

THE DEVIL MONSTERS

by Maxwell Grant

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CHAPTER I. WHEN HORROR STALKED

GREAT, swaying trees loomed monstrous in the night, like creatures beckoning humans to disaster. Tossed by the tempest, those shapes were living things, hurling themselves forward in fantastic fashion, only to stiffen, then lunge with new threat.

Veering suddenly, the roadster drove straight for the mass, as though inviting its embrace. Momentarily, the headlights were blotted out; then a gateway opening showed a curved drive beyond. Passing beneath the swooping boughs, the car was literally swallowed by the blackness.

It was like entering a giant's mouth, for from all about came a grinding sound resembling the champ of mighty teeth. But the driveway continued its curve as the headlights illuminated the course; while the grind was only that of intermingling boughs grating under the power of the wind.

High above, the shriek of the storm was lessened, muffled by the very trees that furnished the horrendous groans. At least, the gale itself seemed far away, which was helpful. It was soothing here beneath the interlacing branches, and the car's slackened rate was a pleasant contrast to the high speed with which it had raced the approaching gale.

Lamont Cranston spoke to the girl beside him. His tone was easy, smooth as the motor's purr:

“Still scared, Margo?”

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There weren't any lights to display the glance of indignation that Margo Lane promptly gave. Still, it was an even break for Margo, because Cranston would easily have seen that her expression wasn't genuine. The girl's face was still pale, and justifiably so, considering how the car had roared across shaking bridges and skidded through the mud of landslides on its way to Glendale.

It was like Cranston to ignore all hazards in reaching a destination. His policy of speed, hair-raising during the process, had justified itself by its conclusion. For the road behind was getting worse under the combined fury of wind and rain. There hadn't been a safe stopping place anywhere along it.

Since Cranston couldn't see Margo's face with its forced expression of bravado, the girl spoke in a tone which was really firm.

"Scared?" she repeated. "Why should I be, Lamont? We're here, aren't we; riding along Farman's driveway?" A moment's pause; then, with a light laugh, Margo added: "If this is Farman's—"

The shriek that interrupted was Margo's own. All her forced courage vanished as she clutched past Cranston's arms to reach his shoulders. Carrying herself half across the wheel, Margo wasn't helping Cranston's driving, but she didn't care. She wanted him to stop the car, and quickly, what with the creatures that were rising up to overwhelm them.

Things that sprang from the ground and lurched forward across the car, their eyes sharp, brilliant dots that blinked from blackness. Shapes from a nightmare, that brought to reality all the fearful rumors concerning Glendale and its surrounding terrain.

Margo's cry stifled as the car jerked to a stop. She was in a grip that she recognized and appreciated: Lamont's. There was security in the pressure of his arms, and his quiet laugh, though obviously at Margo's expense, was filled with reassurance. Lifting her eyes, Margo looked for the monsters.

There weren't any.

Those rising things were tree trunks, situated on an embankment, which accounted for the sudden way in which they had sprung up. As for the blinking eyes, they were just the lights of Farman's sprawling house beyond the tree-fringed terrace. They'd seemed to go on and off because the driveway's curve allowed the trees to intercept them.

So quiet was the motor, that Margo could hear new sounds from the woods. Creeping sounds, that were probably caused by the rain as it sifted through the interwoven boughs; scurries as of little animals seeking deeper shelter against the storm. Curious noises that might be the hoot of owls or the distant calls of nocturnal beasts. Those weren't things to be feared, even though they were strange.

EASING back to her own side of the car, Margo expected Cranston to drive on. She felt that her action was sufficient, and she didn't want to add a verbal request in a tone that she knew would be too choky. Her fright was over and she wanted to forget it.

But Cranston didn't start the car. Instead, he stooped his head toward the wheel, pressing Margo's shoulder so that she would bend forward, too. Then in the most natural of tones, Cranston said:

"Keep watching, Margo. Above Farman's house."

It came again, the thing that Cranston had noticed—a flare of greenish light, like a puff from a blast furnace. It couldn't be sheet lightning, not that color; besides, it was too low and too close. It might have come from the

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roof of Farman's house, which etched its assorted gables against the green flare.

The strange gush disappeared, as though the gale had snuffed it. Again there was blackness, save for the lower lights that represented Farman's mansion, feeble glimmers compared with that vanished wave of vivid green. From above, trees moaned, as though their waving tops had played a part in wiping away the eerie glow. Margo shuddered, brought her fingertips into a tight clench on Cranston's arm.

“Whatever it is, Lamont”—odd how the sigh of the trees encroached upon Margo's whisper—“it makes me think of those... of those devil monsters they've reported here at Glendale! The creatures that we've come to investigate!”

Cranston's laugh was singular. It had a creepy note that should have increased Margo's shudders, but didn't. It was the mirth the girl wanted to hear—the tone that identified Cranston as that most mysterious of all humans, The Shadow!

Such a pronouncement was an antidote to the present situation. Certainly no horror that stalked by night could outmatch the prowess of The Shadow, whose own ways of mystery surpassed belief. Even the fury of the elements faded from Margo's thoughts as she heard the reassurance of The Shadow's whispered laugh.

Again the green flare flickered beyond the thickness of the weaving trees. This time it was brief, evasive, as though the wind smothered its first efforts.

Cranston's voice spoke calmly:

“Take the wheel, Margo; drive up to Farman's. The house is just past the next turn in the drive. Wait for me there; Farman is expecting us.”

“But I've never met Farman,” began Margo. Cranston's return to his own self worried her. “What's more, you don't know him very well. It may be that he doesn't want us—”

The laugh of The Shadow intervened, more expressive than words. It covered the very point in question. If James Farman, Cranston's only acquaintance in Glendale, happened to be the man responsible for rumors of queer monsters seen in this vicinity, he would naturally be discouraging visitors, although pretending to welcome them.

The Shadow was taking the best possible measure to nullify any claptrap on Farman's part. Should that green flare be a mere preliminary, things more weird would happen as soon as Cranston's car came within sight of the house. But if the car contained only Margo, while The Shadow was watching from some better vantage point, all efforts at synthetic horror would be nullified.

More than that, Margo would have the backing of The Shadow as an outside force. Her trip to the porte-cochere that fronted Farman's mansion would be a convoyed expedition, once she swung past the last curve in the drive and reached the open stretch.

A hand had drawn Margo behind the wheel. She heard the swish of a cloak and knew that Cranston had donned the black garb that distinguished him as The Shadow. Looking toward where Cranston's face should be, Margo saw only darkness. She knew that her companion's features were hidden by the brim of a slouch hat.

In this setting, The Shadow was quite as invisible as legend claimed he could be. His whispered tone was like something gathered from the wind, to fill a voice beside the car:

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“Count ten, Margo... slowly. Then start!”

Margo counted ten as slowly as her nerves would let her. Across the path of the glowing headlights, she saw a singular streak of darkness that stretched suddenly upward to merge with the trees of the embankment. Confident that The Shadow was taking the short cut to open space in front of Farman's house, Margo finished her count quite calmly and thrust the car into gear.

Ahead, the drive showed its last wide sweep, skirting the embankment. A swing around that turn and the goal would be reached, under The Shadow's guidance. What might happen after that, Margo could accept without concern. The Shadow would handle whatever could occur.

But the last twist in the driveway was the nerve-taker. Despite herself, Margo let the accelerator travel to the floor just after she pulled the gear into high.

Timed to the car's lurch around the final bend came another burst of eerie green, like a torchlight stabbed into the sky itself. For one breath-holding moment, Margo saw Farman's mansion loom against the emerald setting; then, with equal swiftness, the whole picture was blotted out.

It wasn't that the green flare ended. That vivid burst had not reached its peak. Something came between it and the lunging car; something bigger than Farman's house, that swooped down from the sky itself, a monstrous mass of furious blackness that lived!

MARGO'S own shriek was drowned by the brakes, which she jabbed too late. Already the thing had the car in its grasp and was ripping away the stout top of the roadster like so much tissue paper. Fierce was the clutch of claws that jabbed through to seize their human prey.

The car itself was lifted by that grip; then, as it jounced back heavily to earth, Margo was struggling in the air, fighting at talons that carried her helpless. Her dress ripped as she twisted in the pincer grip, but the creature did not let go.

Amid the whirl, Margo saw two things like eyes, orbs that had the fury of living coals. From somewhere else she saw two stabs of flame, that might have come from the treetops for all that Margo knew, though they were accompanied by bursts like those of guns, lost quickly in the rising roar of the wind.

With a final twirl, Margo received a forcible blow upon the head, as though the clawed creature had purposely crashed her against something solid to end her pitiful struggle. With the jolt, the talons closed tighter, completely ending all resistance.

Her scream ending in a hopeless sob, Margo Lane was enmeshed in utter blackness that swallowed her within its mighty maw, her only solace being the fading of her senses, nature's one remedy against this horror of the night!

CHAPTER II. GONE WITH THE GALE

TWO vivid eyes, as green as the fading flare, blinked off as The Shadow jabbed his gunshots. Coming out from the trees as the car's motor ended with a choke, The Shadow was wheeling around in the space that fronted Farman's house, seeking to cope with a menace as black-hued as himself.

A great, weaving bulk, the thing first seemed to be much like the swaying trees; but those blinking eyes were low, far closer to the ground than they should have been, considering the creature's size. It was that very fact that gave The Shadow the impression of a monster on the lunge. Accordingly, he reversed his course with a

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long swift stride, intending to outflank the creature.

Whatever the beast, it had taken Margo as its prey. Its size, its power could not, did not, matter. All The Shadow wanted was another sight of it, to jab more shots at something as vulnerable as its eyes. Given the right angle, he might be able to distinguish Margo from the creature that had seized her—an important point, where The Shadow's gunfire was concerned.

Whatever the creature was, its behavior was most erratic. Swinging to look for it, The Shadow couldn't see the thing at all. Whether it had leaped, flown, or spun away in gyroscopic fashion, The Shadow could not tell. For all he had to go by, the monster, if such existed, might have burrowed underground.

There were whirring sounds that might be just the wind whistling among the trees. Swoops of blackness could be simply the bending trees themselves. What The Shadow wished for was another flash of that green flare—which might help somewhat, even though Farman's house blocked it. At least it would give The Shadow a skyward view, which seemed more important than a look along the ground.

Light came suddenly from an unexpected source, giving The Shadow the opposite of what he wanted.

Farman's front door was flinging outward and the light came with it, accompanied by voices. Taking direction from the glow that was partly obscured by the porte-cochere, The Shadow made another turn that ended in a quick, instinctive drop.

Blackness wasn't coming from the sky; it was lower, almost at The Shadow's shoulder, lunging in what seemed a massive kitelike shape. So odd was the illusion, that it wasn't credible. Though huge, it lacked the utterly tremendous bulk that The Shadow had gauged earlier. If real, this blackness could only be a portion of the first, assuming the original to be existent!

Rather, this growth of blackness might be a fleeting shade caused by the sweep of light from Farman's front door. That it was such seemed proven when The Shadow, lunging in the opposite direction, heard a snarl that brought him to his feet, thrusting his gun straight ahead.

Though the bulging blackness was behind The Shadow, the glowing eyes were in front!

Higher than his head, those eyes faced The Shadow; eyes that belonged to the snarling monster of the night. A creature which, by present proportions, must be a dozen feet in height! Not only that, the thing had seen The Shadow and was already springing in his direction with a speed and power that would render a close-range gunshot useless!

