoon progressed, there was no sign of Harvey Wendell. Harry sat on the veranda. Levis strolled about the plantation. On two occasions the old man stopped by the porch to inquire if Wendell had returned. Harry gave a negative reply each time.

While Levis was away on another stroll, Hadley arrived in the old truck.

The overseer came up on the porch, filled his pipe, and began to chat. Harry had become good friends with Hadley. He liked the man, and it was good policy to maintain a cordial relationship with him.

“Seen Wendell?” questioned Hadley, while he puffed at his pipe.

“No,” returned Harry. “Not since breakfast.”

“Humph,” grunted Hadley. “What does that fellow do with all his time? He acts like he was busy—but I notice that he takes plenty long when he goes to Knoxport.”

Harry was watching Hadley as he saw the overseer staring toward the river.

He noticed that Hadley’s lips were moving, and he detected that the man was silently muttering vague thoughts concerning the sallow-faced secretary.

It was obvious that Hadley did not like Wendell. But for the fact that he was now under definite instructions from The Shadow, Harry would have begun to draw out opinions. He fancied that Hadley might have something definite to say regarding Harvey Wendell.

Weston Levis appeared upon the lawn. His first question was one which he had asked before. This time it was addressed to both Harry and Hadley. The old man wanted to know if Wendell had returned.

THE ISLE OF DOUBT

“Mr. Vincent says that he hasn't been here,” announced Hadley. “And what's more, I haven't seen him myself. By the way, Mr. Levis, I want to talk with you about these men we've hired. They're pretty slow on the job. Come over here and let me show you how they've been loafing on the shacks they're building.”

Hadley and Levis walked around the corner of the house. Harry, still seated on the veranda, sensed that Hadley had a particular purpose in speaking to Levis—a purpose other than the one that had been mentioned. Intuition told Harry that something was due to break.

Not long afterward, Levis reappeared. As the old man approached the veranda, Harry could detect a grave look on his face. Harry knew that questions were going to be asked. He prepared himself.

As an agent of The Shadow, Harry was left to his own judgment in matters of unexpected consequence. Harry had already proven his ability to use resourcefulness. He felt that he could exhibit it now.

“Vincent,” declared Levis seriously, as he seated himself upon the porch, “I want to talk to you. I want your frank answers to my questions. Tell me: have you any special motive other than the real-estate proposition for staying in this vicinity?”

“Only my instructions from New York,” answered Harry truthfully. “I am working for interests represented by Rutledge Mann, who specializes in investments. I have remained here because of Mr. Mann's telegraphed instructions.”

“I shall be frank with you,” returned Levis. “My secretary, Harvey Wendell, has expressed doubts to me regarding your purposes. Wendell is, perhaps, more observant than I. He is apt to be overly suspicious.”

Harry nodded his agreement.

“Wendell has been a rather odd sort of an employee,” continued Levis. “Hadley, on the contrary, has worked for me a good many years. He is a man in whom I impose the greatest confidence. Last night, Hadley tells me, some one left this house and returned later on. Hadley believed the man took a trip on the river. I am not questioning the purpose of that trip. I know only that either you or Wendell was the man who left the house. Your affairs are your own. Will you tell me this: were you the man who went out?”

“I was not,” responded Harry calmly.

Weston Levis looked squarely into Harry's eyes. The old man's gaze was stern, but kindly. Levis nodded slowly; then said:

“I believe you, Vincent. I also believe Hadley. Therefore, the man who left this house was Harvey Wendell.”

Harry said nothing; Levis resumed his talk in a serious manner.

“Understand, Vincent,” he said, “Wendell is in my employ. I want to know what he is doing. Hadley has been watching Wendell; and Hadley feels sure that it was Wendell who went out. In order to be fair, I first questioned you regarding your own actions. Now that I am convinced of the truthfulness of your reply, I may tell you that Hadley has suspected Wendell of making previous excursions of this type.

“I want to ask you something else. I do not ask you to be unfair to any one. My own suspicions are now well-grounded. Have you seen any evidence of Wendell being on the river at night?”

THE ISLE OF DOUBT

The question was a firm one. Harry was thoughtful. He realized that he must use good judgment. Harvey Wendell, Harry knew well, was interested in affairs upon the isle of doubt. There were crooks upon that isolated plot of land. Wendell was the cross-purpose in the situation.

Under less extenuating circumstances, Harry could have cried out his true thoughts—that Harvey Wendell, too, was a crook in search of ill-gotten spoils. But to reveal this to Weston Levis might interfere with the plans of The Shadow.

At the same time, Harry could see a subtle test in Levis' question. Harry had observed Harvey Wendell making secret trips from the house. Perhaps Levis or Hadley had seen Harry watching the secretary. To deny all knowledge of Wendell's actions, and thus to defend the man, might be the worst thing possible. It could promptly put Harry under suspicion of being Wendell's accomplice in some questionable enterprise.

IN his previous answers to the old man's questions, Harry had adhered to the truth, with careful reservations. A deliberate lie would now be disadvantageous. It would not only be difficult to put across; it might cause trouble with to-night's arrangements.

With Weston Levis a dupe of Harvey Wendell; with Hadley a faithful yeoman, who followed Levis' instructions, there was nothing to fear by playing fair with Levis. To maintain his own position as a respected guest, Harry knew that he would do best to deal in frank statements.

These thoughts were rapid in Harry's mind; but they brought a pause, during which Harry gazed soberly toward the river and its distant isle. Realizing that delay was forcing him to the decision already in his mind, Harry hesitated no longer.

“You have questioned me as a friend,” declared Harry, turning to Weston Levis. “Therefore, I must answer as a friend. I knew that Harvey Wendell left this house late last night. I heard him go out on a previous occasion. I must confess that I wondered regarding his purpose; I did not think it my province, however, to discuss the matter.”

“Have you actually seen Wendell on the river?”

“Yes. In the evening when I was returning from my trip down the river. I passed his rowboat just as I came into the dock. He said that he was out for an evening's row.”

“He did not mention it to me,” remarked Weston Levis thoughtfully. “Vincent, in talking with Hadley just now, I find that he thinks Wendell has been visiting that island a few miles below here. Can you think of any purpose that he might have in doing so?”

“Hardly,” said Harry. “I have noticed the island, and I can readily see why a person might like to make a curious visit there, but as a business proposition”—Harry smiled—“my own ideas of real-estate values involve the mainland only.”

“That is understood,” rejoined Levis. “I have just begun to believe, however, that Wendell may have had a special purpose in acquiring this piece of ground. Hadley has that idea; and it means that we must be on the watch.

“Vincent, I have begun to mistrust Wendell. I ask you, therefore, to return my hospitality by watching for any actions on Wendell's part—actions which might appear suspicious to you.

THE ISLE OF DOUBT

“I do not request you to spy upon my secretary. That is an unfair proposal to make to a guest. I simply want you to regard me as I regard you. We are friends. We can talk as friends. I fear”—the old man's face clouded—“that Wendell might actually be engaged in crime. He might have friends stationed on that island—or enemies. Hadley is watching Wendell; I shall do the same. But you, as a visitor, may uncover something that would be of added value.”

“I understand,” returned Harry. “I shall remember it, Mr. Levis.”

The old man chose to waive the subject from then on. Harry knew that nothing further would be said until occasion or circumstances called for it.

The young man noted, however, that the matter was still on Weston Levis' mind.

IT was mid-afternoon when Harvey Wendell appeared. The secretary arrived as if from nowhere, strolling across the lawn of the plantation. Weston Levis greeted him as cordially as usual, but expressed annoyance because the secretary had not been present to take dictation on some important letters.

As Levis turned to go into the house, with Wendell close beside him, he turned to Harry Vincent and made a remark concerning the trip which Harry contemplated.

“Take the motor boat whenever you desire,” said Levis. “Arrange to have dinner with us—if we proceed without you I shall have the servants keep some food for you. However, Wendell and I will be very busy until seven o'clock at least, so dinner will be late.”

Harry decided that he would depart at once. As he arose to go to the dock, he noted Wendell watching him with a sour expression. Harry Vincent smiled as he strolled away. Weston Levis was serving Harry—and himself—a good turn by keeping Harvey Wendell engaged until after sunset.

When darkness had fallen, Harry would be on the River Queen. Important affairs would be on their way to settlement before Harvey Wendell would have an opportunity to leave the plantation house.

The way was clear to go through with the instructions given by The Shadow!

CHAPTER XIII. A MAN IN THE DARK

CROOKS with cross-purposes. They were still in Harry Vincent's mind when darkness settled above the Mississippi River. At that particular hour, Harry was on his return journey from the spot up the river.

Harry had guided the motor boat to the right bank of the great stream. Saunders Landing was less than a mile ahead, but its wharf was hidden by a bend. Harry had chosen this course so that he could get as near to the landing as possible.

Near the shelter of the shore, Harry stopped the motor and let the boat drift.

The river was bathed in a dull afterglow, which would soon be replaced by darkness. The evening was cloudy; the starlight was faint. It was just the night that Harry wanted—when one could barely trace a course and at the same time be free from observation.

Harry's thoughts were of the river. The young man gave no heed to the shore. As his boat drifted along, Harry had no idea that eyes were watching him from the side road that ran along the river bank. Yet an observer was there—a man who Harry would never have believed was present.

THE ISLE OF DOUBT

This individual had been watching for the return of the motor boat. As he saw it begin to drift, he walked swiftly along the road, keeping ahead of the slowly moving craft. The road was a short cut. The man reached the deserted landing ahead of Harry. Dropping from the side of the pier, he stepped into a small flat-bottomed row-boat and propelled it out into the bosom of the great river.

Meanwhile, Harry Vincent was drifting to his quest. A slow-motion way to get to a field of action, but the best method under these circumstances. Harry handled the rudder of the motor boat and let the little vessel swing farther into the current. He was a quarter mile off shore when he slipped by Saunders Landing.

The darkness was thickening. Objects on the river were almost invisible. The isle of doubt loomed as a black patch; beside it, Harry thought he could distinguish the River Queen.

But Harry had no idea that there was an object of interest much closer by—a tiny rowboat that was drifting with the same current which he followed.

AS THE motor boat slid past the dock in front of the plantation, Harry could see the lights of the house. It was well after eight o'clock, and Harry felt sure that dinner was completed.

If The Shadow's plans required but a short time, Harry could soon return. If a longer period were consumed, an explanation would have to be given; but that would be after The Shadow's plans were consummated.

The great factor now was that Harry's boat was drifting freely down the river. Staring toward the gloom that shrouded the little dock, Harry watched and listened for any indication that might be unfriendly. He was particularly anxious to detect the sound of oarlocks, for it was possible that Harvey Wendell might have managed to slip away at this late hour.

No sound came, much to Harry's pleasure. Peering steadily through the night, it was possible to make out objects at close range. But Harry never looked directly astern. Hence he did not see the boat, drifting down the river in his wake.

Assured that Harvey Wendell must still be at the plantation, Harry concentrated on the space ahead. Caught in a side current that made toward the mainland side of the cut-off, the motor boat was moving at satisfactory speed. Almost before Harry realized it, the wreck of the River Queen was visible. Harry swung the tiller and let the motor boat drift toward the derelict.

The maneuver worked to perfection. The motor boat glided into an area of reeds that marked the slope up to the swamp.

Harry was surprised to note that the boat drifted easily through the stalks until it was quite close to the River Queen. Harry knew from The Shadow's instructions that this fringe of the swamp must be navigable for a boat of little draft, but he had expected more trouble than he actually encountered. He did not have to use an oar to wedge the boat through the muck until he was actually abreast the derelict.

Harry was now completely concealed from the island; still he was cautious about making noise. He brought the motor boat beside the wrecked ship, moored it fast to a broken timber, and raised himself to a lower deck. Standing there, Harry looked back to the tiny lights of the plantation.

There, he fancied, Weston Levis was busy with Harvey Wendell. In all probability, Hadley was keeping tabs on the suspected secretary. Whatever might occur, Harry felt sure that he need expect no interference from Harvey Wendell.

THE ISLE OF DOUBT

Carefully, Harry made his way below decks. Once there, he intended to be on guard. The placid river remained unrippled. The edge of the swamp was as serene as ever. No sign of human presence was in evidence for a short while.

Then, from the edge of the swamp, another boat drifted silently toward the derelict. It was the flat-bottomed rowboat which had kept up the drifting pursuit of the motor boat.

The little craft moved through the reeds along the course which Harry had followed. Its occupant used a single oar with excellent caution. The rowboat did not even scratch against the side of the River Queen as it came in amidships.

Harry, in accordance with The Shadow's instructions, had moored the motor boat near the bow of the derelict. The newcomer, however, was directly at the center, where the broken entrance to the boiler room could be reached from the upper side of the listed steam-boat.

THE man who had arrived seemed familiar with the place where he had stopped. Protected beneath the side of the derelict, he lighted a match and held the flame close to the rotting timbers, so that it revealed a mark upon the side of the old steamboat. The man had found the spot he wanted.

More surprising, however, than the action of this follower was the fact which the flickering match betrayed. As the man bent forward close to the flame, his face was momentarily revealed.

It was the sallow countenance of Harvey Wendell!

By some ruse, Weston Levis' secretary had managed to leave the plantation house. He had gone up the river to watch for Harry Vincent's return. He had gained a rowboat stationed at the landing. He had followed the motor boat's drift, and had landed here. He intended to use the accessible entrance to the boiler room to board the River Queen!

Harry Vincent had never dreamed that Harvey Wendell could have been upon his trail. The young man's faith in Weston Levis had been misplaced. Wendell was free—in action, and prepared to creep in unsuspected. Harry Vincent was due for a surprise—one which was delayed only because Harvey Wendell lingered before making his cautious advance.

Not only was Harry Vincent due for a surprise; Harvey Wendell was also destined to cause a change in The Shadow's plans. Three crooks upon the isle of doubt knew nothing of events aboard the River Queen, but Harvey Wendell, the man who had a definite purpose of his own, was on the job.

Strange surprises were in the making when Harvey Wendell arose and raised his hands to draw his body up the side of the abandoned steamboat. Harry Vincent had arrived; Harvey Wendell had followed. Before this fateful night would end, a culmination of startling events would reach an amazing climax.

Cross-purposes were at work amid the affairs of men who sought for stolen wealth; and within the maze of circumstances, the hidden presence of The Shadow, man of the night, was fated to play its part!

CHAPTER XIV. TRAPPED!

HARRY VINCENT had reached the boiler room of the derelict. Holding a flashlight low, so its rays were focused only on his surroundings, he had made a quick survey of the place. Rusted machinery set in a water-logged pit, around that, a raised ledge which afforded plenty of foot room. These were the principal features of the boiler room.

THE ISLE OF DOUBT

Harry had come through an entrance at the front. There was a similar passage at the rear. Then there were side doors—both closed with old wooden barriers. Harry's light went out. The Shadow's agent stationed himself on the lower side of the ship.

Harry had something to think about. From the moment that he had entered this portion of the derelict, he had sensed a presence which he could not see. His light had thrown long, grotesque streaks of shaded blackness. In that guarded illumination, Harry had fancied that he had seen a tall, mysterious shape.

Was The Shadow here?

There were reasons to believe so. Harry could not relieve himself of an impression of awe—a feeling which he had previously experienced when in the presence of The Shadow. Friends or enemies—so long as they were ordinary beings—were not difficult for Harry to detect. The Shadow's agent had acquired considerable skill as an investigator. But when The Shadow was present, the only indication was that weird feeling that invisible eyes were watching; that a powerful, unseen hand was close by.

Minutes drifted. It was quiet in the boiler room. Harry no longer felt that uncanny sensation that betokened The Shadow's presence. Intuitively, Harry came to a solution.

The Shadow had been on this boat, awaiting Harry's arrival! Now that his agent was here, The Shadow had departed on some other errand!

That, surely, must be the answer. Eventually, The Shadow would return—until then, it was Harry's duty to watch.

Had The Shadow gone to the island? That was plausible. Harry half imagined the master of the night stalking forth to spy upon the house where three crooks were stationed. Thinking of The Shadow as a personage brought recollections of the amazing episodes in which Harry had seen The Shadow figure.

Long ago, Harry Vincent had been on the brink of suicide. A mysterious figure from the night—a being shrouded in fog and blackness—had drawn him back. A commanding voice had ordered Harry to obey the mandates of The Shadow. Harry had undertaken that trust. He had always followed his duty.

Danger—adventure—thrills—all had been Harry Vincent's lot. He had been captured by insidious enemies; he had been wounded on occasions; he had been doomed to die by monsters of crime. Always, The Shadow had arrived to rescue him.

The Shadow never failed; in that conviction, Harry held no reservations. Yet The Shadow relied upon his agents to do their duty. When they failed, difficult situations arose, and such occurrences brought trouble to The Shadow's plans.

HARRY VINCENT did not expect trouble to—night. He was sure that he had come unobserved to the River Queen. He reasoned that the crooks on the island would not make another trip to the derelict; he decided that Harvey Wendell could not possibly have left the plantation at this early hour.

Hence, Harry accepted his present duty as a matter of routine, and his sense of vigilance returned only when he thought that he heard a creaking sound from the opposite side of the boiler room.

Softly, Harry arose and crept along the catwalk, in order to look beyond the old machinery. All was blackness on the other side. Without light, it was impossible to tell whether or not some one had slid aside the old door that led to the outer deck.

THE ISLE OF DOUBT

Harry did not care to risk his flashlight. He remained vigilant, ready to go into action at a moment's notice.

No further sound came from the direction of the old door. Harry realized that a stealthy prowler could have entered by that route, but it would have been an artful piece of business for any one to have done so.

Nevertheless, the belief that a person had come in from the side door still persisted in Harry's mind. Close by the front companionway, Harry decided that if an enemy had entered, he would probably have taken the rear route around the machinery. With this sudden thought, Harry crept back along the lower side of the catwalk. He stopped—to listen.

Some one was in the darkness straight ahead! Harry was sure of it now. He knew that it could not be The Shadow, lurking there beside the boilers. It must be an unknown foe; if so, the man might have realized Harry's presence.

Harry crouched and waited. He could play at a slow game as well as the other man. When the time for action came, Harry would be ready—so he thought. Therein was Harry's mistake—an error that was to shape events in a most unexpected manner.

A click sounded in the darkness. Simultaneously, the glare of a bull's-eye lantern flooded the boiler room.

Harry Vincent, helpless in the light, could see nothing but the dazzling orb of the lantern, less than a dozen feet in front of him!

A GROWLING voice issued a command. Harry, trapped flat-footed, dropped his gun. He knew that he was covered. An enemy had discovered him; had outwitted him. Harry had blundered directly into the snare!

The lantern swung. The enemy hung it alongside of the boiler, so that it provided sweeping illumination in this room. Then the foeman stepped into the light.

Harry saw the glitter of a big revolver. He looked above, and found himself staring into the sallow face of his captor—Harvey Wendell!

There was malice in the secretary's features. Wendell's suspicious-looking countenance wore a look of keen triumph. Harry, bewildered, could not understand how the man had arrived here at this crucial moment.

“Nabbed you, eh?” growled Wendell. “Thought you were too smart for me. Well, you weren't! What are you here for? Come on—spill it if you know what's good for you!”

Harry did not immediately reply. He was still wondering how Wendell had managed to learn that he was coming here. He was positive that the man had not put out from the little dock in front of the plantation.

“Come on,” ordered Wendell. “Speak up! What's the idea of coming down here?”

“Curiosity,” remarked Harry calmly. “I was coming by and thought I'd look over the old derelict—”

“Quit the stall,” interrupted Wendell. “You headed here from up above Saunders Landing. I was watching for you. I knew that you had gone up the river—not down. What was the idea of drifting past the plantation?”

A sudden light dawned upon Harry Vincent. Until now, The Shadow's agent had regarded Harvey Wendell as a crook; Weston Levis as an honest man. But it was obvious, from Wendell's words, that the secretary had talked with Levis. Today, on the veranda, Levis had feigned suspicion of Wendell. Actually, the two must

THE ISLE OF DOUBT

have been in complete accord. Harry had fallen for a pretense!

Wendell grinned as he sensed the thoughts which were in Harry's mind. Then his expression regained its sternness. Wendell did not intend to let Harry stall.

“What do you know about this place?” queried the secretary. “What do you know about the island over here?”

“All I know,” rejoined Harry, “is that you must be a crook—and a bad one.”

“Me?” sneered Wendell. “A crook? What about yourself, you rat? There's three men on that island. They're guys I'm going to get—and you're in with them.”

There was conviction in Wendell's tone. Harry felt the tenseness of the situation. Wendell, backed by Levis, and with Hadley in reserve, was evidently playing a lone hand against a trio whom he intended to thwart.

This gave Harry opportunity. If he could convince Wendell that he was not with the band of outlaws, he might be able to stall off trouble for a while.

Harry was thinking of The Shadow. He knew that his own failure might mean difficulty for the hidden master.

“Let's talk fair, Wendell,” declared Harry. “I'll tell you why I came here to-night. When I came up the river the other night, I saw a light on the island. I was fool enough to go ashore to find out what it was all about. I saw three men through the window of a house.”

“Yeah?” queried Wendell sourly. “What then?”

“I saw you,” rejoined Harry. “I had left the window. You came up there. You went away. When I came in with the motor boat, you were at the dock.”

“What of it?” demanded Wendell.

“Just this,” replied Harry. “If I happened to be in with those men who you say are crooks, I could have made trouble for you outside of the house. The fact that I saw you there proves that I was looking in on them—just like yourself.”

“Humph!” grunted Wendell. “Maybe you're right about that—maybe you aren't. Looks to me like you're in this game on your own. Well, if that's the case, it won't be quite so tough for you. But I've still got a hunch that you're phony, and I'm going to stick right here in case those other birds intend to show up to meet you.”

HARRY said nothing. He wondered what Wendell intended to do. The sallow-faced man was considering the problem also. Harry, expecting no mercy, feared for a moment that Wendell would deliberately shoot him down. Then he realized that the report of a gun would probably be heard on the island. That could cause trouble for Wendell, should the three crooks visit the River Queen with knowledge that a fray had taken place on board.

A sarcastic grin showed on Wendell's face as the man gained a bright idea. Harry did not view the expression with any pleasure.

“I've got the place for you,” growled Harry's captor. “I'm going to shove you into one of those old staterooms—and I'll fix you so you'll make no noise. Remember this: I know you've got no business here. I'll shoot you quick enough if you make trouble. It makes no difference to me if those other birds are your

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buddies. If I make a noise, I'll slide out before they show up.”