The Shadow made a low, quick forward dive that carried him right beneath his hurtling foe. Ending in a roll, he brought up against something solid as he came about with his gun, intending to blast the creature that had overleaped its mark. What The Shadow saw against the vague light from Farman's doorway was even more amazing than all that had gone before.

The thing that had leaped for The Shadow was a great beast that could have been aptly described as a hell-hound or a werewolf. It wasn't a dozen feet high, though it was plenty large enough. Its stature had seemed enormous because the thing was springing from a high embankment, against which The Shadow's roll had ended.

Having missed The Shadow, the mammoth hound was after something else, as was apparent by its leap. Again, The Shadow saw the vivid glow of eyes, more yellow than green due to the difference of the reflected light. They belonged to blackness that seemed to spread like bat wings. Reaching that mass, the hound lurched

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high in air, as though encountering something solid.

Turning his gun toward the enfolding blackness, The Shadow fired. Seemingly, that one shot dispelled the whole illusion, like a pin point bursting a bubble. The hound was gone as completely as though it had been summoned back to some infernal domain. The folding blackness had turned itself into a void. It was gone too, like something traveling into another sphere of space!

THERE was just one argument to shatter this fourth-dimensional concept. The eyes still remained, but they were no longer part of the thing that owned them. Spread apart, they were close to the ground, with a space of twenty feet between them.

Sharp, yellow eyes, focusing on The Shadow as if in new challenge to the cloaked fighter who was rising from the ground. Eyes that might incredibly gather themselves together and come boring in The Shadow's direction, bringing the monster with them!

It wasn't strange that The Shadow should gain the wild impression, considering that first Margo, then the hellhound, had been gathered into space by this creature that dematerialized the victims it gulped, only to come back for more.

Timely shots might cause it to disgorge its double feast, and The Shadow hoped that the party of the first part, Margo, would still be intact and alive.

So instead of waiting to see the thing materialize, The Shadow blazed quick shots at the spot where it most probably would be, between the brilliant and converging eyes. His bullets whistled through space and chipped the stone of Farman's portico. That was bad in itself, but the sequel was worse, and for a few brief moments more startling and incredible than all that had gone before.

The eyes of the creature answered The Shadow's fire with gunshots of their own!

Fortunately, the first bullets peppered wide. Before more came, The Shadow's wits were back. Those glowing things weren't eyes; they were flashlights carried by two of Farman's servants, who had rounded the ends of the portico and were rushing to the scene of trouble. They were thinking in terms of monsters and living blackness, but they were identifying The Shadow as both!

Away with quick, elusive strides, The Shadow was leaving the servants quite as baffled as himself, when they stared toward the spot where he had been and saw only the blank embankment. If his own evanishment had been his only worry, The Shadow could have completed it with ease. But he still was thinking of that other blackness more massive than himself, and there was a bulk of it that seemed to whirl beyond the corner of Farman's house.

Pausing in his tracks, The Shadow fired. The wind rose in a gleeful howl, as though relishing the effect of the gunshots. For those jabs from The Shadow's muzzle produced the biggest result yet.

One blast and the blackness beyond the house was gone. Another, and a terrific crash sounded; with it, a whitish ghost appeared, ten feet high and a dozen feet across, literally to explode in a spray that included splintering posts and a collapsing roof.

There wasn't anything ethereal about that object. It was a solid structure that broke apart as though The Shadow's bullets packed the power of half-ton bombs. Apparently the cloaked fighter had wrecked a pergola on Farman's lawn, a well-constructed summerhouse that was painted white.

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At least the servants gave The Shadow credit for the deed. They dived away, not wanting anything to do with a marksman whose bullets were nothing short of dynamite. There were others, however, who didn't view the singular catastrophe around the corner.

One was James Farman, in person, a rangy man who was toting a shotgun as he came out from the portico; the rest were guests at his house party, and were similarly armed.

They spied the dodging servants, saw the motions they made in The Shadow's direction. Shouting for the weaving fighter to give himself up, Farman and two friends drove forward to surround him. They were almost upon the vague, crouching figure when it gave a lurch straight toward them. Without arguing further, all three let rip with their loads of buckshot.

The figure didn't even reel. It simply swayed, remaining erect. Farman and his friends were dropping back, too startled to let their shotguns fall, when the servants, thinking the monster had been slain, arrived with flashlights to disclose the facts. The charges from the shotguns had done some trifling damage to one of Farman's prize forsythia bushes, with which the lawn was well fringed.

A simple deception on The Shadow's part of a dozen shrubs would have attracted mistaken gunfire, considering how lifelike they looked under the continued sweep of the gusty gale. Having made a few mistakes of his own, The Shadow was leaving further errors to others while he tried to rectify his own.

One fact was certain: in this medley of real and fanciful, where the nearest thing to an actual monster might prove to be nothing more than a large hound, Margo Lane had disappeared. When The Shadow had last seen Margo, she was in the roadster; therefore, the next step was to find the car.

DIM headlights still were glowing before the embankment at the last turn of the driveway. Springing down from the bank, The Shadow was caught in midair, much as Margo had been in the final stages of her nightmarish adventure. Clutching talons caught his cloak and ripped it from his shoulders, while his slouch hat was swept from his head. But the claws were nothing more than tree branches that covered the stalled roadster.

Sliding downward, The Shadow settled into the car; as he did, he heard a moan above him. Finding a handy flashlight, he turned it up through the ripped top and saw Margo perched most uncomfortably among the boughs of the fallen tree. The girl was much disheveled, but apparently unhurt.

Instead of climbing up to rescue her, The Shadow hauled down his cloak and hat, stowed them deep in the car, and settled behind the wheel to wait for Farman and his companions, who were coming in this direction.

Reaching the car, Farman helped Cranston out and heard him mutter something about a crash. The scene apparently explained itself: a tree uprooted by the gale had fallen across the bend of the driveway and Cranston had driven into it. The ripped top wasn't much of a surprise, considering that the branches could have hooked it.

But when Cranston groped about looking for someone else, and finally ended by staring blankly upward, other faces began to show surprise. The roadster must have made a sudden stop indeed to pitch Cranston's girl friend clear through the wrecked top into the branches on the upper side of the fallen tree.

The servants climbed the car and helped Margo down. Cranston caught her as they slid her from the side of the car. Her dress dangling from one arm, Margo rubbed her hand against her head, where she had bumped the tree trunk. To her returning senses, things seemed more bewildering than ever.

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Apologizing for his oversight in not checking the condition of the driveway, Farman led the way into the house, the servants following with the luggage from the roadster. While Cranston was relating a simple but coherent story to the guests, Margo went upstairs and changed to another dress.

Rejoining the group, Margo took Cranston's cue and told a simple story, too. They'd struck the tree so suddenly, she hadn't realized what it was. Of course, she'd been tossed higher than Cranston, because he was at the wheel. Cranston himself had already advanced that simple explanation for Margo's surprising flight.

Warming his hands at the fire, Farman laughingly turned the conversation to the subject of monsters. There'd been talk of such things around Glendale; "devils," the natives termed them. Imaginative people, the local townsfolk, and superstitious, too.

Still, Farman couldn't blame them. Farman was from New York, like other residents of Glendale, and all were owners of large estates. Being from the city, he didn't believe the outlandish tales he heard. Nevertheless, Farman's own imagination had run riot this evening, and his servants had shown even wilder trends.

"Fancy it!" laughed Farman, turning his sharp eyes about the group. "I thought I saw a fellow in a black cloak shooting at something around the corner of the house! A ghost that turned out to be a forsythia bush!"

Even Cranston smiled at Farman's account.

"But the servants"—Farman peered through the doorways of his broad living room to make sure that none were within earshot—"do you know what they thought they saw? They imagined that they saw it change itself into a big bat that became a man!

"The old vampire stuff; they probably heard it wherever they came from originally. But they said the thing had a gun that could curve bullets around the corner of the house. When the gale ripped the pergola, they thought the creature's gunfire did it!"

One listener, at least, could credit the last part of the tale. Knowing the ways of The Shadow, Margo recognized that he had been in action and that the servants had exaggerated his performance. But Margo was quite willing to discount her own impressions of the things that happened earlier.

AFTER they left the living room, Margo waited for Cranston on the landing of the stairs.

"What a fool I was," confided Margo, in an undertone. "Actually, Lamont, I thought a great creature seized me with its tremendous claws. And all the while there was nothing out there!"

"Nothing at all," assured Cranston. "Nothing except a hound the size of a wolf that tangled with something three times bigger that snatched it off to nowhere."

Margo's eyes went startled.

"You're serious, Lamont?"

"I ought to be, Margo. Those creatures mixed it up just long enough for me to get out of range. But if you want proof, think this over. I wasn't behind the wheel of the roadster, as I said. You were driving the car."

Slowly, Margo nodded.

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“Then what did you do?” queried Cranston, in a whimsical tone. “Crawl out and climb to the top side of the tree yourself? You couldn't have been tossed that far, you know. Not from behind the steering wheel.”

There was sheer desperation in the sudden clutch that Margo gave to Cranston's arm, but the return pressure of his hand was soothing. He assured Margo that whatever the menace that lay abroad, it could hardly penetrate indoors.

As if to corroborate Cranston's statement, a green light flickered from beyond the window of the stair landing. Brief but weird, the glow showed a mass of distant treetops waving against the night sky; then the flare vanished.

Cranston's good night was a whispered laugh, an echo from the past. When one mystery could produce another and return to the starting point with both unsolved, The Shadow had found a fitting challenge to his skill at unraveling strange riddles!

CHAPTER III. MATTERS OF MONSTERS

MORNING dawned crisp, clear and cold, for this was the late autumn season. At breakfast, Farman showed himself the perfect host; he was more than glad that Cranston and Margo had become guests at his extended house party. But while he spoke, Farman was suggesting a fact that he didn't mention: namely, that some of last night's guests had left.

Gradually, Farman worked around it, though he still hedged the question.

“Never a dull moment here at Glendale,” he asserted. “I should have told you that before, Cranston. Perhaps you would have paid an earlier visit here. You like adventure.”

Cranston nodded. Noted as a world traveler, he couldn't deny Farman's statement. Both men were members of the Cobalt Club, one of Manhattan's most exclusive men's clubs, but Cranston had previously side-stepped Farman's invitations to visit Glendale.

What Cranston didn't state was that his sudden willingness to join one of Farman's house parties was because of recent happenings in the vicinity. However, Farman was shrewd enough to take that for granted. He immediately brought up the subject.

“Whatever is going on around these parts,” declared Farman, “it's really serious. When two men are killed on two successive nights by something that literally mangles them, it's bad business, even if the victims did happen to be trespassers.”

Cranston's quizzical stare took Farman's attention from Margo's sudden shudder.

“Trespassers?” queried Cranston. “On whose property?”

“One was on the Grebb estate,” replied Farman, gesturing toward a corner of the dining room. “Over to the northeast of here; a big place owned by old Dariel Grebb. He's a retired banker, who owns about half the county.”

“And the other?”

“That was on Althrop's place,” informed Farman. “You've heard of Roscoe Althrop, the big shipping man. He lives to the northwest” —Farman made another gesture—“and he owns the other half of the county. No, I

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guess I'm exaggerating." Farman shook his head. "Let's call it a third of a county each, otherwise there wouldn't be room for the rest of us."