Wendell's face gleamed at his own suggestion. Harry became more tense than before. He could see that Wendell was a man of cold action. One false step—Wendell would not fail in his threat. Harry met Wendell's stare; a second later, he made a new discovery—one that brought him a sense of keen elation.

Harvey Wendell was standing beside the old door on the lower side of the ship. Harry had fancied the bulwark was below water level. It could not be, as Harry now perceived, for that door was sliding open, actuated by a force that was both powerful and silent!

Wendell moved two steps forward. Less than eight feet separated him from Harry. The secretary wore a sallow scowl as he gripped his big revolver. Harry was apparently staring into Wendell's face; actually, he was watching beyond.

A form of blackness was wedging through from the space at the end of the half-opened door. Free of the barrier, it became a tall figure which seemed to loom like the darkness of the room beyond the gleaming lantern. A living shroud, this black-garbed form hovered above the stocky figure of Harvey Wendell.

Harry could distinguish the folds of a black cloak, the brim of a slouch hat, two burning eyes that shone like blazing orbs. Then, stretching from the weird form, Harry saw a pair of black-gloved hands that reached forward like tentacles of doom.

From the most unexpected place on the ship—an abandoned doorway that seemingly led nowhere—The Shadow had returned!

CHAPTER XV. TABLES TURN

LIKE a man in a trance, Harvey sensed the fantastic situation which now existed in this forgotten spot—the boiler room of a Mississippi derelict.

Face to face with Harvey Wendell, a man who threatened him with a revolver muzzle, Harry could see salvation just beyond.

The Shadow was in a position from which he could strike. Should his mighty hand falter, it would mean death for his agent, Harry Vincent. For Harvey Wendell, if attacked from in back, would surely fire.

As Harry stared, he saw the right hand of The Shadow raise. With a sweeping, silent gesture, it came downward beside Wendell's shoulder, and pointed to the gun which the man held. The Shadow's index finger spoke as plainly as though words had been uttered. It commanded Harry to make a desperate move.

Harry must leap for the revolver which was in Wendell's hand! For an instant, Harry wondered; then, his senses coming back, he prepared to obey The Shadow's surprising order. Looking squarely into Wendell's eyes, Harry uttered a protest.

“Say”—his voice was pleading—“you aren't going to shove me into one of those cabins—”

“Either that,” interrupted Wendell, “or I'm going to load you with lead. Take your choice.”

The hand of The Shadow was creeping close beside Harvey Wendell's arm. It was inches only from the revolver which the sallow-faced man held.

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“All right,” grumbled Harry. “You say take my choice. I’ll take it!”

With that final statement, Harry Vincent sprang forward. His move was a swift one, but a single shot could frustrate a one-in-a-hundred chance. Had he acted alone, Harry Vincent would have been doomed. But The Shadow was there in his agent’s behalf.

Harry’s spring—Wendell’s firing of the gun; between those actions, The Shadow did his part. His fingers, like living things of blackness, gripped the revolver which Wendell held. Like a blotting shaft of ink, the hand of The Shadow covered the glimmering weapon and twisted it with a viselike clutch.

The gun snapped from Wendell’s gripping hand. It shot across the floor past Harry Vincent. Wendell’s fist, close to his body, came open and was empty. His faltering forefinger trembled in space.

Before the man had a chance to understand it, Harry Vincent was upon him. Wendell threw up his arms to ward off Harry’s grasp. The two men clinched, and Wendell staggered backward under the force of Harry’s attack.

THE SHADOW was no longer there. Swift as the onslaught had been, The Shadow had stepped away more rapidly. Somewhere in the darkness beyond the boiler, his eyes were watching the fray. He had evened the turn for his agent. He was leaving the rest to Harry Vincent.

The young man knew it. Once tonight, he had failed. This time, he was determined to show his ability in combat. Harry was unarmed; so was Harvey Wendell. It was a man-to-man fight, with the odds even.

As the two twisted back and forth, just within the glare of the swinging electric lantern, Harry wrested free. As Wendell leaped forward to a new clinch, Harry struck. Wendell’s ferocious snarl ended in a click as his teeth came together.

Harry had landed a jab on Wendell’s jaw. The secretary came at him with a right, which Harry Vincent countered with a perfect punch that slipped in under Wendell’s guard. The sallow secretary went down like a rag doll, his collapsed form sprawled out on the catwalk.

Harry had delivered a knock-out.

Harry Vincent looked at the motionless body, then turned and walked along the catwalk. He picked up Wendell’s gun and pocketed it, then found his automatic. As he turned back toward Harvey Wendell, Harry was in a quandary.

What should he do now?

The answer came—a sinister whisper from the companionway at the front of the boiler room.

“Question the man.” The Shadow’s words came with the strange precision of unspoken thoughts. “Learn all that he knows. Await instructions. Here.”

Harry nodded, even though he could not see the invisible speaker. He realized that The Shadow had passed around the boiler room to reach this exit. He knew that the black-clad master did not want his hand to be revealed—for the time at least. It was up to Harry to act—with The Shadow standing within hearing distance, an unseen watcher.

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Harry looked at Wendell. The secretary was stirring. He raised himself groggily, and placed his hand to his jaw. Then, staring into the range of light, he saw Harry Vincent.

FOR a moment, Wendell appeared angry; then he grinned feebly, and rubbed his jaw ruefully.

“Well,” he acknowledged, with a growl, “you've landed me. I hope your story is straight—that you're working on your own. If you're in with these other crooks, I'm done—that's all.”

“Why speak of other crooks?” queried Harry. “Is that an acknowledgment of your own calling?”

Wendell stared in a bewildered fashion. His grin disappeared as he studied Harry Vincent.

“I don't get you,” he said sullenly.

“Why stall?” questioned Harry. “You know what I mean. I've had your number from the start. When I looked in on those fellows on the island, I heard them talking about some swag they were after. They said that there might be somebody as phony as they were, trying to get in ahead of them. Then I saw you—and I knew who the other fellow was.

“I thought you were playing a lone hand. I didn't know that old Levis was working with you—but that's the way it appears now. He was using you as a cover up; or else you've flim-flammed him very neatly. The other crooks went to the island; you preferred the plantation.”

“Say”—Wendell was sitting on the floor as he spoke—“I begin to wise up now. I heard those crooks talk, too. I was looking for some snake in the grass. You don't look like a crook, and you don't talk like one.”

“But you look like one,” returned Harry, “and you talk like one—and your actions give the same indication.”

Wendell chuckled. “Listen, Vincent,” he said. “I'd have believed you were on the level if you'd been able to show me credentials. How about giving me the same break?”

“In what way?”

“Well—I've got my papers on me. You probably thought I was phony because I don't look like a secretary. Well, I'm not one, although I've been acting in that capacity. I'm a State investigator, appointed by the banking commission.”

Harry stared.

“I can prove it,” insisted Wendell. “Then, if you're crooked, you can give me the works. But I'm staking it all on my belief that you're really on the level.”

“Bring out the papers,” ordered Harry.

Wendell thrust his hand into his inside pocket. Harry was unperturbed. He did not think that Wendell carried another weapon; even if the man were armed, it would not matter. The Shadow, silent spectator of this scene, was in readiness for any emergency. With The Shadow behind him, Harry knew that ordinary precautions were unnecessary.

“Here you are,” declared Wendell, thrusting forth the documents which he had promised.

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WARILY, Harry stepped forward and took the papers with his left hand. He stepped back and examined them close by the front hatchway of the boiler room, at the same time eyeing Wendell at intervals.

The credentials were unquestionably genuine. One bore Wendell's photograph, with a seal impressed upon it. The man's signature was also present. The papers announced Wendell as an agent of the commonwealth. The man had the power to make arrests.

As Harry stood with his shoulder turned toward the opening that led from the boiler room, he sensed that eyes other than his own were upon the papers. The Shadow, obscured in darkness, was noting the information which his agent had gained.

A soft whisper sounded in Harry's ear. The command of The Shadow, to his agent, was not heard by Harvey Wendell. That order, however, was of great importance to the man whom Harry Vincent had overpowered. The Shadow's whisper was more convincing to Harry than were the certificates which Wendell had extended.

“Work with him,” came The Shadow's tone.

In response, Harry stepped forward and handed the papers back to Harvey Wendell. From his pocket, Harry produced the State investigator's revolver and gave it to Wendell also. Rising from the floor, Wendell extended his hand and received Harry Vincent's clasp.

“You're a square shooter, Vincent,” declared the man who had announced his status. “I took a long chance, but I figured right when I decided you were on the level.”

“You're the kind of fellow I've wanted to meet. With your help, I may get somewhere around here. I'm going to tell you what those crooks are after—and there may be a chance that we'll beat them to it.”

An alliance had been formed between Harvey Wendell and Harry Vincent. As a result of that alliance, Wendell's hopes were to be fulfilled. For there was a third member in this combination—a silent partner whose power was to dominate the entire situation.

The unseen master was The Shadow!

CHAPTER XVI. THE INVESTIGATOR EXPLAINS

“YOU'VE come into a crucial situation, Vincent,” declared Harvey Wendell. “I've been waiting for the break, and it may come any time. So, while we're here, close to the island, I'm going to tell you just what's what.”

Wendell was leaning against the wall of the boiler room, close by the door on the lower side—the unexpected entrance through which The Shadow had appeared without Wendell's knowledge. Harry Vincent was still standing beside the blackened exit through which The Shadow had departed.

“It was a good break, after all”—Wendell grinned as he stroked his jaw—“the way you socked me. Say, Vincent—you had nerve. I can't figure yet how you grabbed my gun so quickly. Before I could pull the trigger, it was gone.”

“I had to take a chance,” returned Harry quietly. “When you failed to believe my story—”

“Forget it,” growled Wendell. “I should have known you were all right. It was my own dumbness. But I've been worried during the last few days, Vincent—and I'm going to tell you why.”

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Wendell paused to adjust the electric bull's-eye so that the illumination turned downward. The lantern was a powerful one, with a battery that was evidently capable of long duration.

“Did you ever hear of Birch Bizzup's gang?” questioned Wendell.

Harry looked doubtful; then recalled the name.

“The bank robbers?” he asked.

“Yes,” returned Wendell. “They ran wild, here in the Middle West. I was sure you'd have heard about them in New York.

“Well, I was investigating their robberies—and I kept pretty well under cover. Acted as secretary on different boards of directors. I'd worked that system before; it gave me ingress into different banks without exciting suspicion of employees.

“We figured that there might be some inside tips going out, you understand. Weston Levis was connected with various banks; he had interests all around St. Louis. He and I talked over the proposition, and we figured that as his secretary, I could cover more ground. So I took the job.”

The connection was clearing now. Harry saw how Weston Levis fitted into the picture; and he felt sure that further explanation would clarify other details.

“Bizzup's gang finally hit trouble,” resumed Wendell. “Some of the worst customers in the outfit were killed—Bizzup along with them. The rest went to the penitentiary. But there was no sign of the stuff they had stolen—more than half a million, all negotiable. It was evident that Bizzup must have stowed it somewhere—and we couldn't get a word out of any of his gang.”

“The crooks on the island!” exclaimed Harry, as though gaining a sudden idea.

“I'm coming to them,” said Wendell dryly. “There were two of Bizzup's men who went to the pen—and both were pretty foxy fellows. One was Zach Telvin, Bizzup's lieutenant; the other was Tom Furgis, who had been with Bizzup a long while.

“I figured Telvin as too wise for the game I had in mind. I picked Furgis. I went to jail for three days, by arrangement with the warden. Played the part of a safe cracker who was getting a parole. I landed in with Furgis, and played my part so well that he spilled what he knew.”

“About the money?”

“Yes. He wanted me to locate it and hold on to his share. He had heard Birch Bizzup talking to Zach Telvin about going up the river with some swag. Furgis knew this island, and he decided it must be the place where Bizzup had buried the spoils. That was all I wanted to know. I got my parole—so Furgis thought—and I figured out the best way to look around up here.”

“Why didn't you come alone?”

“Because I didn't know who else might be in on it. I told Levis what I had learned. I thought maybe I could get some property through him, and use it as a headquarters. Levis was a prince. His doctor had ordered him to retire—for a while at least—so the old man suggested that I find a large tract of ground. That's how I came to get the old plantation. Levis brought Hadley along to work the place.”

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“So Levis knew that you were coming down here,” grinned Harry. “Say—he fooled me this afternoon. So did Hadley.”

“Not Hadley, so much,” asserted Wendell, “because he really thinks that I am the old man's secretary. He doesn't like me, but Levis keeps things smoothed. But wait until I tell you the rest. I'll get to you eventually.”

“I scoured this boat, and I went all over the island. Nothing doing. No money. I figured that Furgis had bluffed me. I was going back to the pen to take a try with Zach Telvin, when one day I read in a newspaper that Telvin had broken jail.”

“No!”

“Absolutely. That made me think. Then, when three strangers showed up on the island, I began to think some more. That's why I was looking in there the night you saw me. I spotted those three men—and I recognized one of them.”

“You don't mean—”

“Zach Telvin. That's who I mean. He's the stoop-shouldered one. He's there on the island with two pals. They're looking for what I couldn't find. So I'm watching the three of them.”

“I get it now,” remarked Harry. “No wonder you were puzzled when I happened to drop in at the plantation so casually.”

“SAY,” returned Wendell, “I expected you right from the minute you showed up. I wondered whether you were with the outfit, or whether you were trailing them on your own hook. I told Levis what I thought about it.”

“He suggested that I watch you for a while. That's why he talked this afternoon. I knew all about it. I was there in the house, listening. When you went up the river in the motor boat, I arranged to be on watch for your return.”

“I fell for it,” admitted Harry. “I thought you looked like a crook —”

“I do,” declared Wendell. “That's how I made out so well with Furgis, in the pen.”

“I was curious about the island,” said Harry, “and, when Levis talked today, I had a hunch I'd like to come down this way again. I picked the old steamboat first—”

“And you didn't get any farther. Well, now you know everything, and I'm convinced that your story is correct. You can move out of this mess if you want to; but if you're willing to stick with me, I'd prefer it, now that I've let you in on the whole story.”

“I'd like to stick for a while, Wendell. I suppose you're going after those men on the island.”

“Not yet. Here's the trouble. I can take Zach Telvin, but I've got nothing on the others. I can call on the sheriff to run down the escaped convict. But suppose the other two slide out; suppose there are more in the game? They know about the money Bizzup took—and I don't want to tell the whole county about it. There'd be a treasure hunt. I'm sure the stuff is here, since Zach Telvin has arrived. That's all the more reason to play a cagey game.”

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“That's right,” agreed Harry.

“I've got to be on the job,” declared Wendell, “to get those fellows quick, if they find the goods before I do. But all along I've had the hope that I could land the dough ahead of them. Then the job's done, and I can call in the sheriff to catch Zach Telvin.”

“But the crooks are on the island.”

“That's the trouble. I'm going over there again to-night, to watch them.”

“You're letting them do all the searching.”

“Yes. I can't get out of it. Say, Vincent, we might be able to cook up a plan where one of us could watch while the other looked around a bit. That is, if you're game.”

“I'm game,” returned Harry.

“I know that,” said Wendell quickly, “but I mean if you're willing to poke yourself into trouble. I'm a lone hand, Vincent. I've never needed help before, like I do now. I don't want to bring men up from St. Louis—I don't know who I'd get. Levis is too old a man. Hadley is a capable chap, but I don't know if he could stand the gaff.”

“Why do you think I could?” quizzed Harry.

“Here's why,” returned Wendell, pointing to his jaw. “You showed your stuff, young fellow. I'll work with you any day. What say—are you ready to hit that island?”

Harry Vincent's lips were moving to form an affirmative reply when a weird, creepy sound reached the young man's ears. It was a whisper from the darkness beyond the boiler room, a sinister sound articulated so subtly that Harry could barely detect it, while Wendell, fifteen feet away, did not catch the words that were so softly spoken.

The whisper of The Shadow! As Harry heard its sinister tones, he listened, for the new instructions. The reply that Harry was to make depended upon the word that was coming from The Shadow!

CHAPTER XVII. STOLEN WEALTH

“THE lower door.”

These were the words which Harry heard, while Harvey Wendell, State investigator, awaited his new companion's decision. The whisper of The Shadow was scarcely greater than an echo, yet it had impressed a definite message upon Harry's mind.

The lower door!

What did the phrase mean?

For a moment, Harry Vincent was at a loss. He heard Harvey Wendell speak again.

“How about it?” the investigator was questioning. “Are you game to strike for the island?”

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Harry looked at Wendell. The investigator was anticipative, hoping that his new friend would agree to work with him. For a moment, Harry glanced at Wendell's face; then his eyes searched beyond the man. Harry saw the wooden barrier that he knew must lead to the mud-bound deck on the lower side of the listed River Queen.

Through that door, like a specter from another world, had come The Shadow. That was the spot where The Shadow had been—the last place aboard the derelict where one would expect concealment.

The lower door! Harry was gazing at it now! What lay beyond? Only The Shadow knew; and he had ordered Harry to learn the same!

“Well,” asked Wendell, “shall I go alone?”

“Wait a minute,” responded Harry. “Count me with you, Wendell. I don't mind danger, but I was thinking over what you said. If there was some way of beating the crooks to what they're after—”

“Great,” interposed Wendell. “You're forgetting, though, that I've been around here a long while—and I haven't found a thing on that island.”

“Neither have the crooks.”

“No. But Zach Telvin may have a better idea than I have as to the probable location of the stuff that Bizzup buried.”

“Maybe and maybe not. Those fellows may be in the dark—they probably are. I was just thinking that it might be a good idea to go over this old boat while we're on it.”

“This boat?” Wendell laughed. “Say, I've searched the old tub from stem to stern. I know every stateroom. I looked through here—until I suddenly realized that Bizzup wouldn't have been sap enough to put the dough on an old wreck that any curiosity seeker might visit.”

“What about this boiler room—”

“You mean the boilers? I thought of them. Nope—the stuff isn't there.”

Harry cast a careful glance about the sphere of light. He walked over toward Wendell and pointed to the lower barrier.

“What about this door?” questioned Harry.

“Mud under that,” asserted Wendell. “I hammered at it once, and the mud oozed through. See—here at the bottom? That door is jammed as tight as the timbers of the old tub—”

Wendell paused. Harry was pushing against the door. The barrier was yielding under pressure. A surprised look came into Wendell's eyes.

“It's coming open!” exclaimed the investigator. “Say, Vincent, maybe you've struck something. How in the world did that get loose? It was like a rock when I first noticed it!”

THE door was halfway open. Its bottom edge was muddy, and the muck seemed to aid the barrier in its slide. This was the door which The Shadow had handled so easily. Wendell grabbed the bull's-eye lantern from the

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boiler and turned its rays on the door.

“Look at that!” the man exclaimed. “It’s like the door on the other side—slides into the walls of the boiler room. But there’s nail holes there. Vincent, somebody has loosened this—”

The investigator’s speech ceased. The lantern light had revealed a sight which startled him—one that made Harry Vincent stare in wonder also. Projecting up against the side of the door was a surface of solid rock, its edges incased with mud, its center cloven as though by a mighty ax.

The light from the bull’s-eye was blazing into the crevice. It showed a damp passage leading at an angle through the solid rock.

“The old boat must have grounded on rocks,” remarked Harry. “The mud—the swamp—they resulted later. This must have been above the water level.”

“It still is,” said Wendell, “but the hole goes down beneath the swamp. This is a region for caves, Vincent—and there are a good many underground channels. Say—we’re going in there. It may be Bizzup’s safe-deposit vault! Come along!”

In his eagerness, the investigator thought of nothing but an exploration of the cavern. He wedged his way between the rocks and beckoned to Harry to follow. The Shadow’s agent paused. He was about to suggest that he remain on guard. Then he realized that such action would be unnecessary. The Shadow, himself, had taken over the duty of the watch!

Harry joined Harvey Wendell. The cavern had widened after the crevice. It was sloping downward as the two men groped their way along its stony bottom. Trickling water accompanied them—a tiny stream which oozed its way from the layers of mud above.

The passage leveled. Its bottom was rough. It led toward the island, and the two men followed it. Wendell, his low voice echoing as he spoke, remarked that this cave might be part of a larger cavern underneath the isle. A sharp turn and a widening space indicated the possibility of his theory.

The men had reached the end of the accessible cave. They were in a chamber, far from the derelict, moving upward toward the top of a steep slope. This was evidently a space underneath high-banked rocks on the shore of the island. The light showed a downward sloping ceiling, broken with narrow passages, too small for a man to squirm through. There was no continuation.

Wendell lowered the bull’s-eye. A gleeful exclamation came from his lips. Two heavy wooden boxes were in view, stowed on a small shelf of rock. The investigator leaped forward. A knife came from his pocket. Eagerly he pried up one of the top boards of the nearer box.

THE board loosening, Wendell passed the knife to Harry, and urged him to open the other box. Pulling out his revolver, Wendell set the lantern on a jutting rock above, and thrust the butt end of the weapon under the board that he had raised. The board snapped off. Wendell pulled aside the edge of a rubber blanket. The green hue of a stack of bank notes caught his eye.

“We’ve found it!” cried the investigator. “We’ve found it all, Vincent! Never mind opening that other box. We’ll get this stuff out of here without delay. This is Bizzup’s safe-deposit vault right enough!”

Wearied by momentary eagerness, Wendell sat down upon the box that he had opened and grinned as he looked at Harry. The Shadow’s agent joined in the smile.

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“That door must have been loose,” declared Wendell. “Bizzup must have opened it. He found this place, and stowed the stuff. Then he nailed the door up tight. Say, Vincent—you’ll get plenty of credit for this—and your share of the reward for finding the dough.”

A pause; then Wendell arose and managed to raise one end of the box.

“Heavy,” he remarked. “Probably some gold in it. The two of us can heft it. Come along—we’ll take this box, and then return for the other. We’ll tote the whole works up to the plantation. Say—this will be a surprise for Levis!”

Harry responded. The two men managed the box and carried it well along the passage that led back to the River Queen. They left the box near the boat, and returned for the second. It was as heavy as the first. Both were panting when they completed the new journey.

“Get the boxes into the motor boat,” said Wendell. “Here—we’ll lug them around the boiler room. I’ll be ready to leave from the deck when you have the boat. Where is it?”

“Down by the bow,” said Harry.