Breakfast being over, Farman suggested that they go outdoors and view the terrain from his rear lawn. Once outdoors, they postponed other matters to look at the tree, which the servants had sawed in sections to remove from the driveway. Going around the wide, old-fashioned house, they made another stop to look at the remnants of the pergola.

"That wind was heavy last night," observed Farman. "I'm not surprised that it ruined the summerhouse. It must have come up inside the roof and turned it inside out, like an umbrella."

The estates owned by Grebb and Althrop occupied distant hills in the directions that Farman had specified. Their houses, however, were not visible among the thick woods that topped the slopes. But straight to the north, beyond a valley behind Farman's property, was a house atop a midway hill, a mansion that looked old but sizable. Cranston casually inquired who lived there.

"A fellow named Leonard Thull rents it," explained Farman. "Why he picked it, I don't know, because it's been empty for years. Maybe Thull rented it cheap. Still, they say he's worth a lot of money. He's some sort of a promoter."

"He might be working on Grebb or Althrop," suggested Cranston. "Promoters usually sell ideas to wealthy people."

"Not to those two skinflints," returned Farman. "Whatever they promote, they do on their own."

"You mean they are partners?"

"Partners!" Farman guffawed at Cranston's question. "Say, if any two men hated each other, Grebb and Althrop win first claim. They both picked properties in Glendale so they could make their grudge last longer. In a couple of years they'll hold a silver jubilee.

"I wouldn't want to be Thull, living halfway between that pair. He's liable to get caught in the middle if Grebb and Althrop try dirty work on each other. Suppose we go downtown to the coroner's inquest this morning. They'll both be there, exchanging mutual glares."

While Farman was getting the car out, Margo put a question that was on her mind. Eagerly, she asked:

"That green glare last night, Lamont—whose place did it come from, Grebb's or Althrop's?"

"Neither," was Cranston's reply. "I'd say it was on a direct line with Thull's house. Let's hope he's at the inquest, too."

ON the way downtown, Farman kept pointing out trees, fences, and even bridges that had suffered from the storm. Either he was trying to justify his own fallen tree that had nearly ruined Cranston's roadster, or he was trying to prove his theory concerning the destruction of the summerhouse; perhaps both.

Whatever Cranston's opinion, he didn't express it; but Margo was bored by Farman's endless chatter on the same subject. However, things promised to be interesting when they reached the county courthouse. Quite a crowd was assembled to hear the coroner's verdict on the double inquest. Getting the nod from one of the attendants, Farman ushered Cranston and Margo inside.

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Grebb and Althrop proved to be very much alike, despite their personal differences. Each was seated at the opposite end of a long table, and both had lawyers as spokesmen. Looking them over, Margo couldn't choose between them. Both were stoop-shouldered and crab-faced; but Grebb had a crop of short-clipped gray hair, whereas Althrop was quite bald.

If anything, Grebb's features were more wrinkled, but it looked the other way about, because Althrop's greater range of forehead revealed more furrows simply on the basis of a larger visible area. Another difference was the way they glared. Grebb did it with deep-set eyes that narrowed darkly, while Althrop pushed his whole face forward and opened his eyes wide.

Each was obviously trying to prove something on the other. Neither would admit that trespassers were common on their respective properties, the implication being that the other might sent a snooper over to see what was going on around his rival's place. But they couldn't afford to press such accusations, Grebb or Althrop, because both were in the same boat.

They left most of the testimony to their servants, and there wasn't much to choose between. Grebb's servants said that they had heard screams shortly after dusk, four nights ago, and had found a dead man, his throat badly torn, his body twisted and broken, lying by a stone wall near Grebb's house.

Althrop's men spoke similarly of a death one night later; but the victim on Althrop's premises had been found in the rocky bed of a small brook below an old mill dam. His throat was likewise torn, his skull fractured, with both legs and one arm broken.

The coroner, a dry-faced man who answered to the name of Squire Bates, proceeded to call upon a most unusual witness, who had been close to the scene of both crimes. The witness was named Jed Guphrey, and when the fellow took the stand Farman undertoned, unnecessarily, that Jed was the village half-wit.

Huge of body, but small of head, this specimen of undeveloped mentality looked about with vacant, colorless eyes and gave a wide, idiotic grin that showed empty spaces where teeth should have been. Questioned by the squire, Jed became as voluble as his limited vocabulary would allow.

"I seen 'em!" Jed asserted. "A-lyin' dead, the both of 'em! I seen it, too."

"One moment, Jed," snapped the squire. "When you say 'it', to which case do you refer?"

"Nuther on 'em," returned Jed. "I mean the thing that done the killin' on 'em."

"Describe it for us."

Jed's description was inconsistent, to say the least. On the first occasion, he'd seen the "devil," as he termed it, bounding from one stone wall to another. He'd heard screams, and had next observed the curious killer leaping from the top of an old barn next to Grebb's property. People who had listened to the stone-wall incident began to exchange doubtful looks when Jed described the barn jump.

Pleased by his own story, Jed became more graphic with the next case. He'd seen the devil monster hop from a ledge on Althrop's premises and disappear into a woods. Hearing screams, he'd chased after the thing, to see it fling a shrieking man from the edge of the old mill dam. It had then thrown rocks at the victim, until Jed arrived.

"You know what I done then?" Jed gave an idiotic laugh. "I picked up a rock myself, like this. An' I huv it at the critter."

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The nearest thing at hand being the witness stand, Jed hoisted it. His strength was formidable, for the stand was braced to the floor by heavy angle irons that Jed wrenched loose as a mere matter of course. Needing a “critter” to represent the devil monster, Jed picked the squire, who scrambled underneath the table while four men were trying to release Jed's grip on his improvised rock.

Angrily, Jed swung the witness stand about, clearing everybody from a six-foot circle; then, disgruntledly, he flung his plaything to the floor and smashed it.

Inasmuch as the witness stand was constructed of solid oak, the power in Jed's brawny arms was very evident, for the solid stand splintered in the same fashion as Farman's pergola.

“I warn't goin' to hurt you, squire,” grumbled Jed. “I was a-tellin' as to how I missed the devil with the rock, so I gotta miss you, wouldn't I? Only, you don't jump nigh onto half as far as the critter done.”

Crawling out from cover, the squire inquired testily how far the devil monster had jumped from the edge of the mill dam. Jed's answer on that point was so utterly fabulous that it practically wrote his testimony off the record.

“Clear over the moon,” asserted Jed. “Right on tother side on't! Guess I musta scart 'um.” And he went off into a gale of foolish laughter.

THE squire adjoined the inquest with a verdict of death by misadventure in both cases. Most of the assemblage, Grebb and Althrop included, went out by the main door, though Margo noted that the two crab-faced gentlemen were keeping decidedly aloof, each with a lawyer as a spearhead and servants as a screen for better progress through the throng.

Farman was following after them and Margo was about to go along, when Cranston pressed her arm.

“Wait a moment,” Cranston undertoned. “Let's see which direction Leonard Thull takes.”

Margo's expression was quizzical; she wondered how Lamont had identified Thull. With a smile, Cranston caught the unspoken question.

“That's Thull, over there.” Cranston pointed to a stocky man whose back was turned. “Farman just pointed him out.”

Margo's impression of Thull was confined to flannel shirt, slacks and heavy walking shoes, for the stocky man went out through the rear door. Following, Cranston's arm swept Margo back every time Thull looked around.

Not realizing that he was being trailed, Thull went down a flight of stairs to a rear alley behind the courthouse. Stopping just within the lower door, Cranston and Margo saw him climb into a car, his back still turned.

Nor did Thull show his face as he started to drive away. The last thing he did was turn his face toward the rear seat and make a sweeping gesture at something that reared clean up to his shoulders. The growl from the creature in back was drowned by Thull's own snarl, as he voiced angrily:

“Down, Buskin!”

Then the car was gone, Thull and the creature with it, and Margo was staring aghast at Cranston. It seemed strange that he should take the situation so complacently after his experience of the night before. For to Cranston, this was like a meeting with an old friend—or perhaps foe.

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If anything, the beast that belonged to Leonard Thull exceeded the huge description of the mighty hellhound that The Shadow had seen engage itself with a black-winged devil monster in a battle that had ended with a mutual vanish!

CHAPTER IV. CASTLE CHANDOS

ONE thing was evident in Glendale: Not only had Jed Guphrey established himself as the village half-wit; he had won the title of champion liar on a world-wide rating.

On every corner, people were laughing about the way listeners had been drinking in Jed's story of a fabulous devil monster that used stone walls as springboards to reach barn roofs and threw people from the brinks of mill ponds so that it could chuck the dam after them. Just a wonderful build-up for Jed's payoff of the creature's mighty jump that had carried it clear over the moon.

Waiting while Farman saw some friends and Margo did some shopping, Cranston listened to the local reactions toward Jed's testimony. Then, strolling across the street, he entered the town's small hotel and took a leather-cushioned chair that faced the brass-railed window.

Disgruntled reporters, here covering the devil story, were checking out and going back to New York. As the others left, one of them, a wiry young man, paused to take the chair next to Cranston's. This chap was Clyde Burke, of the New York Classic. He was also one of The Shadow's secret agents.

"Hello, chief," spoke Clyde, without turning his head. "That inquest story sure was a convincer... the wrong way!"

"The moon story sounded new," conceded Cranston. "It wasn't in any of your previous reports, Burke."

"Jed never got that far before," explained Clyde. "It sounded all right up to that point. Now, the editors will laugh at it. I'll be on a different assignment tomorrow, when I ought to be out here scouring the county some more."

"Anything so far to support Jed's story?"

"Not much that makes sense. Some farmer claimed he heard something hit his barn roof like a ton of coal, but he'd been drinking too much applejack. That stuff goes bam all by its lonesome!"

Clyde pulled a road map from his pocket and spread it, as though asking Cranston's advice on the best route back to New York. What Clyde actually did was mark the places where he had made inquiries on the devil rumors. The map also showed red crosses marking the homes of Grebb and Althrop, with a blue one indicating Thull's residence midway between them.

"Here's an interesting thing," observed Clyde, drawing his pencil southward to the thin lines of a dirt road that ran between Thull's house and Farman's. "Interesting because it's negative. There's a big house tucked away in that valley by the old road. One of the queerest places you ever saw, chief. It's called 'Castle Chandos.'"

The slight steadying of Cranston's impassive eyes was the only indication of his rising interest.

"No reports of monsters from that area," hastened Clyde. "Castle Chandos is like an oasis in all the turmoil. Still, it ought to make a good central location for learning what goes on elsewhere. Particularly with things happening here"—Clyde tapped the red cross marking Grebb's estate, then moved across and did the same with Althrop's—"and here."

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Cranston took Clyde's pencil and made a red X on the map to indicate Farman's house. Calmly, he added:

“And here.”

From then on, Clyde listened breathless to Cranston's experiences which he had encountered as The Shadow. Those details only emphasized the importance of Castle Chandos as a calm spot in the midst of furor.

When Clyde was leaving, he heard the question that he had been expecting more and more. Cranston expressed it almost idly:

“Who lives in Castle Chandos?”

“An old fellow who calls himself Compeer Chandos,” replied Clyde. “They've named the castle after him. He's lived there for years, but nobody knows much about him except that he's never caused any trouble.”