The pair manipulated the boxes one by one. They brought the treasure chests to the narrow deck on the upper side of the boiler room. The lantern was out. Harry groped his way through darkness to the upper deck, and found the motor boat.

AS he slid the boat along the side of the derelict, Harry felt a sensation of strange freedom in the coolness of the night air. His past experiences, short though they had been, seemed unbelievable. Wendell had given him credit for a smart discovery. Harry knew that The Shadow had been there before.

In fact, Harry had a good inkling of what The Shadow had originally intended. He did not know that the shrewd master of deduction had located the layer of cave rock by means of an aerial photograph. But he did know that The Shadow must have found the cavern previous to this night.

He knew that The Shadow had summoned him here to aid in the removal of the wealth before the crooks could find it. The Shadow had needed the motor boat; he had required Harry on watch so that he could safely explore the depths of the treasure cave.

Harry had failed; but The Shadow had rectified matters. Returning to the door which he had wisely closed, The Shadow had seen the light of Wendell’s lantern, and had observed his agent in trouble. The Shadow had turned the tables. Learning that Wendell represented the law, the master had let Harry aid the investigator.

Instead of stolen wealth reappearing in a mysterious way, it would be brought back by a man who had set forth to seek it. Such was The Shadow’s method. He let such men as Harvey Wendell get the credit that they deserved for honest effort.

Harry was aiding Wendell. Together they were frustrating evil men who dwelt upon the isle of doubt. Harry smiled triumphantly as he brought the motor boat against the little rowboat that Harvey Wendell had previously moored amidships.

A whispered voice came from above. Wendell was signaling. Harry responded softly.

“Ready?” questioned Wendell.

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Harry reached up and felt the bulk of the first box. He gave a grunt of assent. The box came over the edge. Harry eased it into the motor boat. The second box followed. Wendell joined The Shadow's agent.

“Wait a minute,” the investigator said. “I’ll hitch the rowboat to the stern.”

That job done, Harry and Wendell worked with the oars, and pushed the motor boat through the muck of the swamp water, until they reached the deeper section of the cut-off. Caught by a slow current, both boats drifted downstream.

“No noise,” said Wendell quietly. “We’ve been close to the island all along. Wait until we’re below it, then we’ll start the motor and head up the main channel.”

All was silent. The derelict lay almost invisible against the bulk of the isle of doubt. To Wendell, that old ship meant nothing now. But to Harry Vincent, the River Queen was still a place of mystery. For on that old steamship, Harry was sure, remained the presence of a weird personage to whom belonged all credit for to-night’s success.

HARRY was right. The Shadow was still upon the derelict. Invisible upon the bow of the old boat, his sinister form was a motionless object. Eyes that shone even in the darkness were scanning the cut-off as though they could see the progress of the two adventurers.

A soft laugh sighed from the spot. Its tones were caught by the solemn hush of the silent river. The Shadow moved noiselessly across the deck. His tall form glided over the side and entered the rubber boat, which was moored to a spot near the bow—toward the island.

Harry Vincent and Harvey Wendell had departed in the boats which they had used to make their separate visits. It was The Shadow’s turn. The rubber boat moved easily among the reeds, and glided to the edge of the swampy water.

Swift but guarded strokes of the broad-bladed paddle made no ripples in the water as The Shadow’s strange craft moved out into the blackened stream. Another laugh—soft but weird. That sinister sound came from absolute darkness.

The Shadow had turned the tide of events to-night. The stolen wealth had been recovered. Harry Vincent, The Shadow’s secret agent, was aiding Harvey Wendell, who represented the law. To all events, this turn had brought an end to the adventure.

The tribe of crooks still remained upon the island. The law would soon be loosed upon them. Yet The Shadow, ever wise, had not yet ceased his vigilance.

Until all scores had been settled, The Shadow would remain in this vicinity—ever watchful in the cause of law and justice.

CHAPTER XVIII. OTHER VISITORS

“WHAT’S that?”

The question came from Zach Telvin. Crouched beneath a tree near the lower end of the island, the escaped convict was listening to a vague sound from the river. The noise became more evident.

THE ISLE OF DOUBT

“It's a motor boat,” declared Possum Quill. “Lay easy, Zach. If anybody's snooping around this island, Lefty will spot them up by the house.”

“Listen Possum.” Zach spoke seriously in the darkness. “That motor just started, down below the island. I don't like it.”

“Crawl down to the bank then, and look things over if you want to.”

“That's what I'm going to do,” Zach replied.

Zach pushed his way through a thickness of saplings, leaving Possum chuckling at his companion's trepidation. The sound of the motor was more apparent. Possum could place it. The boat was coming up the main channel of the Mississippi, swinging wide of the island, according to the sound.

The chugging retained its intensity. Then it began to die away as the boat followed the river up beyond the island. Possum heard Zach pushing through the small trees. He spoke in a low voice, and heard the convict's growl.

“Satisfied?” questioned Possum. “The motor boat never stopped, did it?”

“Not here,” returned Zach, “but I'm leery of it just the same.”

“Why?”

“I'll tell you why. That boat was drifting down the river, Possum. It wasn't going down the main stream, either. When the motor started—as near as I can figure—the boat was over toward the shore that's close to us.”

“What does that mean?”

“I'll tell you what it means.” Possum's voice was tense. “I've got a hunch, Zach. I know where that boat came from. I know what it was doing around this island.”

“It probably came from the plantation up the river.”

“Maybe it started from there, but it stopped on the way. That boat was at the old steamship out there in the swamp—that's where it was!”

It was Possum's turn to show excitement. The smart crook grabbed his companion's arm.

“Are you sure of it, Zach?” he queried.

“You bet I'm sure,” returned Zach. “If the boat had slid down the main river, it wouldn't have been in by this shore, would it? I'm telling you, Possum, somebody's on our trail. Like as not, there's a couple of bimbos out on that old wreck—”

“We'll find out about it,” interposed Possum with a determined growl. “Come along, Zach. We'll see what Lefty's doing.”

The crooks used a flashlight intermittently as they beat their way toward the old house. A responding gleam came like a signal. New flickers brought Lefty to the others.

THE ISLE OF DOUBT

“Nothin' doin' at the house,” the gangster began. “But I'll lay there all night—”

“We're not worrying about the house now,” retorted Possum. “Did you hear a motor boat go up the river?”

“Sure,” said Lefty. “It sounded like it was headin' for that old plantation.”

“Did you hear it come downstream?” queried Zach.

“No” replied Lefty.

“Get started,” ordered Possum. “We're going to get our own boat.”

THE crooks lost no time in starting their investigation. They reached the spot where their boat was hidden, pushed the skiff into the river, and Possum swung down below the swamp.

They were cautious as they worked up the cut-off until they neared the River Queen. Possum used an oar to push the skiff up to the derelict. Cautiously, the crooks came over the side.

The trio had visited the wreck before. They had gone through all portions of the steamboat. Possum, who remembered all the passages, led the way, with Zach and Lefty following and moving into side corridors among the staterooms.

“We'll get down into that room where the engines are,” whispered Possum. “That's the spot to work from. It looks like there's no one here, but we can't be sure.”

The three arrived at the appointed place. Possum flickered a flashlight about the rusted boilers. He turned the glow toward the muck below the catwalk. He flashed his torch toward the lower side of the ship.

“Possum!” Zach spoke quickly, as his sharp eyes made a discovery. “Look out for that old door—there in the mud.”

“What about it?” growled Possum, turning his light on the designated spot. “It's banked in mud.”

“Some one's been at it,” asserted Zach.

A gruff exclamation came from Possum. What Zach had said was true. The old door was not entirely closed. Harvey Wendell had failed to completely shut it.

“Get hold of it, Lefty,” snarled Possum. “I've got the door covered. If anybody has slid in there, I'll plug him. But you won't find nothing but turtles in that mud.”

“And snakes maybe,” warned Zach.

“Water moccasins—”

“Shut up!” growled Possum, as Lefty hesitated. “Get busy there! Shove it open!”

Lefty obeyed. He threw his shoulders against the edge of the old door. The barrier slid open. A sharp cry came from Possum as his flashlight revealed the crevice in the rock. Zach echoed the exclamation.

“Possum!” exclaimed the convicted bank robber. “That may be Birch Bizzup's place—”

THE ISLE OF DOUBT

“Yeah?” queried Possum. “Well, I hope it's not. Some guy's been here ahead of us.”

“Maybe he's still in there.”

“We'll find out.”

Ordering Lefty to remain, and commanding Zach to follow, Possum pushed his way through the crack in the rocks. With his flashlight lowered to the floor of the water-trickled passage, the crook led the way into the cavern.

This pair of visitors proceeded with more caution than Harvey Wendell and Harry Vincent had used. As they neared the upgrade of the large cavern, Possum was ready to open an attack upon any person who might be lying in wait. When they reached the final cave, Possum grunted and swept the light about the chamber. Zach, at his elbow, uttered words of relief.

“Nobody here,” he said.

“Nobody,” returned Possum. “Nobody and nothing.”

“Say, Possum, I'll bet this is the spot that Birch picked—”

“You think it is? You're picking a sure bet, Zach.”

“Then the swag must be here!”

“Yeah? Guess again.”

“You don't think that some bird got here ahead of us?”

“Listen, Zach. We went over the boat before, but we didn't spot anything funny about that busted door. We spotted it to-night, though. Some guy spotted it ahead of us. He grabbed the gravy.”

“The guy in the motor boat!”

“Right!”

ZACH could see the scowl on Possum's face. The convict uttered an oath. He realized that Possum's words must be true. The swag stowed away by Birch Bizzup had been taken from beneath the noses of the three wise crooks!

“Lefty said the motor boat was heading toward the plantation,” growled Possum. “Lefty may be right. That's where we're going, Zach!”

The crooks turned and started through the passage back to the River Queen. They arrived at the boiler room. Lefty reported that there had been no occurrence during their absence.

Neither Possum nor Zach offered return comment. Possum, as leader, nudged Lefty forward. With one accord the three crooks hurried to the spot where they had left the skiff. They pushed off from the side of the River Queen.

THE ISLE OF DOUBT

As they headed up the cut-off, Possum began to outline his plans. The others listened, their only comments being rough grunts of approval. They had left the cover of the island. Coming into the open, they were no longer lurkers.

Men of grim determination, dangerous criminals to whom murder was a pastime, these three were bound upon an errand of desperate crime. The swag was gone; they were out to get it.

Harvey Wendell and Harry Vincent had left the River Queen in safety. These crooks had departed from the derelict unmolested. Another had gone from the wreck during the interim. That other was The Shadow.

While the skiff was traveling up the river, The Shadow was making another departure. His big sedan was moving from the old clearing, where he had left it. The rubber boat was packed. The Shadow's laugh was uttered softly in the darkness as the mysterious driver turned his car along the dirt road toward the main highway.

Was The Shadow aware that a new menace had arisen? Or had he decided that his presence was no longer needed?

Only The Shadow knew, and his keen brain was dwelling upon strange theories at that particular time!

CHAPTER XIX. CROOKS COUNTER

WESTON LEVIS was dozing in the front room of the plantation house when the slam of the screen door awakened him. The old man looked up to see Harvey Wendell standing before him.

"Hello! Wendell!" he exclaimed. "How did you fare to-night? Did you encounter this man Vincent?"

"Yes," smiled Wendell. "I found him. What's more, he was the man I wanted. He's here with me now—at least, he's waiting down by the dock."