MEETING Margo and Farman at the courthouse, Cranston found them discussing the relative merits of Glendale's prize “crabapples”—Dariel Grebb and Roscoe Althrop. Since Cranston showed some interest in the miserly pair, Farman decided to drive home by a roundabout road that would take them past the mansions of the men in question.

The houses proved as similar as the men who owned them, though the buildings could only be viewed from a distance because of the extensive grounds surrounding them. Farman was heading home down a long sweep to the east of Althrop's, when Cranston pointed out a dirt road leading to the right and remarked that it looked like a short cut.

“It is,” agreed Farman, “and we'll take it. I've just thought of something else I ought to show you.”

Deep in the valley road, Farman stopped in front of a great stone gateway that was flanked by a high picket fence. Through the bars of the gate, he pointed out a huge, square-walled building that looked like a gigantic citadel. The massive structure was built entirely of dark-gray stone, with a castellated roof four floors above the ground. Usually such baronial buildings were situated on hills, but this one happened to be tucked in a secluded vale.

“Castle Chandos,” stated Farman. “I forget what it was originally called, but we've named it after the man who lives there now. He calls himself Compeer Chandos.”

Margo was particularly intrigued by the rare plants that skirted the castle grounds, some actually in bloom, which was unusual for this late season. There were rock gardens, too, with curiously colored stones that couldn't be native to this terrain. Margo was still studying this delightful scene, when Farman decided to drive along.

On the way back to Farman's, Cranston defined the title “compeer” as meaning “an equal” in the sense of rank or prowess. Farman agreed that the definition was an apt one.

“Old Compeer Chandos is an equal, all right,” declared Farman. “He's equal to himself. He's probably traveled to every part of the world, civilized and uncivilized, bringing back rare plants and rocks. The whole interior of his castle is a huge hothouse converted from an old courtyard. That's where he cultivates his plants. The rocks take care of themselves.”

“Is Chandos there at present?” inquired Cranston.

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“Yes,” replied Farman. “He’s getting too old to travel as far and often as he once did. They say he mulls over his books and tends his plants while his servants take care of him. Shipments keep coming in for him at the express office; mostly minerals for his collection.

“Poor old Chandos! He doesn’t know what’s going on, not only in the world at large but right here in Glendale. All this crazy devil business passes him right by; or if we went on Jed’s say–so, we could say that it jumps over Chandos and his valley.

“Nobody would bother Chandos like those prowlers did at Grebb’s and Althrop’s, only to lose their lives. First of all, they’d have to find the castle, and once finding it, they’d stay away. That valley can get real spooky when the mists begin to rise around the castle. They say the will–o’–the–wisp is often seen there. You know; that colored gas that looks like flame, sometimes called ‘marsh fire.’“

There was a definite point to Farman’s final words, enough to keep Margo thinking all that afternoon. Reports of colored marsh gas in Chandos’ valley would account for the weird green flickers that Margo and Lamont had seen the night before; therefore, if Farman had seen the flare, he might not have given it more than passing attention.

But would that account for lurid light on such a large scale? Margo doubted it and her mistrust extended to James Farman. He was a shrewd sort, Farman, wealthy in his own right, though he never talked about how he had made his money.

Even Cranston knew little about Farman. The invitation to visit Farman’s house was the standing sort that Farman had extended to various members of the Cobalt Club.

Many of Cranston’s friends pressed him to visit them, and he’d accepted this invitation only because Farman happened to live in Glendale. Somehow, Farman’s mention of marsh fire impressed Margo as an alibi, much like his acceptance of the fallen tree and the ruined pergola, things which Farman blamed entirely on the gale of the night before, in the same breath laughing off all talk of monsters.

AFTER dinner, Margo’s theory was further justified. In the gathering dusk, Farman went out to look at the wrecked summerhouse. The moon was rising, huge and vivid, through the woods flanking Farman’s lawn, and the glow showed the shrewd look that Farman suddenly turned toward Cranston.

“See how those pergola posts are splintered?” queried Farman. “It reminds me of what happened to the witness box when Jed Guphrey threw it across the courtroom.”

Cranston’s lips showed the flicker of a smile.

“You don’t think that Jed could have torn up this summerhouse and ripped it the same way, do you, Farman?”

“Not on his own,” returned Farman. “I’ve already blamed the gale for most of it. But suppose Jed had been prowling around here the way he admits he was at Grebb’s and Althrop’s. If he’d been on the run and the pergola was in his way, he’d be just fool enough to try to shove it over. Such a heave might be all the wind needed to do the rest.”

Pausing, Farman stroked his chin as another idea struck him. This thought was more pointed than the pergola theory.

“Maybe it was Jed who mangled those victims,” declared Farman. “He could have told his devil story for an alibi. Getting to the spot where he feared questions, he switched to the moon jump. I think I’d better go

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indoors and phone Squire Bates, so he can check on Jed.”

Hardly had Farman left before Margo was pouring out her own impressions to Cranston. Adding things up as she went on, Margo actually claimed that Farman was pinning things on Jed to keep his own slate clean. In the midst of all the devil–monster chatter, Margo exclaimed suddenly:

“Of course, there was that huge beast of Thull's—”

“Probably a large mastiff,” interposed Cranston. “Thull wouldn't be exhibiting such a huge dog too publicly, not with all the wild rumors now in circulation. Get back to the devil monster, Margo.”

“It couldn't have been Jed,” vouchsafed Margo. “He isn't big enough, nor strong enough, even with all his bulk. Besides, there can't be any such creature as the one described.”

“What! No devil monster?”

“Of course not! If we believe anything that Jed said, we'd have to swallow all of it. He claimed that the thing jumped clear over the moon.”

Pressing Margo's elbow, Cranston turned her toward the trees through which the moon was rising. Hearing a slight sound from the thick boughs, Margo was startled for the moment; then she laughed, relieved. The creature that Lamont indicated was only a squirrel, perched on a bough just to the left of the moon's great disk.

“Watch the squirrel,” suggested Cranston. “It's going to spring to the other tree, over at the right. After it does, tell me exactly what it did.”

Conscious that it was being watched, the squirrel made a quick scramble along the bough and took a long, arching leap. As the little creature landed on the limb of the other tree, Margo's breath came with a sudden gasp.

“Why—it jumped right over the moon!”

“Precisely,” declared Cranston, approving Margo's verdict. “That's what Jed saw the devil creature do. By my calculations, the moon must have been somewhat higher than is tonight, but it wasn't more than a few degrees above the horizon.

“Jed didn't claim the monster jumped from the near side of the moon to the far. He meant that it cleared the moon from left to right, or vice versa, just as you saw the squirrel do—a natural description for a person of Jed's mentality to give. He would think of the moon like a tree, a house... or a barn.”

So that was it!

There was more that followed Cranston's analysis. Margo heard the swish of a cloak and turned to see her companion placing a slouch hat on his head. Again The Shadow, Cranston was starting off to the garage where Farman's servants had placed and patched the roadster. Eager, Margo trotted along with The Shadow, keeping his cloaked form visible against the moon.

Firm hands halted the girl and steered her toward the house. Margo's protests were promptly smothered by a whispered voice.

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“Remember your own suspicions, Margo,” advised The Shadow. “Farman still needs watching, and that's to be your job. Besides, you'll have to cook up a reason why I drove into town.”

The Shadow was gone, his parting token a whispered laugh that Margo half guessed was at her expense. From the house, the girl saw the roadster coast from the garage and go out by the rear drive that led to the valley road. As the car disappeared beyond the slope, Margo looked toward the valley itself.

At that moment, a green light flickered. It could have been the will-o'-the-wisp, so quickly was it smothered. The flare couldn't show in the brilliant moonlight as it had against the scudding clouds accompanying last night's gale.

Weird, that light, like a sinister beacon! Whether in welcome or in warning, it was inviting The Shadow, intrepid venturer of the night, to the place called Castle Chandos!

CHAPTER V. VALLEY OF AMAZEMENT

CONTRARY to Margo's expectation, The Shadow did not go directly to Castle Chandos. There was another place he wanted to investigate first—a house that Farman hadn't shown him along the detour back from town. The house in question belonged to Leonard Thull.

Situated between the mansions of Grebb and Althrop, Thull's place occupied what might have been termed the apex of a broad but squatty triangle, the base of which was the straight line between the homes of the rival misers.

The road didn't follow the straight line; contrarily, it swung way around the hill in back of Thull's, following a valley as the dirt road did past Castle Chandos. So instead of traveling a long, unnecessary distance, The Shadow parked his car not far from Althrop's house and followed the very stream that came from the old milldam where Jed had seen the devil monster make its second kill.

Reaching the millpond, The Shadow surveyed briefly evidence that supported Jed's story. The dam itself was in ruins and a great gap showed on the edge. Below, half blocking the little brook, was a large broken stone, probably the rock that Jed claimed the monster had thrown at its victim. But it was quite conceivable that the huge stone had merely been dislodged, rather than hurled.

However, the moon was right. The dam faced south. Looking from the pathway on the west side, The Shadow saw the moon through a low clearing a dozen feet to the right of the dam. The pathway probably represented Jed's own angle of approach, which meant that the moon jump could have resembled the squirrel's antics, but on a much larger scale.

Nevertheless, Jed's devil monster must have made an actual take-off from the dam, to rise above the angle of the moon's upper edge. Such a feature did not cause The Shadow to question the half-wit's story; on the contrary, the cloaked observer compared it with his own experience.

If monster there was, at Farman's last night, it had certainly left the premises with terrific speed, enough so to make the leap from the milldam plausible. Considering his own experience in terms of Jed's description of the creature seen at Grebb's, The Shadow recalled mention of a similar take-off from a barn roof, which could be compared, in turn, with the umbrella top of Farman's pergola.

A laugh stirred the moonlight as the cloaked shape of The Shadow merged with the trees that flanked the pathway. The Shadow was continuing his shortcut to Thull's midway house.

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The question of mastiffs was answered as soon as The Shadow reached Thull's premises. There were two great dogs of that breed chained near the house, each having a large kennel. But neither animal was Buskin, the dog that Cranston and Margo had seen in Thull's car. These two were Lodi and Presto; their names were inscribed on their kennels. A doghouse that bore Buskin's name stood empty between the other two.

Together, the two great dogs raised their heads and growled, though they couldn't see The Shadow against the darkened background of Thull's house. They settled down again as a door opened just around a corner and two men appeared. Evidently the dogs had noted the opening door, which was where The Shadow couldn't see it.

One man was Thull, distinguishable by his heavy build. Observing Thull's face in the moonlight, The Shadow saw that it matched his stature. It was a broad, flat face, with heavy jaw. Seen in profile, Thull's lower lip displayed a thrust as conspicuous as his very blunt nose.

The man with Thull was much younger and rather handsome in a rugged way. His high-cheek-boned face had a hard-boiled expression that might have been a pose, for his thin nose and lips were of somewhat sensitive mold. Thull was attired in slacks and flannel shirt, and the younger man was wearing slacks and sweater. The cap that tilted sideways from his forehead matched his dark costume but didn't cover his wavy blond hair.

"I'm telling you, Weldon," argued Thull in an ugly tone, "I can't afford to let the dogs loose. With all this crazy talk about devils, the hounds might be mistaken for them."

The mastiffs didn't snarl as the men approached the kennel. Thull was doing that for them. Weldon's reply came in a hard, somewhat contemptuous tone:

"Buskin was loose last night."

"I'll swear he wasn't!" Thull said. "Buskin tangled with his chain when the gale overturned the kennel. That's how his leg was hurt. You're a fine person for me to hire, Weldon! Next thing, you'll be claiming that my dogs killed those snoopers who were looking in on Grebb and Althrop!"

"I wouldn't know," assured Weldon coolly. "Those deaths happened before I arrived here."

Thull raised his fist savagely. Instead of making a defensive gesture, Weldon turned sharply on his heel and started toward the house. The mastiffs, rising with a growl, settled back beside their kennels. Abruptly Thull overtook Weldon, gripped his arm and spoke in a tone entirely changed. His voice was a wheedling whine.

"Be reasonable, Stan," argued Thull. "You came here knowing what the job would be. Why balk at the last moment?"

Halting, Stan Weldon looked Leonard Thull hard in the eye and rendered final verdict.

"If you let me take the dogs," spoke Stan, "I'll go to Castle Chandos. Otherwise the deal is off."

With a shrug and the muttered words: "You win!" Thull went over and released the mastiffs. The dogs evidently knew Stan well enough, for they followed when he snapped his fingers. Flanked by two powerful mastiffs, Stan was off on the mission ordered by Thull.

Behind the man who strode toward the deep valley followed an unseen figure of blackness: The Shadow!

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UNDER the hush and shelter of great trees near Castle Chandos, Stan Weldon paused and watched a sudden greenish flicker. It wasn't low, as marsh fire would have been; the flare came from the top of the castle itself.

Unfazed by the singular sight, Stan spoke low orders to the mastiffs accompanying him. The well-trained beasts deployed toward the clearing and scattered there, motionless, at Stan's low-whistled signal.

The posting of the dogs benefited The Shadow. He was able to move closer on Stan's trail as Thull's hireling crept across the open ground to the castle. Side-stepping a patch of rock garden, The Shadow used a clump of dark-flowered shrubs as background and watched Stan move along the forbidding walls of Castle Chandos.

Evidently Stan was seeking a way into the place, a task which even The Shadow deemed quite difficult. The windows were set high from the ground; their dull light, trickling in varicolored hues, showed them to be made of stained glass, and more. The metal joints between those colored panes were more than ornaments; they served as bars against such prowlers as Stan.

Skirting the house, Stan took a glance at the huge front door and decided not to try it. From another angle, The Shadow, ever watchful, saw the prowler start forward eagerly. Past the front door, on the other side, was a new extension of the castle, partly obscured by trees. Rising to a two-story height, the new wing resembled a conservatory, with many windows and a sloping roof which probably had a row of skylights.

At least Stan could climb up and peer in through those windows, if nothing more. Such seemed his obvious intention, when he paused and reversed his route for a trip around the house. It was better to keep clear of the front door, where the servants of Compeer Chandos were apt to be on watch.

A low fog was already creeping through the valley, its effect being visible by the way it dimmed the moon, producing rainbow rings around that silver orb. But the moonlight was blocked off at the rear of the bulky castle; another reason why Stan preferred this route. Nevertheless, the man stayed a reasonable distance from the shrouding wall, which was black behind the castle, rather than gray.

There was just enough reflected glow to keep the prowler visible from The Shadow's range of some twenty feet. But where Stan could be seen, his trailer could not. The Shadow formed a darkened swirl in the gathering mist; nothing more. His figure was too vague to be defined as an existing shape.

It was The Shadow's recognition that his own invisibility was not quite perfect that gave him the impression of a strange thing happening up ahead.

Somewhere about the halfway point behind the house, another follower took up Stan Weldon's trail, coming between The Shadow and the man ahead. Yet The Shadow, whose eyes could pierce darkness as effectively as it shrouded him, was unable to see the person who had cut into his path.

Literally, The Shadow's trail was intercepted by some creature whose invisibility was total!

What The Shadow did was sense the presence of the thing. He could almost hear it as its motion became more apparent. The Shadow could feel traces of its footmarks when he reached them. But this new figure in the valley of amazement caused no swirl in the slight fog, as did The Shadow. Not for an instant did The Shadow lose sight of Stan Weldon, twenty feet ahead.

Whatever the thing that moved between, The Shadow was seeing right through the space where the creature should have been!

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To The Shadow, nothing was incredible. He applied logic to facts that other persons would brand as fancy. In this case, certain points were evident. Though the mystery monster might be transparent to human vision, its bulk was definite and its substance solid. Otherwise, its creep would be weightless and consequently undetectable.

Pulling out an automatic, The Shadow increased his pace, drawing closer to Stan and the thing that intervened. His free hand stretching ahead of him, The Shadow was expecting to pluck something out of nothingness and deal accordingly. With every stride, he could sense the invisible creature more plainly, even to feeling the tremble of its footfalls, scarcely more than an arm's reach ahead!

Just beyond was Stan, almost within grasp of the invisible thing. He must have sensed its loom behind him, for he turned abruptly in his tracks as he passed the final corner of the castle. The Shadow saw the glitter of a revolver that Stan produced with a sweep in the arriving moonlight. An instant later, the light was blotted out.

The revolver and the man who aimed it were both erased by a gray shape of human size that arrived between Stan and The Shadow as suddenly as if the ground had disgorged it!

It was the invisible creature, revealed to human sight apparently of its own choice and accord!

THE SHADOW saw short arms, with jabbing, clawlike hands pouncing for their human prey. Sleek but plump, the creature lunged to an attack that almost overwhelmed Stan. His gun gave a single jab in air as his attacker pawed it aside; then The Shadow was springing on the creature from behind, slugging his automatic for the narrow, bowed head that hunched from its massive shoulders.

The impact of that blow was dulled by what seemed a thick, padded helmet. Beady eyes darted sharply at The Shadow's, right on a line with his own, as the ponderous but agile creature swung about and gave him a sweeping claw. The monster seemed half beast, half human, as it swayed between the grasp of two opponents.

Into that fray came two new fighters, to side with The Shadow and Stan Weldon. They were Thull's mastiffs. Anything but gun-shy, they bounded from opposite directions, lunging their great forepaws to the top of the whirling fray. The first dog's jarring weight reeled the battle away from the castle corner, where the heave of the second mastiff halted the eccentric whirl.

It was at the moment that The Shadow gave a hard, side-arm swing of his gun, hoping to hit the gray creature's vulnerable neck. What the weapon met was another gun, arriving from the opposite direction: Stan's revolver. Steel clashed steel, and from the force of their blows the two sluggers locked under the pawing push of the giant mastiffs.

No longer was a hunched and clawing monster the center of the fray. By its self-disclosure the creature had proved that it was solid, but in returning to invisibility it had vaporized as well, leaving its foemen, human and canine, to decide their own issue among themselves.

Like the gray ghost it appeared to be, the mystery monster was gone, as though the fog of the amazing valley had absorbed it!

CHAPTER VI. VANISH FOLLOWS VANISH

IN all his experience, The Shadow had never met with a situation matching this. It was something that called for time out, to allow for cold consideration. To meet a monster that was real, and viciously so, only to have it melt the instant it was surrounded on all four sides, was indeed a matter for sober thought.

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What made it all the more impressive was the effect upon the dogs. Presto and Lodi weren't creatures to be deceived as humans could be. The mastiffs had arrived with all their animal instinct on the alert, hard upon the trail of prey. To find their own paws interlocking, their green eyes glaring at each other, was something that baffled beast as much as man.

Such amazement was short-lived. Not that the great dogs solved the riddle any more than their temporary master, Stan Weldon. They simply switched their objective, as he did. For there was a stranger in their midst, a being who, under present circumstances, rated as a foe:

The Shadow!

The gray thing could belong to the gathering fog that it matched in substance as well as color. Like Stan, the dogs picked The Shadow as the vanished monster's logical successor and turned their attention his direction. Stan's lunge came in the form of a driving gun swing that pitched the dogs apart. Hitting on all four feet, they bounded about, ready to follow their master's call.

The Shadow didn't waste an instant. He knew that a brief grapple with Stan would make him prey for the hounds. Should he turn his attention to the dogs without settling Stan's case, he would be a target for revolver shots. So The Shadow handled Stan first.

Shorter, faster than Stan's stroke, The Shadow's own swing came up to his attacker's jaw. Packed with the added weight of an automatic, that well-placed punch resembled a brick wall. It jarred Stan clear from his feet, flattening him back upon the turf a dozen feet farther from the corner of the castle.

With a quick twirl, The Shadow was away as the mastiffs pounced for him. His spin didn't stop; instead, it became a complete reversal, ending with a headlong dive between the converging hounds. It was a trick that rabbits had been known to use, instinctively; The Shadow was applying it through reason. But it wasn't The Shadow's way to relegate himself to the category of a rabbit.

As the mastiffs flung about to overtake him, The Shadow changed the direction of his dive. Hitting the ground on hands and knees, he bounced upward like a missile from a petard, his free hand jabbing for the first dog's jaws. Like a band of steel, The Shadow's fingers tightened around the beast's snout, closing its mouth and cutting off the breath from its nostrils.

While one dog writhed, the other tried to bound around its obstructing mate. With a backhand swing of his gun, The Shadow cuffed the second mastiff so forcibly that it lost its balance and wallowed like a puppy. On his feet again, The Shadow flung the first dog aside and turned to dart beyond the corner of the castle.

Things happened in such close-packed time space that they seemed instantaneous, though they couldn't possibly have been.

In that quick roll to his feet, The Shadow saw Stan Weldon prone upon the ground a dozen feet away. To reach the corner, The Shadow had to clear Stan's half-stunned figure, which was all the better, since sight of Stan might divert the mastiffs from pursuit. But when The Shadow sought to gauge his spring across the human obstacle, the hazard no longer existed.

One moment, Stan Weldon had been lying on the solid ground; the next, he had vanished as if that very earth had swallowed him!

It was more baffling than the sudden appearance and disappearance of the bulky, solid creature that had proven itself a gray ghost. This happened some twenty feet away from the spot of the first occurrence, and it

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was a certainty that Stan couldn't have performed this vanishment on his own.

The ground here was solid enough, too, for The Shadow's own feet were thudding the very spot where Stan had sprawled. Another case of the utterly impossible turned real, but this time with an amendment. What The Shadow hadn't seen or sensed, Presto and Lodi must have.

Instead of seeking the cloaked fighter who had flung them from his path, the two great mastiffs gave sudden yelps that would have shamed a Pekinese. Hearing those bleats, knowing that something formidable must have inspired them, The Shadow hooked the stone corner of the castle as he passed it and came full about, a few feet beyond.

Looking back, his gun swinging to aim, the mystified master of mystery looked for explanations—and saw none.

As if to taunt The Shadow, the scene disclosed itself in every detail. The revealing factor that offset the thickening mist was another glare of the green light that Castle Chandos so frequently disgorged. This puff must have been long muffled, for it burst from the castle top with flickers of reflected flame.

Vividly, the emerald brilliance split the thin fog and showed every detail of the ground beyond the corner, so far as The Shadow could view it from his present angle, which was sufficient, because he saw the grass where Stan had sprawled, even to the detail of the flat-pressed blades.

Most certainly Stan Weldon had vanished, and Thull's mastiffs were disappearing as fast as they could go.

One was hopping a clump of bushes with purple bell-flowers; the other had cleared a sizable rock garden with a dolphin fountain in its center. As trees enveloped them, The Shadow could hear Presto and Lodi crashing through the underbrush, bound for their kennels by the shortest route.