"You mean that you were mistaken about him?"

"Just that. Vincent is a square shooter, and he helped me to the biggest success I've ever had. We've got the stuff, Mr. Levis—the swag that Birch Bizzup buried!"

Weston Levis leaped to his feet. He started toward the door in his excitement. Wendell still smiled as he motioned the old man back to his chair.

"Remember, Mr. Levis," he said, "I'm still looking out for your health. Where's Hadley?"

The overseer was coming down the stairs as Wendell spoke. He had heard the conversation below, and had noted the excited tones of the two men. Wendell turned to Hadley.

"Vincent is down at the dock," said the investigator. "He's got two heavy boxes down there. Help him up with the first. I'll come down and meet you."

Wendell remained long enough to make a few explanatory remarks to Weston Levis. Then the investigator went out through the screen door. A few minutes later, Harry and Hadley were shifting the first box into the living room.

THE ISLE OF DOUBT

"I'll go back and help Wendell with the second box," remarked Harry. "In the meantime you can start to open that one."

Leaving the old man and the overseer, Harry crossed the veranda and strode through the darkness toward the dock. He found Wendell waiting with the second box. Together, they hoisted it, and carried it into the house.

Hadley, under Levis' supervision, had just succeeded in breaking open the top of the box. Bank notes, bonds, and other valuables were in plain view. With an excited gleam in his eyes, Weston Levis strode over and extended his hand to Harvey Wendell.

"Shake with Vincent," said Wendell, as he accepted the old man's clasp. "He's the boy who found the place. He gets the big credit."

Levis shook hands heartily with Harry. The three turned to the boxes. Hadley was opening the second. When the work was completed, the overseer walked across the room, and laid down the hammer which he used.

"Let's get a look at this," suggested Wendell, stooping beside the first box. "We'd better take an account of stock. Come on, Vincent—we'll stack the stuff on the floor."

WESTON LEVIS seated himself in a chair, and watched the pair begin to work. Sheaves of bonds, bundles of bank notes and gold certificates, were appearing in profusion. At the side of the first box, Harry unloaded small stacks of gold coin.

Weston Levis spoke in a worried tone. At the old man's words, Wendell stood up and let Harry continue alone. Levis had brought up a most important subject.

"Tell me, Wendell," said the old man. "What do you intend to do about those crooks on the island? You told me that you recognized one as Zach Telvin, the escaped convict."

"Absolutely, yes," returned Wendell. "Say—there's no use of giving those birds a chance to make a get-away. We'd better call out the sheriff and form a posse."

"You will lead the posse to the island?"

"Yes. We can put men on guard here."

Weston Levis nodded.

"It would be advisable to proceed at once," he said. "You have your credentials. The fact that you know an escaped convict is on the island will prove sufficient."

Wendell nodded this time.

"We talked it over before," he remarked. "Counted our chickens ahead of time—now they're hatched. We'll stow the money and get the sheriff. We can leave Hadley and some men here at the house. If we let these people around here see the money, they'll all want to stay on guard."

"Exactly," said Levis. "You must concentrate on the island. Those crooks may prove dangerous."

Wendell looked at Harry, then at Hadley.

THE ISLE OF DOUBT

“One of you fellows had better go for the sheriff,” said the investigator. “Maybe we could save time if we called him up on the phone.”

“Hardly advisable,” remarked Levis. “You don't know who may be listening in on these rural calls.”

“That's right,” returned Wendell. “It would be best for Hadley to drive over to Knoxport right away. He knows the place. Rouse up Sheriff Keegan, Hadley.”

“Tell him that I want to see him,” added Levis. “Say that men are needed here. I have met Keegan. He doesn't know that Harvey Wendell is a State agent.”

“That's right,” said Wendell, with a grin. “I'm just your secretary, Mr. Levis. That is, until the sheriff gets here.”

“I'll get the car out right away, sir,” said Hadley to Levis.

“You have a revolver?” questioned the old man.

“Upstairs,” answered Hadley. “I'll get it now.”

THE overseer went out of the room. Wendell produced his revolver from his pocket, and laid it upon the corner of an emptied box. Harry did the same with his automatic.

“We've got plenty of dough here,” was Wendell's comment. “Nobody's going to disturb us, but with those crooks only a couple of miles away on their island, it's best to be ready for emergencies.”

“You do not think that they could possibly know?” questioned Weston Levis anxiously.

“Not a chance of it,” responded Wendell.

Hadley arrived from upstairs. The overseer had strapped on a belt and holster. The butt of a big revolver was in view. The man looked toward Weston Levis to learn if there were further instructions.

“Get started right away, Hadley,” urged the old man. “Tell the sheriff that there are dangerous criminals in the vicinity. If you can bring back some capable men, do so—”

“Half a dozen,” interposed Wendell. “Tell the sheriff to pick his own squad.”

A peculiar tenseness had come over the group. Harry Vincent noticed it, and gained a growing feeling of impending danger. Harry was standing by one box; Wendell by the other. Weston Levis had arisen from his chair, and was standing a dozen feet away. He was close beside a partly opened window.

Hadley was within the door that led to the hall. The door was opened, and it formed a right angle to the doorway. In adjusting the buckle of his belt, the overseer had moved a step backward; his stocky form was in the shelter of the projecting door.

A trivial circumstance—the position which Hadley had taken; yet it was destined to play an important part in the unexpected events which were to follow. Despite the fact that thousands of dollars were upon the floor, no one had expressed great concern. There was a lulling sense of security in this room. It was due to be broken.

THE ISLE OF DOUBT

Harry Vincent, glancing past Hadley, saw the screen door move. Before Harry could make a motion of his own, the wire barrier was flung open. An instant later, a man was leaping into the living room, a drawn revolver in his hand. Close behind him were two others.

Possum Quill!

Harry recognized the crook. So did Harvey Wendell; but the investigator's eyes were upon the man behind the leader of the crooks. Zach Telvin, a wicked leer upon his face, was thrusting his revolver forward with a menacing swing.

But for Possum Quill's command, Zach would have opened fire at once. The leader, however, was more wary. As Possum covered Harry, Zach took care of Wendell. Lefty Hotz, peering over Possum's left shoulder, aimed his gun toward Weston Levis.

“So we've nabbed you, eh?” sneered Possum Quill. “Got you—swag and all! Never mind the old gazabo, Lefty. Cover these mugs that have got the dough.”

Weston Levis, his hands above his head, was cringing away as Lefty derisively laughed and pointed his gun toward the two men who were beside the stacks of bonds and currency. Harry Vincent and Harvey Wendell had their hands above their heads.

Weston Levis was staring at the threatening revolvers. Not one of the three was aimed in his direction. The old man's lips moved widely, as his eyes saw Hadley, still as a statue, standing out of sight behind the door.

The overseer caught the command!

CHAPTER XX. THE SHADOW UNSEEN

CROOKS had countered. They were due for a surprise. As Weston Levis gave his inaudible order, Hadley, with remarkable swiftness, yanked his revolver from its holster. Leaning from behind the door, the overseer fired point-blank at Possum Quill. The leader of the crooks staggered.

With the report, Harry Vincent and Harvey Wendell leaped for their guns. It was their only chance. Still covered by the revolvers of Zach Telvin and Lefty Hotz, they had no other alternative.

Hadley held the advantage. Close by the crooks, the overseer had an opportunity to save the lives of his companions. Had he used the same quick precision with which he had used against Possum Quill, the overseer could have dropped the other crooks amid the confusion.

Weston Levis, dropping behind a large chair, saw Hadley falter in his aim. He saw Harry Vincent and Harvey Wendell gaining their guns. He saw Zach Telvin and Lefty Hotz respond with trigger fingers.

Five men on the point of firing! Hadley had the bead on the crooks; they, in turn, had the advantage over Harry and Wendell. Hadley's unfortunate lapse—a momentary hesitation between Zach and Lefty—would have proven fatal for Harry Vincent and Harvey Wendell, but for an unexpected aid that came from another quarter.

Eyes from the dark had been upon this scene. Automatics were looming at the opened window, each clenched in a black-gloved fist.

The Shadow had arrived to meet the invasion of the men of crime!

THE ISLE OF DOUBT

The automatics roared the first shots of the fray. Leaden messengers sped forth just as Zach and Lefty were pressing their triggers. Zach's right hand wavered. His revolver shot, too late to be stopped, was rendered null. The bullet from Zach's gun whizzed past Harvey Wendell's ear, and plastered itself against the wall.

Lefty Hotz collapsed as Zach Telvin wavered. Clutching his right hand to his breast, the gangster fired vainly as his gun hand—the left—was dropping to the floor.

Hadley's revolver roared as it spat bullets at the falling crooks. Amid that one-man barrage came the spurts of flame from the weapons seized by Harry Vincent and Harvey Wendell.

Five men within the room had fired; yet only two had fallen. Harry and Wendell did not cease their shots toward the writhing foemen, nor did Hadley. When the roaring echoes had ceased, empty weapons were in the hands of the victors. Three crooks lay motionless upon the floor.

Weston Levis arose from behind his chair. The old man's face was flushed with excitement. He stared from man to man, as though unbelieving that all could have remained unscathed.

Harvey Wendell sprang forward and clapped Hadley upon the shoulder. He fully believed that the overseer had been responsible for this timely work.

“You get the credit, Hadley!” cried Wendell. “Say—the way you plugged those crooks while Vincent and I were after our guns was nothing short of marvelous.”

A LOOK of perplexity appeared upon Hadley's face. The overseer realized that he had been late with his shots. He thought that the crooks had fired wide, that Harry Vincent and Harvey Wendell had done the work. But in face of Wendell's congratulations, Hadley seemed too amazed to speak.

Harry Vincent alone understood. Words of censorship were upon his lips. He realized that Hadley had blundered; that the bold attack, though bringing safety to the overseer and Weston Levis, would logically have proven fatal to himself and Harvey Wendell.

By all the laws of chance, Harry and Wendell should have been the first to fall; then Zach and Lefty, for the crooks could not have turned before Hadley fired at them.

Harry knew whence aid had come. The Shadow, from the window, had broken through with the first shots. The others had been so closely followed that no one—not even Weston Levis—had realized what had happened.

Harry caught himself before criticizing Hadley's action. The overseer had evidently done his best. He was explaining, now, how he had chanced to break loose with the sudden gunfire.

“They didn't see me,” declared Hadley. “I had my revolver handy, and I saw Mr. Levis give the word. He's the man you want to thank. I would have stood here like a dumb-bell if it hadn't been for Mr. Levis.”

Harvey Wendell began an examination of the bodies. He saw that all three crooks were dead. The investigator mopped his brow as he sat upon one of the boxes. Then, mechanically, he broke open his revolver, brought a supply of bullets from his pocket, and began to reload with fumbling fingers.

The action seemed to relieve the strain. Harry and Hadley followed suit with their own weapons. Wendell arose and looked around the room. A hazy recollection came to the investigator's mind.

THE ISLE OF DOUBT

“Seemed to me the shots came from everywhere,” Wendell confessed. “Like some one was firing from the windows. Must have been the echoes. Maybe I’m not shaky!”

“Do you think there is danger of another surprise attack?” quavered Weston Levis.

“Not a chance,” said Harry Vincent. “There were three crooks on the island. We’ve bagged them all.”