By then, the green flare had ended, leaving thick blackness which at least could shroud The Shadow from sight of any new creatures that might arrive. Inasmuch as such visitors would probably be invisible, it was just as well that The Shadow had acquired such a state. But it still didn't solve the riddle of Stan Weldon.

The answer came only because The Shadow's senses were completely keyed to the impossible. In such concentrated state they could actually outmatch instinct. There was nothing that The Shadow could see, touch, or even smell. He was able to hear, but the sound that reached his ears was nothing more than the snapping of a few dead twigs. Still, the intuition of his other senses applied themselves to aid The Shadow's earshot.

Those faint snaps placed Stan Weldon. They were the muffled proof that the vanished man had crashed to earth at least fifty yards from Castle Chandos!

Something seemed momentarily to blight the dull moonlight that trickled past the roof edge of Castle Chandos. Looking up, The Shadow saw that he was beside the glass-walled extension that Stan had chosen as a goal. But the windows were high above the ground and their panes were very small, ribbed with thick metal frames. Moreover, that wing of the castle was totally dark.

The thing to find was Stan Weldon, or what was left of him. Gliding away from the castle, The Shadow let his senses guide him. If something had told him of Weldon's true fate, the same uncanny sense combination must have provided the location, too. For once, The Shadow preferred to travel blind.

Through trees so thick that they completely cut off the moonlight, The Shadow reached an obstruction that he recognized—the picket fence that flanked the gateway of Castle Chandos. The very trees that had been so

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troublesome could now prove helpful. Gripping the boughs above him, The Shadow scaled to one so stout that it didn't yield until he had crawled almost to the fence spikes.

Pressing downward, outward, The Shadow took advantage of the bough's flip and cleared the spiked fence. Landing in the middle of the dirt road, he saw the trees that flanked the other side—a mass of thick evergreens towering above an enormous rock that was skirted with large bushes.

Lying in that tangled thicket, as definitely placed as if an invisible finger had pointed him out, was Stan Weldon!

REACHING the sprawled man, The Shadow found that he was still alive; moreover, he did not appear to be seriously injured. The answer lay in the trees above the thicket. They were thick cedars, with springy, flat-needled branches. Assuming that Stan had covered the distance from Castle Chandos in one flying bound, a crash among the cedars would be the happiest of landings.

Breaking the man's fall, the boughs had dropped him to the ground, where the bushes had served as a further buffer. Stooping, The Shadow lifted Stan by the shoulders and found that he was not dead. The question was whether to carry the unconscious man to the roadster, or bring the car here to pick him up.

That depended on the possible existence of a further menace. His senses again keyed to the situation, The Shadow raised suddenly and whirled about. He hadn't forgotten the great rock, a boulder ten feet high, that reared very close to the spot where Stan's human cannonball act had terminated.

With a lunge, The Shadow met the thing that was springing down upon him, a monster that might have fitted any description. Its leap was like one of Thull's mastiff's. Its arrival was as sudden as that of the solid ghost of gray. From the way it darked out the moonlight's trickle, it could have been the black mass of huge proportions that had identified as a fallen tree, but which The Shadow still believed was something else.

This thing from the rocky perch might be the devil monster that Jed Guphrey had actually seen jump over the moon!

Nevertheless, The Shadow met it bare-handed. He caught the creature at the belt line and let his knees grip the rock, so that his arms could deliver a backward fling, propelling the living menace along the route of its own inertia. By letting the thing use its momentum to aid its own disaster, The Shadow was lessening his task.

Victory proved easier than The Shadow expected. His deflected drive was perfectly timed and placed. The attacker from the rock concluded his pitch with an enormous somersault that landed him a dozen feet beyond where Stan Weldon lay.

Disentangling itself from the brush, the creature staggered out into the road and paused there long enough to identify itself by angry fist shakes, supplemented with guttural shouts. The thing from the rock was just the opposite of what The Shadow had supposed it might be.

It wasn't the monster whose flight Jed Guphrey had witnessed and described. The creature was the half-wit in person!

Jed was used to laughs. Listeners had provided plenty at the inquest. But Jed had never heard mirth like the sort that now dented his eardrums. The tone was unearthly, ghoulish in its mockery, a taunt that would have fitted the devil monster that twice had crossed Jed's path.

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It came from blackness, the gibe that The Shadow gave. The same blackness that had spun Jed like a whirligig and which now showed eyes that glowed like living coals. As to its size and shape, the half-wit was no longer sure. He'd seen darkness stir below the rock and hadn't supposed that it contained a thing as large and as formidable as his favorite devil monster. But Jed's leap had convinced him otherwise.

Down the road went Jed Guphrey, with bounding leaps that were his imitation of a monster's moon jump. If Farman had been present to view that flight, he'd have used it to further his argument that Jed was the devil monster. A little thing like a summerhouse wouldn't have stopped Jed's rush for safety under the pressure of his present panic.

Behind him, Jed left a cloud of dust thicker than the fog that was gathering about Castle Chandos. From that filmy swirl, as though belonging to it, trailed the weird echoes of The Shadow's laugh, speeding the fugitive on his way!

CHAPTER VII. FACTS DISCLOSED

WHEN Stan Weldon opened his eyes and looked about, his gaze was startled. Not that there was anything horrible in these surroundings; quite the contrary. It was the fact that Stan expected almost anything else that caused him to be puzzled.

This scene was quite too composed.

Perhaps that was due to the influence of a calm man whose profile was slightly hawklike. Naming himself as Lamont Cranston, this leisurely individual turned to introduce Margo Lane, a brunette whose poise and sparkle made an instant impression upon Stan.

Still, Stan didn't know in whose living room he was, until Cranston announced James Farman as owner of the house.

Margo saw the way in which Stan's features stiffened, only to relax into what could be termed their usual hardness. It was palpable that his pose was a matter of practice or habit. Evidently, Stan's business was the sort that required such a manner. Though Cranston already had some inkling as to the business, he did not mention the fact.

Instead, he spoke in a most casual way.

“Lucky you showed me that short cut down through the valley,” remarked Cranston, addressing Farman. “If you hadn't, I wouldn't have found this chap lying in the road right by that place with the big gates. What did you say its name was, Farman?”

“Castle Chandos,” replied Farman, looking hard at Stan. “Named after its owner, Compeer Chandos.”

“I remember now,” nodded Cranston. “Anyway, that's where I found—“ He paused, gave a complacent glance at Stan, and added with a slight smile: “That's odd. I didn't think to inquire your name.”

Stan clapped a hand to his inside pocket. He wanted to learn if he still had his wallet with its identification cards. He half suspected that this was subterfuge on Cranston's part; but the wallet was still there.

Stan's lips firmed to suppress a smile; this could be deeper strategy on the part of Stan's rescuer. Perhaps Cranston had examined the contents of the wallet and replaced it while Stan was still unconscious.

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So the smart thing was to play aboveboard. As though honesty were really the best policy, Stan opened the wallet and passed his business cards around. The card stated:

STANLEY L. WELDON

Confidential Investigator

The first person to comment was Farman. He gave Stan a sharp-eyed look and said in a contemptuous tone:

“So you're just a private detective.”

“Investigator' is the word,” retorted Stan, brandishing one of his cards. “You see, Mr. Farman”—Stan's eyes narrowed, like the pair that met them—“my chief work is insurance investigation. I only handle other cases as a side line.”

Farman's wince was too apparent to escape notice.

“Don't worry,” continued Stan. “I'm not here on your account. None of the big insurance companies are making further probe into the fire that destroyed your shoe factory a few years ago. Of course, you did retire from business immediately after you collected the insurance money—”

“Because I was ready to retire,” interrupted Farman. “I was too well along in years to start all over again. I'd made it plain that I wanted to sell the business.”

“But there were no buyers,” reminded Stan. “That was another reason the insurance companies thought you'd chosen a fire as a quick method of liquidating your assets. But as I said, they've shelved the matter. That's the latest on the subject, Mr. Farman.”

For one thing, Stan had given Margo information as to Farman's wealth. Her previous suspicions regarding the man seemed justified by the stigma the factory fire had caused. Still, Farman's fire might have literally been all smoke, with no blame attached to him; however, Stan's mention of the case had strained the present situation.

Cranston smoothed it with the idle query:

“What does the initial 'L.' mean in your name? Livingstone, I presume?”

“That's it,” replied Stan, with a sheepish grin. “Stanley Livingstone Weldon is my full name. They named me after my uncle, and he was born about the time Stanley found Livingstone.”

EVEN Farman smiled, which showed that the tension was over. Pouring a glass of brandy, Farman politely offered it to his new guest. To Margo, Farman's manner placed him in a better light; still, she noted that Farman's expression remained foxlike.

Stan observed it, too, and was rather pleased. He felt that he was tucking Farman back into his pocket along with his wallet. Whatever Stan might reveal about this evening's misadventure, and its causes, Farman would keep a close mouth on the subject, rather than offend a man who could reopen the insurance investigation.

As for Cranston and Margo, Stan already felt that he could trust them fully. He was sure that Cranston knew more than he had stated; therefore, it would be good policy to straighten him on other facts. Since Margo appeared to rely on Cranston's opinions, what she might learn wouldn't hurt.

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Briefly, Stan declared that he was working for Leonard Thull; that his express purpose was to bring back facts regarding Compeer Chandos. He told how he had come down the hill with the dogs, only to run into trouble near the house. But Stan's mind was somewhat hazy as to what had happened there.

First, Stan remembered a hunch-shouldered attacker in gray, who had either disappeared or changed into a creature resembling a human bat. The monster must have tried to fly off with Stan, for he'd landed in the road outside the grounds of Castle Chandos.

Margo could picture Jed as the first attacker; The Shadow as the rescuer that Stan had mistaken for another enemy. But she couldn't imagine how Jed had slipped The Shadow, nor how even the cloaked fighter could have pitched Stan so far.

While Margo pondered over that double mystery, Farman switched the subject. Accepting Stan's account with a shrug, Farman suddenly demanded:

"But why did Thull send you to check on Chandos?"

"I'll tell you why," returned Stan frankly. "Old Chandos is broke, or nearly so. Those two skinflints, Grebb and Althrop, know it, and they're taking advantage of the old compeer."

Cranston saw avid interest in Farman's eyes.

"Thull is a promoter," continued Stan. "He knows that Compeer Chandos must have something other than those plants and rocks on which to spend his fortune. Something, perhaps, involving both—that Grebb and Althrop are trying to get at a bargain."

Farman was becoming more intrigued.

"Bidding against each other!" mused Farman. "Or maybe Grebb and Althrop are in cahoots! That wouldn't surprise me; they're both smart enough to drop a grudge in order to make big profits. Go on, Weldon, while I pour you another brandy."

Resuming, Stan asserted that Thull had moved to Glendale in order to contact Chandos. The promoter's plan was both simple and fair; he wanted to outbid Grebb and Althrop on whatever Chandos might have to offer. But Thull had deemed it wise to learn what the proposition was, before announcing his attention.

Moreover, he'd foreseen, Thull had, that his arrival might rouse the suspicions of Grebb and Althrop. The first few weeks had justified that opinion. Snoopers had shown themselves on Thull's premises, so he'd imported three mastiffs to keep future visitors away.

"That's how I came in," completed Stan. "A friend of mine supplied the dogs and mentioned my name to Thull. When this devil-monster business started, Thull became worried. He thought Grebb and Althrop might be trying to pin something on him because of the mastiffs. So he sent for me, hoping I could hurry up the Chandos angle."

Cranston's eyes were complacent, but Farman's showed suspicion. Bluntly, Farman suggested that Thull might have sent men to check on Grebb and Althrop before hiring Stan. Such would account for the deaths of prowlers on each of the large estates, the men whose murders Jed had described as the work of a devil monster.

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“I don't think Thull sent those chaps,” argued Stan. “I'd say Althrop and Grebb hired them individually, each trying to check on the other. I know that Thull thinks so.”

Before Farman could offer any other comment, Cranston put the steady-toned words:

“Tell us what else Thull thinks.” It was more a command than a query; furthermore, Stan grasped the whole content, probably because of Cranston's tone. It was a direct call for Stan to declare whatever he had learned about the proposition that Thull wanted to promote, rather than have Grebb or Althrop swindle Chandos out of it.

ODDLY, Stan found himself anxious to tell Cranston. His doubts were solely confined to Farman, even though the latter was generously proffering another brandy. In a way, the brandy was a catch, because Farman might be spending it to loose Stan's tongue. But that didn't matter, because inwardly, Stan had the thought that Farman wouldn't believe the thing anyway.

“You'd like to know what Thull is after?” Stan looked from Cranston to Farman. “I've told you my middle name. All right, tell me the first name of Compeer Chandos. The term 'compeer' is just a title, you know.”

Cranston glanced at Farman, who shook his head.

“Never heard the name,” said Farman. “Never even thought about it.”

“It's Paracelsus,” stated Stan. “That's what Thull told me. Paracelsus Chandos is the compeer's full name.”

Farman looked blank, then turned his puzzled gaze toward Cranston, who provided the explanation that Stan expected.

“Paracelsus was a famous alchemist,” stated Cranston. “He studied the mystic virtues of natural objects, attributing necromantic qualities to rare herbs such as the mandrake. He deemed these essential to magical incantations.”

“Compeer Chandos collects rare plants!” exclaimed Margo. “He has brought them from everywhere!”

“According to Paracelsus,” continued Cranston, “the ultimate purpose of such study was to learn the secret of transmutation. He sought a rare mineral called the 'philosopher's stone,' believing that if it were placed in a crucible with baser metals, the latter could be transformed into gold. Such was alchemy, the forefather of modern chemistry, which today is giving credence to some of those ancient theories.”

Stan finished his brandy and thumped the glass on the table. Rising a bit unsteadily, he wagged a forefinger and complimented:

“That's better than the way Thull put it! But he says the same thing. Compeer Chandos is trying to make gold; the light that keeps flickering from his castle is the flare from the furnace where he has his crucible!”

“You mean the marsh fire,” sneered Farman, folding his arms. “The old will-o'-the-wisp. You're exaggerating it until it sounds as wild as Jed's talk of a devil jumping over the moon.”

Margo could have argued otherwise, but didn't. Instead, she watched Cranston steady Stan to help him to a chair. Stan was muttering something about getting back to Thull's.

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“We'll have Margo call Thull and tell him you're all right,” Cranston told Stan. “Thull can form his own conclusions for tonight. He'll be satisfied tomorrow, after you've seen Compeer Chandos.”

Staring, Stan muttered thickly:

“After I've seen Compeer Chandos?”

“Of course,” replied Cranston. “You've been frank with us, so you deserve a reward. You want to meet Compeer Chandos. Very well, I shall arrange it.”

Cranston and Farman were helping Stan upstairs when Margo gazed from the window and saw the moonlight catch the tint of a faint green flicker from the valley far below. It fitted Farman's definition of the fleeting will-o-the-wisp, but Margo knew it to be a flare from Castle Chandos.

Mysterious though the strange light was, there was something that puzzled Margo more. She was wondering how Lamont intended to penetrate the formidable portals of Castle Chandos and introduce Stan to the illustrious compeer who dwelt there.

That task, in Margo's opinion, was a problem befitting Cranston's other self, The Shadow!

CHAPTER VIII. WITHIN THE CASTLE

THE next afternoon, The Shadow found his way into Castle Chandos, accomplishing that marvel in broad daylight while guised as Lamont Cranston. Not only that, he took Stan Weldon with him on this amazing expedition, which proved most surprising because of the ease with which it was accomplished.

The clever expedient whereby Cranston entered the castle consisted in openly approaching the front door and pounding its heavy knocker until a servant answered. Announcing his name and that of his companion, Cranston asked to see Compeer Chandos and was promptly admitted.

It turned out that Compeer Chandos was delighted by the mere thought of visitors; he met them as the servant was conducting them across the hallway. The fact that both were total strangers did not faze Chandos in the least. His door was always open and he greeted all who used it.

One look at Chandos supported the primary theory that had brought Leonard Thull to Glendale. Both appearance and manner marked Chandos as the perfect dupe for such graspers as Althrop and Grebb. The compeer was a thin, frail man, his proportions accentuated by the dark-gray attire that he wore. His hair was a light gray, but most of it was hidden by a skullcap.

Wizened of face, but sharp of eye, Chandos wore a perpetual smile on the dry lips beneath his thin-beaked nose. His face was birdlike, the skullcap resembling a topknot. What he lacked in plumage, Chandos showed in manner. His step was like a bird's hop, and being short, he kept looking up at his visitors much as a canary would. To further support the comparison, Chandos spoke with a chirp.

Unquestionably, these visitors had come to see his plants. They, not Chandos, were the real attraction of the castle. So Chandos led the way to the central courtyard which he had converted into a great hothouse. It was really something to behold.

Great tropical trees rose in masses of twisted foliage. Banyans clustered among palms, with the leaves of rubber trees projecting in abundance. But those were merely the backbone of the exotic display surrounding them. Huge trailing vines turned portions of the hothouse into veritable jungles, while rare flowers filled the

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air with color and fragrance.

Four floors above was the great glass roof, supported by tall, thin girders. Its center was a large square, with four sloping sides extending down to the inner edges of the castle roof. Sunlight was streaming in through the clear panes of glass, and those in the center were slightly lifted, being hinged at their sides.

Compeer Chandos pointed out that fact himself, for he was quite as proud of his "tropical room," his own term for the courtyard, as the remarkable plants that it contained. The problem of ventilation conflicted with that of climate, but Chandos had finally balanced them.

Only the hardier plants were in the central sector. The rest were in different compartments, separated from the main by glass partitions that were invisible because of the creeping plants. But when Chandos led his visitors along the jungle trails, the thing became apparent.

At intervals, the compeer paused to slide back glass doors that blocked the path. At those points, too, the creeping plants looked poised in midair, the reason being that they were pressing against the higher glass.

The place was a great maze which baffled the sense of direction. Knowing the paths, Chandos was able to make the complete tour, checking off the various compartments. When they finished, he took them along an interior hall where sunlight streamed through dimly, mellowed by the stained-glass windows.

They came to the new extension of the castle, the short wing that formed an additional hothouse.

The wing wasn't completed. Entering a little room that formed a small portion of it, Cranston and Stan saw a high scaffolding that cut off the rest. Some plants were visible beyond, rising like a screen, but they were only a few that Chandos had been forced to place here while the work was still in progress.

This new section had skylights in its sloping roof, arranged in a continuous row; but Chandos was no longer interested in pointing out features of construction. He'd brought his visitors into the little anteroom to show them his century plants, a hundred of them.

All on shelves and in order, a century plant for every year. Chandos had gone to great trouble collecting them. He believed that he was the only man who had a hothouse where a century plant always bloomed. It had been difficult, finding out the exact year in which each would flower, considering that it only happened once a century. But Chandos had traced the history of every plant before accepting it.

Compeer Chandos liked century plants. He said so with a chirp, adding that his friend Roscoe Althrop was also fond of them. The curious thing was that Althrop couldn't appreciate plants or flowers when he saw them in mass formation. He liked to view them a few at a time, so this evening he was sending his car to bring Chandos up to the house with some specially selected plants.

Tilting his head, Chandos looked from Cranston to Stan, assuring both that they would be welcome if they came to Althrop's house this evening. Whenever Althrop invited Chandos up there, he specified that the compeer would ask any friends he chose. But this was the first time that Chandos had been able to invite friends along.

WHILE the visitors were saying that they would consider the invitation, Chandos remembered something else. Beckoning them in through the house, he led them out by the front door and clear around the corner. There, he began gathering specimens from his rock gardens.

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“I have another friend,” explained Chandos. “His name is Dariel Grebb and he likes minerals. I shall have to go to his house after I leave Althrop's. I thought that Grebb might come over there to see me, but he said he couldn't. Of course, Grebb doesn't care for plants.”

That was just another way of saying that Grebb didn't like Althrop. Whether Compeer Chandos was displaying tact or ignorance, was a question. The only positive fact was that he was wrapped up in plants and pillowed on rocks, enjoying the happy dream life that such a couch provided.

Chandos was still plucking rocks when they reached the rear corner. He was so burdened that Cranston and Stan had to help him carry them.

At the corner, Cranston noted Stan looking for the spot where the strange encounter had occurred with the thing in gray. It had seemed close to the corner when it happened, but the distance must have been considerably greater, because the corner of the house was adorned with a sizable rock garden, from which Chandos picked more samples.

Continuing around the house, the compeer called for two of his servants to carry in the rocks. Both men were patient-looking fellows, accustomed to humoring the compeer. In addressing them, Chandos called one “Optimus,” the other “Maximus.” After they left, he explained his choice of terms.

“Optimus is my best servant,” Chandos declared, “while Maximus is the strongest. I have another, named Fortissimus because he is the bravest. He should be around somewhere. Suppose we look for him.”

Fortissimus was out by the front gate arguing with a man who was seated in an old wagon drawn by a swaybacked horse that looked like a dime-museum product. Seeing the compeer, the hunched man raised himself from the front seat of the wagon and proved to be Jed Guphrey.

“Hello, Compy!” greeted Jed. “All I'm askin' is to gather up some old logs t'other side of the fence. You ain't a-needin' 'em or you'd gather 'em yourself. Gettin' so punky, them logs, that Old Stumpy will be pokin' his face out on 'em.”

By “Old Stumpy,” Jed meant the will-o'-the-wisp, the curious glow that went under so many names. Passing over that reference, Chandos asked Fortissimus why he wouldn't let Jed gather old logs.

“You should remember why, compeer,” said Fortissimus in a respectful tone. “The last time, Jed drove off with some fine specimens of petrified wood from one of the rock gardens.”

“But Mr. Grebb sent them back,” said Chandos. “And Jed now knows to keep away from the rock garden. Let him gather logs.”

Coming through the gate, Jed grinned at Fortissimus, who inquired if he'd seen any more devils.

“Seen 'un on 'em last night,” replied Jed. “Tother side of the big rock crosst the road. Comed right up out of the ground it did, an' grabbed me. Must've flowed off with a fellow what was lyin' there, because both on 'em was gone when I comed back to look. Mebbe 'un on 'em was you, Forty!”

Jed finished that comment with a doltish laugh. Somewhat irked, Fortissimus inquired if the creature had jumped over the moon again.

“Guess it couldn't have,” decided Jed. “The moon wasn't where he could have jumped over it. He'd 'a' had to hop clear to tother side of your castle to get at it.”