In a leisurely manner, Harry strolled to the window from which The Shadow’s shots had come. Peering into the darkness, Harry smiled weakly as he looked in vain for his invisible chief. But as he stood there in the light, his own form plainly in view, Harry Vincent fancied that he heard the ripple of a weird and sinister laugh.

The laugh of The Shadow! The mockery that came when men of crime had fallen—the triumph which had been the knell for many a fiend! Harry believed that he now heard the ghostly mirth that he had heard before.

Right had triumphed. Crooks had fallen. The Shadow’s hidden hand had effected an amazing rescue. Harry Vincent turned away from the window, satisfied that The Shadow had departed with the last notes of victory ringing from his unseen lips!

CHAPTER XXI. THE ACCOUNTING

HARVEY WENDELL turned to face his fellows. Nervously, the investigator had gone to the front door; then to a door at the end of the room, a blackened opening that led into the kitchen. Though the three crooks were dead, Wendell could not relieve himself of the fancy that some one else had entered into the swift fray which had brought doom to Zach Telvin and those who had joined the convict’s cause.

At last the investigator seemed satisfied. He stood beside the stacks of regained wealth and spoke of his plans.

“We don’t need the posse,” said Wendell. “But we do need the sheriff. How do you feel, Hadley—shaky?”

“Not much,” returned the overseer.

“You’d better go get the sheriff then,” decided Wendell. “Tell him there are three dead crooks up here. He’ll come along with you quick enough.”

Hadley, still a trifle reluctant about taking orders from Wendell, looked toward Weston Levis.

“You heard the instructions, Hadley; you know what to do,” Levis said.

“All right, sir,” said Hadley.

The overseer went out by the front door. Weston Levis sank in the chair which he had formerly occupied, and rested his chin upon his right hand.

“We can tell the sheriff about everything,” he remarked. “Maybe it would be best to render an accounting of the stolen wealth that we have recovered.”

“A good idea,” responded Wendell. “But we’re going to keep the whole business right here. I’ll wait until the sheriff arrives. Then we can call the State officials. I’ve got to make a report of this as soon as possible.”

THE ISLE OF DOUBT

“Which is all the more reason,” declared Levis, “that we should know the full extent of the stolen funds. It may prove difficult, Wendell, to learn from which banks different amounts were taken.”

“Let some one else worry about that,” laughed Wendell. “Vincent, I’ll be secretary again. You stack away the goods—back in the boxes—and I’ll make the accounts.”

The investigator went into the little office, and returned with a large pad of paper and a pencil. Harry, still a bit shaky from the fray, began to call off stacks of currency.

IT was a grotesque scene: men engaged in listing recovered funds while the corpses of three dead crooks still lay upon the floor. But neither Harry, Wendell, nor Levis could feel a sense of pity for those criminals who had come here to slay. It was like the impersonality of warfare—a view of a miniature battlefield, where soldiers ignore the bodies of the slain.

Weston Levis, in suggesting that the funds be listed, had struck a chord of agreement. The thought of the recovered wealth was strong enough to take all minds away from those bodies on the floor.

Yet Harry Vincent, as he called off the numbers of bank notes, still remained perturbed. So far as Levis and Wendell were concerned, there was no reason why Harry should not be nervous. They did not know Harry’s true calling—that as an agent of The Shadow, he had encountered situations like this before.

Harvey Wendell had curbed his nervousness. The investigator had seen men die before.

Most surprising of all, however, was the calmness which had possessed Weston Levis. The old man, recovered from the fright that he had shown, was sitting as stolid as a statue. He seemed absorbed in watching the wealth that passed before his eyes as Harry Vincent dropped the bundles of bank notes back into the boxes.

It was the old man’s calmness that finally lulled Harry into a complete indifference regarding his surroundings. Now that the excitement was over, Harry, too, gained the fascination of counting off the vast supply of wealth. His tone became methodical. He turned to gold certificates and handled them rapidly. Liberty bonds and other securities; stacks of gold; all followed in turn. When the work was completed, Harry sat upon one filled box and Wendell rested on the other.

The investigator was calmly adding figures. Harry watched him, completely forgetful, of Weston Levis.

It was then that the old man uttered the first sound that he had made since the work had commenced. Harry heard Levis chuckle, and smiled as he caught the satisfaction in the tone. The chuckle was repeated—then again—and again.

Harvey Wendell looked up from his figures and stared toward the old man’s chair. Harry Vincent followed suit. Both men stared in astonishment at what they saw.

Weston Levis was no longer seated in his chair. The old man was standing, a revolver in his hand, facing the two who sat before him.

The threatening muzzle of the gun—the wicked gleam in the old man’s eyes—both were a menace more terrible than the entry of the crooks. From the kindly face of an elderly gentleman, Levis’ visage had changed to the countenance of a fiend.

THE ISLE OF DOUBT

Horror, more than fear, gripped Harvey Wendell and Harry Vincent. Both were armed with loaded guns, but freed from any dread of a new attack, the State investigator and The Shadow's agent had now pocketed their weapons.

The expression that Weston Levis wore was one that brooked no opposition. For an instant, Harry Vincent thought that the old man had gone mad. Then, the crafty glint of Levis' eyes was more apparent. Thin lips moved, and an evil voice spoke forth ironic words that could have come only by a man in full possession of a sound brain.

“You have done well,” sneered Weston Levis. “You have regained the stolen wealth. You have brought it here to me. The time has come for our accounting!”

CHAPTER XXII. THE REVELATION

WESTON LEVIS paused after uttering his first derisive statement. The old man was holding his revolver in a steady hand. His eyes were watching for any movement on the part of the two whom he covered. Harry Vincent and Harvey Wendell were both aware that a single motion would mean instant death. Levis seemed to read their thoughts.

“Death,” remarked the old man, “is not a bitter thought. View those corpses upon the floor. They were living only a short while ago. They are silent now—as you, soon will be.

“You are wondering if I have gone mad. Quiet your minds on that point. I am sane—and wise. You are sane—and foolish. You, Wendell, are the greater fool. Vincent's folly is excusable. He has not known me a long time.”

The old man paused to emit one of his derisive chuckles. He spoke again, eyeing both of the helpless men before him, but concentrating his remarks upon Harvey Wendell.

“You, Wendell,” remarked Levis, “considered Birch Bizzup to be a superior type of bank robber. You considered him to be a craftsman. You were wrong. He was nothing but an ordinary crook—backed by brains. My brains!

“I arranged Bizzup's forays; advised him where to strike. I was a man who served on many boards, but whose holdings were comparatively small. I designed the raids, and Bizzup did the work. This wealth which you have just been tabulating is Bizzup's share of the spoils. I received my percentage from every raid.”

Glittering eyes and leering lips—these were the features which predominated the old man's face. Weston Levis was revealing his part in crime. Harry Vincent, tense and worried, realized that he and Harvey Wendell were trapped by an arch plotter.

The Shadow was gone—that Harry knew from his observations by the window. Weston Levis had been more cunning than he knew. He had not only deceived the men who had found the buried money; to all appearances he had tricked The Shadow also!

“I knew that Bizzup was burying his wealth,” gloated Levis. “It was his share of the swag—he was welcome to it. Bizzup was getting dangerous, however. I gave him more difficult assignments. At last, when he was wanted dead or alive, he was taken—dead.

“The spoils that he had gained? You traced them, Wendell. When you told me of the island, I planned to aid you in your search. You followed my advice. No one but Hadley and myself knew what you were after here.

THE ISLE OF DOUBT

You kept your quest to yourself.”

AT that juncture there was a motion at the door. Hadley, leering as he swaggered into the room, stepped within range of vision, his hand upon his gun.

“You were doomed from the time you came here, Wendell,” pronounced old Levis. “Doomed if ever you found that buried wealth. Hadley and I were watching you. We let you search while we waited. We were wise.

“Three crooks arrived. A complication? Not for us. You were watching the crooks; you were reporting all that you learned to me. With Hadley in readiness, I was waiting for the turn of events I needed. It came, to-night.

“With Vincent, a chance entrant into the situation, you found Bizzup's store of wealth. You brought it here. When I ordered Wendell to get the sheriff, you were going to stow the money out of sight.

“You and Vincent were going to the island with the posse. Hadley, you thought, was to remain here. Not at all. He would have traveled with you, to shoot you in the backs when you reached the island. Those mysterious shots would have been sufficient cause for a posse to annihilate the three crooks.”

Levis laughed. With Hadley standing, gun in hand, the old man could relax his vigilance. He indicated the three dead crooks.

“Those men came here,” declared Levis. “They turned the tables; but I turned them back. Hadley had them covered. I gave him the signal, and he understood.

“He shot one down; but he lingered on the other two, long enough to let them fire. By all rights, you two”—Levis was scowling at Wendell and Harry—“should have died. I expected better marksmanship from those two crooks.”

Harry Vincent understood it all. He knew now why Hadley had faltered in his fire. The overseer had deliberately given the crooks an opportunity to kill the helpless men whom they were covering.

It was not faulty aim, however, that had saved Harvey Wendell and Harry Vincent. The intervention of The Shadow had been the cause.

The Shadow!

Dully, Harry realized that the confidence which Harvey Wendell had shown in Weston Levis was sufficient reason for the black-clad phantom to believe that the old man favored the cause of justice.

Somewhere in the night, Harry had heard the faint taunt of The Shadow's laugh—the sardonic tone which invariably signified the departure of the master warrior. Justice—to all appearances—had prevailed.

With justice triumphant, there was no further need for The Shadow's mighty presence. But justice had been balked. Victory was fading. Death was looming before Harry Vincent and Harvey Wendell, the two who had fought in the cause of right.

“DEATH,” remarked Weston Levis sarcastically, “is not a very great annoyance. Particularly when one dies honorably. Such death will be yours. Hadley and I intend to shoot you at the spots where you now are.

“We shall remove the spoils—Hadley and I. The wealth will go to the cellar of this old house, where Hadley has already brought the money which was my share of Birch Bizzup's loot. While you have lived here,

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Wendell, half a million has lain beneath your feet—in a small locked room to which I hold the key.

“It was best to have my own wealth here, where it could not be discovered. Birch Bizzup's share will be added to it. Then, while your dead bodies still lie warm, I shall call the sheriff. He will arrive to learn only of this bloody fray.

“A raid by desperate outlaws—a battle in which they died. You, Wendell—you, Vincent—will be dead heroes. Victims who fell while protecting a helpless old man.”

A pause; then Harvey Wendell uttered a hoarse articulation, a futile challenge which merely brought a mean laugh from Weston Levis.

“You can't get away with this,” asserted Wendell. “Your crimes will find you out—”

“My crimes?” Levis was ironic. “No one will suspect me of any crime. My standing is too high. All questions will be answered, Wendell. Your status as a State investigator will serve to my advantage.

“I shall explain how you were here, spying upon Zach Telvin, the escaped convict, who had chosen the island as a hide-out, along with other rogues. You, in turn, were spied upon. The crooks came here to get you.

“I shall attribute the victory to Hadley—tell how he entered the battle and slew the crooks after they had murdered you and Vincent. I, a helpless eyewitness, cowering at the end of the room, expecting to die also.”

Wendell had no answer. Harry Vincent knew that the investigator was at a loss. Weston Levis chuckled in a merciless tone. His mirth was the death sentence.

“We are ready, Hadley” said the old man quietly. “We shall make this finish a dramatic one. I am covering these men”—Levis was holding his revolver steadily—“and you can play your part with relish. Come in from the door; blaze away, and do your work.

“Do not fear failure. I am as sure a hand as you. These men are at my mercy also. They will find that the only mercy which I allow is that of quick and certain death.”

HARRY VINCENT, staring from the corner of his eye, saw a malicious grin appear upon Hadley's face. To give realistic touch to the approaching tragedy, the overseer turned and stepped beyond the door. Weston Levis, his eyes beady and cunning, held Harry Vincent and Harvey Wendell helpless.

“All tight, Hadley,” ordered the old man.

Foreboding gripped Harry Vincent and Harvey Wendell. They were staring at Weston Levis. They met the glint of the old fiend's eyes. They could hear a growl from Hadley beyond the door of the room. They saw Weston Levis turn to glance at the overseer.

Then came a startling change. The leer upon the face of Weston Levis turned to a soured expression. The glaring eyes blinked as they stared toward the door.

Harry Vincent, turning his gaze in the same direction, saw the cause —something which Harvey Wendell, from his angle of vision, could not observe.

The growl from Hadley—a heavy tread at the doorway—both had been deceptive. Some one had stepped through the opening, but the arrival was not the overseer.

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Weston Levis, his eyes mad with fury, was staring squarely at a tall form clad in black—a sinister being whose burning eyes outshone the maddened light of Weston Levis' gaze. Those eyes were the only features that were discernible. From between the upturned collar of a black cloak and the down-turned brim of a slouch hat, they peered like orbs of retribution!

Weston Levis, superfiend, was face to face with The Shadow. In place of Hadley, the phantom had returned. The invisible master of the night had come to meet the scheming crook.

Weston Levis had revealed his part in crime. Now, The Shadow had retaliated. He had revealed himself as a champion of justice!

The eyes of The Shadow shone like living coals!

CHAPTER XXIII. WEALTH RESTORED

FOR a long, lingering instant, the strange tableau remained unchanged. Weston Levis was staring at The Shadow. Harvey Wendell was gazing toward Weston Levis. Harry Vincent could see both Levis and The Shadow.

Then came the climax. With a venomous snarl, Levis whipped his revolver toward the phantom shape at the door. The old man's action was performed with amazing rapidity. Levis pressed his finger to the trigger.

A terrific report sounded from the doorway. The tongued flame of an automatic burst forth. The Shadow, his gun projecting from a hand that was close to his black cloaked form, had acted with his unflinching precision.

Weston Levis staggered. His gun hand faltered. The Shadow's bullet had clipped the old man's arm. There was method in The Shadow's aim. At the very instant when he fired, the black-garbed avenger had seen Harvey Wendell spring into action.

Desperately, the investigator had made a mad break for life. As Levis staggered back, Wendell was upon him, drawing his revolver. Wendell heard the roaring shot; amid the cannon-like report he sought to seize the fiend before him.

Madly, Levis tried to stop this new antagonist. He showed grim nerve as he wrested free and managed to raise his wounded arm. His aim was faltering; had it been true, it would have availed him nothing. For Harry Vincent, still watching the figure of The Shadow, saw that the avenger was ready to deliver another bullet.

Then Harry leaped into action, coming to his senses. He drew out his own gun as he sprang. It was a gesture on Harry's part; one that was unneeded, but which served as a role in the drama which The Shadow had created.

Covered by The Shadow's automatic, with Harry Vincent coming from the other side, Weston Levis was in a hopeless case. But with his evil frenzy, he was making a last vain effort to combat the man whom he had tricked—Harvey Wendell.

The investigator, forgetting Harry, and unaware of The Shadow's presence, was the one who acted. Seeing Weston Levis swinging a revolver in his direction, the investigator fired from three feet away.

Levis wavered. His fiendish expression faded upon his face. His lips twitched. He collapsed upon the floor. His revolver, no longer held by fingers which had worked with sheer determination, clattered upon the floor.

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Harvey Wendell stopped short as he saw the fiend fall. Realizing that he had delivered the fatal shot, the investigator stooped above the quivering body, forgetful of all else. He saw Weston Levis gasp, then caught the glassy stare in the old man's eyes.

Weston Levis lay still. He had proven his own statement: that death was no more than a quick, short episode, when properly administered.

HARRY VINCENT was looking across the room. Beyond the body of Weston Levis, past Harvey Wendell's stooping shoulders, Harry could see The Shadow. He caught the motion of the automatic, as it was replaced beneath the folds of the black cloak. He saw the beckoning motion of The Shadow's hand.

Then, with a quick swing, The Shadow turned. The cloak swished; Harry saw a flash of its crimson lining. Like a specter of darkness, The Shadow disappeared into the blackness beyond the door. Harry followed toward the door.

"Levis is dead!" Harvey Wendell looked up as he pronounced the words. The investigator was astonished to see that Harry Vincent was no longer beside him.

Then Wendell heard Harry's voice from the hallway. Realizing that new danger might be present, the investigator leaped up and hastened in that direction. The hallway light flashed on. Harry Vincent stood in view, pointing toward the veranda.

Wendell saw the indication. The screen door was half opened; blocking the path was a huddled form. Hadley lay motionless, wedged between screen door and doorway. The overseer's gun glittered upon the surface of the veranda.

"You got him!" exclaimed Wendell. "Great work, Vincent! Is he dead?"

"Knocked out," returned Harry quietly.

The Shadow's agent said no more. He did not tell what he now knew; that The Shadow, lurking in the darkness, was the person who had overpowered Hadley when the overseer had stepped back through the doorway.

Silently, effectively, The Shadow had dropped Hadley with a powerful blow. So cleanly had the stroke been delivered, that even Weston Levis had not known it. The appearance of The Shadow in the doorway was the first indication that the fiend had gained of Hadley's fate.

"Drag him in!" ordered Wendell.

Harry aided. He and the investigator brought Hadley's unconscious body into the living room. Wendell yanked away the overseer's belt, and used it to strap the man's arms.

"Great work, Vincent," complimented Wendell. "Say—when I jumped forward, I thought that Levis would get me sure. I heard the shot—you must have clipped his arm."

Harry smiled.

"And how you nabbed Hadley"—Wendell was continuing—"was the greatest piece of business yet. What did you do—head right for the front door while I was battling Levis?"

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"I moved there pretty quickly," declared Harry.

"You've got me stumped," admitted Wendell, rising to gaze admiringly at Harry. "The way you clouted me on the boat—that was smart enough. But this beats it by a mile. First you cripple Levis so I can plug him; then you knock out Hadley before he has a chance to shoot!"

Wendell looked at the boxes in which the wealth had been replaced, then pointed to Hadley's bound form. The overseer was feebly stirring.

"Lucky he's still alive," commented the investigator. "When we get his confession, it will incriminate old Levis. I'll call the sheriff; then put in a long-distance to St. Louis. We may need some officials up here. This mix-up is going to require some explaining—even with my credentials.

"Here I was watching you, telling Levis all about my suspicions. Then you turn out to be on the level, Vincent, and the old man comes out with the fact that he's crooked!"

ONE hour later, Sheriff Keegan was in possession of the plantation house. He had accepted Harvey Wendell's credentials; the fact that the investigator had summoned him here was also proof of Wendell's official status.

Wendell had vouched for Harry Vincent. Nevertheless, the sheriff, in view of the amazing circumstances which had been related, was awaiting further verification of Wendell's official position. Hadley, bound in a corner of the room, had maintained a sullen silence.

"I called the head of the banking commission," explained Wendell. "Got him over long-distance. There'll be men up from St. Louis by the end of another hour. We'll identify Zach Telvin positively; and when we quiz this fellow Hadley, we'll get results quick enough. We have the goods on him now."

A large iron chest was with the wooden cases which Harry and Wendell had brought from the cave beneath the rocks. This box was open. It, too, contained a huge sum of stolen wealth. The sheriff's men had found it in the cellar—Weston Levis' share of the ill-gotten gains. The key to the compartment in which the chest had been hidden had been discovered on the old man's key ring, along with the key to the chest itself.

Harry Vincent maintained a discreet silence. He had answered the important questions. He would be required to give his testimony later. With Wendell as his sponsor, Harry would encounter no difficulties.

Furthermore, he had dispatched a wire to Rutledge Mann. Papers would arrive to prove that Harry had actually been acting in the capacity of representative for a real-estate promotion plan. When The Shadow's agents fared forth on widespread quests, they were invariably backed by well-arranged plans for the establishment of identity. This emergency, so far as Harry was concerned, would be capably handled through Rutledge Mann.

Still a bit shaky, however, Harry gazed toward the open window. He forgot the men within this room—the dead as well as the living. It was the blackness of the night that fascinated him; that impenetrable veil through which the vast Mississippi coursed on its mighty way.

Strange events had occurred beside that river to-night. Right had triumphed over wrong, and through the conflict, with its unexpected developments, the power of a hidden hand had been the single factor in the victory.

Sullen crooks had failed in evil purpose. A crafty schemer had been brought to doom. The life of one wrongdoer had been spared. Hadley alone remained, in token of The Shadow's wisdom. The captured

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overseer could not remember what had happened in the hallway. He had not seen the hand that struck him down. He knew nothing of The Shadow's presence.

This time, Harry Vincent knew for certainty that The Shadow had departed. His work completed, the master fighter had gone. His campaign had been one of well-timed deliberation. His keen brain had sensed the situation in a moment.

The Shadow's vigilance had continued after his agent, and the State investigator had recovered Birch Bizzup's buried swag. The master of darkness had followed Harry Vincent and Harvey Wendell to the plantation house that he might witness the successful culmination of their efforts.

There, in one cool stroke, he had thwarted the attack of Possum Quill, Lefty Hotz, and Zach Telvin. In that activity, The Shadow had sensed the treachery displayed by Weston Levis, and his henchman, Hadley.

The Shadow had lingered on that account. He had waited for the climax. He had given Weston Levis the opportunity to reveal himself, to tell his story to men whom the old man had decided to slay.

The facts were known. From the lips of the supercrook had come statements which had led to the recovery of other wealth. Crime was nullified; evil schemes had been destroyed. Well did Harry Vincent, his thoughts upon the subject, realize the intuition of The Shadow—a power as great as the master's skill in decisive action.

Where was The Shadow?

That question was one which Harry could not fathom. The Shadow's presence was like the unending flow of the great Mississippi—a mysterious force that left one in awe—a power that seemed mightier than the hand of man.

Yet there was an answer to Harry's question—a sinister reply that was uttered miles away. It came from the darkness of a speedy sedan that was rolling along the highway to St. Louis.

The Shadow was at the wheel of that mystery car, returning to his headquarters in the Missouri city. The headlights of the speeding sedan revealed an approaching car that was coming from St. Louis. Ere the cars had passed each other, The Shadow had divined the identity of those who occupied the other automobile.

The men whom Harvey Wendell had summoned were on their way. They would arrange the return of the recovered wealth. Money and bonds would be restored to their rightful owners.

The sedan was speeding on alone. From its darkness came the echoes of a weird and appalling laugh—uncanny tones vibrated in a cry of strident mirth.

Whirling along beside the silent Mississippi, The Shadow had sent forth his final burst of mocking triumph. Eerie echoes caught the sardonic merriment.

When the lights of the sedan had vanished past a bend, taunting whispers still persisted, like ghostly symbols from a mystic past.

The Shadow, master of the night, had declared the final token of his victory!

THE END