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“Poor chap,” commented Chandos on the way back to the castle. “He's welcome to all the wood he wants. We use only coal for our furnace. Ah! That reminds me I must show you the furnace.”

In the castle cellar, Stan saw the thing he wanted to find out about—as the second part of Thull's query. The furnace was huge, but it didn't resemble an alchemist's retort. Chandos explained that he used it to keep the great tropical room heated and that sometimes a very large fire was needed. Fortunately, the castle had good chimneys, so there wasn't any danger from the flames.

Leaving the castle, Cranston started into the village, with Stan riding beside him. All the way, Stan speculated.

“Fair enough, that furnace business,” conceded Stan. “Still, why should the flare from the chimney be green, unless Chandos is trying something special. Thull may be right about the alchemy.”

“We'll stop by at Thull's,” said Cranston, “and you can tell him so. Give him a full report... so far as you care to go.”

THEY swung by Thull's, and Cranston waited while Stan went inside. After a half hour, Stan rejoined Cranston and they continued to the village during the gathering dusk. To his new friend, Stan detailed his report to Thull.

Stan had said that there was commotion around the castle the night before, so he'd chased the dogs home and had gone into town to stay at the hotel, rather than leave a trail back to Thull's. According to Stan, he'd made friends with some persons he met at the hotel; specifically, Cranston and Margo.

Learning that Cranston intended to call on Compeer Chandos, Stan had gone along today, thus learning all he could about the castle. Tonight, Stan was going up to Althrop's to meet Chandos again. When he'd added that Chandos would be calling on Grebb later, Thull had been quite amazed by his operative's progress.

“There's one thing Thull doesn't like,” added Stan. “He thinks Chandos is getting too chummy with Althrop and Grebb. When I told him those two were still at odds, he said that made it worse. With the pair working independently, Thull is afraid that one will sign up Chandos before he gets the chance.

“After seeing Chandos, I had to admit he's the type to stick by a bargain once it's made, even though he might be gyped. Thull brooded over that while I was talking to him. He'll have to do something about Althrop and Grebb both, or he'll lose out on the Chandos business.”

Cranston and Stan met Margo for dinner at the hotel. Leaving before the others finished, Cranston announced that he was taking the roadster. Farman would be stopping by in his car, to drop Stan and Margo off at Althrop's.

In his own way, Farman was trying to be helpful. He was going over to see Grebb on a matter of minor business. But it meant that he would be there when Chandos arrived. Thus, at Grebb's, Farman could fulfill the same mission that Stan and Margo would accomplish at Althrop's.

A little later Stan found himself wondering what Cranston's part would be. Noting Stan's expression, Margo restrained a smile. She wasn't wondering at all, for she knew that Lamont would be at large, as The Shadow. If devil monsters, real or imaginary, were on the roam this evening, they would meet a fitting opponent.

It didn't occur to Margo Lane that affairs had reached the brink of something more terrible than all previous episodes. On this calm evening, when all seemed so serene in Glendale, strange death was on its way more

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mysteriously than ever, prepared to flaunt its tragic challenge to The Shadow!

CHAPTER IX. FRENZIED DOOM

THE lights of Farman's big sedan sparkled like little diamonds in the dark. Viewing the car from a distance, The Shadow could tell that it had stopped briefly at Althrop's, just long enough to drop off two passengers.

Now that same car was skirting around behind the hill, the dotted lights blinking on and off because of intervening trees. It was on its way to Grebbs, and The Shadow was witnessing its progress from a midway vantage point near Thull's. But Farman's passing car was merely a minor factor in The Shadow's outlook. The cloaked observer had a larger reason for being at his present location.

The larger reason was Leonard Thull.

However much Thull's purposes might tally with Stan's summary, Thull rated as a disturbing factor in Glendale. As rivals in the duping of Compeer Chandos, Althrop and Grebb had certainly been proceeding peaceably until Thull came along. As the pivot man in matters that did not concern him, Thull had certainly precipitated the reign of horror, whether willingly or not.

Granted that Thull hadn't hired the men who snooped and died at Grebb's and Althrop's before Thull imported Stan to look into the Chandos question, at least, Thull's presence was the reason why Althrop and Grebb had decided to spy on each other. Either could suspect that his rival planned to make a deal with Thull, the unknown factor.

Close to Thull's house, The Shadow turned to gaze toward the valley. Tonight there were no green flickers from the roof of Castle Chandos. Beyond, on the southern hill, Farman's sprawling house lay vague but serene. So peaceful was the countryside that monstrosities seemed impossible in this locale.

Yet The Shadow knew that they could happen!

Twice, Jed Guphrey had seen a fantastic creature that killed and bounded away with a speed resembling an aerial flight. Others regarded those tales as impossible. To The Shadow, Jed's testimony wasn't even exaggerated, but merely confused.

One pitch-black, gale-swept night, The Shadow had met a monstrosity at Farman's. The next, he had encountered a gray ghost in the moonlight at Castle Chandos. Topping that was the experience of Stan Weldon, who had hurdled fifty yards under an impelling force as yet undefined!

Tonight was cloudy, the moonlight straggly. From the kennels, The Shadow could hear the low growls of two great mastiffs, trivial beasts compared with the unknown monsters that might be abroad. As the growls turned to snarls, The Shadow glimpsed a skulking figure off beyond the kennels, but when the moonlight suddenly brightened, proved only a wavering bush.

Had The Shadow been fooled by the very device with which he had deceived Farman, two nights ago?

Before that question could be answered, a block of light issued from the side of Thull's house. The man himself appeared, to quiet the dogs with a louder snarl than their own. Unleashing the beasts, Thull told them to heel; whereupon, he started in the direction of Althrop's house, accompanied by his gigantic playmates.

Close behind moved The Shadow, much as he had trailed Stan to Chandos Castle. But Thull, turning his blunt face across his shoulder as though suspecting followers, was utterly unable to trace the black-clad shape that

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stalked him. The wavery moonlight, casting long, indefinable streaks across the ground, was suited to The Shadow's order.

MEANWHILE, Stan and Margo were being entertained by Roscoe Althrop, if his reception could be so termed. Since they were friends of Compeer Chandos, Althrop gestured them into an antiquated living room, then announced curtly that he was going to his upstairs study until Chandos arrived.

As Althrop's footsteps creaked across the hall to a stairway, the visitors heard him tell a servant to notify him as soon as Chandos came.

The living-room furniture was definitely old-fashioned, and seemed a fair sample of the whole mansion. While Margo sat uncomfortably in an overstuffed chair looking through the pages of an old family album, Stan took a look into the hall. A servant was opening a side door beyond the stairway to admit Compeer Chandos, arriving with his precious plants.

It was amusing to see Chandos fussing with those rarities after the servant helped him bring them in. Each plant was wrapped in stiff paper, like a florist's bundle, as a protection against the chill weather. Unwrapping one, the compeer brought the potted plant to Stan so he could set it on a table in the living room. That done, Chandos went back to unwrap another.

Meanwhile, the servant was notifying Althrop that Chandos had arrived. That action was a chromo in itself. For a system of intercommunication, Althrop's house was still equipped with speaking tubes, out of date since the last century. There was such a tube in the wall of the rear hall; the servant whistled through it and received a reply from Althrop's study, directly above.

Telling Chandos that Mr. Althrop would receive him in the study, the servant went back to the kitchen. But Chandos didn't go upstairs; he was still busy bringing plants into the living room, where Margo was helping Stan find places to put the pots.

They were running out of space and both were looking around for more, when Chandos appeared with the last item in the lot, the cherished century plant that was in its year of bloom.

Outside Althrop's old mansion, Thull with arriving with his dogs. Posting the hounds as Stan had done, Thull took advantage of a cloud that passed the moon. With brisk stride, he reached a trellis wall outside a second-floor room where lights were burning. Evidently Thull recognized the room as Althrop's study.

Thick, dried vines were the additional support that enabled the trellis to withstand Thull's climb. From darkness, The Shadow saw Thull stop outside the closed window and peer through its pane.

Already moving forward for a closer view, The Shadow, too, gained a good break. The cloud passed and the old-fashioned house fairly wallowed in a flood of moonlight.

There was Thull, plain against the window, his features flatter than ever as they pressed the pane. There were the dogs, motionless as the iron variety, as they squatted on the lawn below. And there was The Shadow gone stock-still as the brilliance revealed him. He had to do the statue act, for the slightest motion would have drawn the attention of the mastiffs.

A strange scene, this, but one that was expectant rather than foreboding. A tableau that seemed far removed from the local terror that was wont to strike by night. Yet those passing moments were building to stark tragedy, more horrible than any that had gone before!

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It was Thull who broke the spell. With a writhe that shook the trellis and its twisting vine, Thull flung his arm with a wide sweep at the window, as though attempting to hurl a missile through the solid glass. As Thull's arm spread across the pane, The Shadow heard a sharp thud, like the stroke of a fist. But that thump was a mere accompaniment to the prolonged sound that shivered through the night.

Shrill to a blood-curdling pitch came a dying shriek, the sort that could be given only by a man whose horror outweighed his agony!

For the moment, The Shadow thought the scream was Thull's, but its direction didn't change when the stocky man came tumbling groundward, bringing the trellis with him. The frenzied shriek could still be heard above; it was coming from the window. Too penetrating to be muffled, the death cry was cleaving from the upstairs room where Althrop had gone alone!

HITTING the ground headlong, Thull bounced to his feet. His eyes, wide open, were staring like a madman's. Whatever the cause of his insane glare, his sight was intensified by it. Despite the film of another passing cloud, the moon was giving all the light that Thull needed.

Thull saw The Shadow.

Already in motion, the dark-cloaked shape must have struck Thull as the fresh materialization of some monster. Momentarily, Thull halted; then, howling an order to the dogs, he turned his pause into a lunge.

The mastiffs came to life and seeing Thull's direction, bounded in from each side to attack the elusive wave of blackness that was swirling in the fading light.

Only by a swift reversal did The Shadow escape the triple trap. With all Thull's madness, The Shadow preferred to meet him rather than the mastiffs. Swooping under Thull's extended arms, The Shadow lifted the stocky man in midair, then somersaulted him, rotary fashion, at the muzzles of the leaping mastiffs.

There was a snarling tangle from which the dogs detached themselves. First one, then the other went in pursuit of the patch of living blackness that streaked for Althrop's back door. The latch was off, which proved fortunate, for the lead dog, Presto, actually pawed The Shadow's cloak half from his shoulders.

But before the beast could sink its fangs into the shoulder beneath, The Shadow whipped full about, his foot driving upward in a full-length kick. The altitude of the back steps added leverage to the thrust. Meeting Presto's chest, The Shadow's kick lifted the mastiff into a somersault resembling Thull's.

Clearing the spinning bulk of Presto, Lodi took up the challenge, only to be bounced back by the slamming door.

Safely in the lighted kitchen, The Shadow heard a servant's footsteps clattering up the back stairs. Whipping off his dangling cloak and bundling the slouch hat in it, The Shadow started along the same route.

There were other noises, from the front hall. Through an open connecting door, The Shadow saw Stan racing up the front stairs, with Margo right behind him. Left in their wake was Compeer Chandos, his face quite dazed as he shielded his potted century plant by resting it on a telephone table just below the stairs.

Keeping up the back way, The Shadow reached the rear of the upper hall just as Stan appeared from the front. The Shadow was Cranston again, with no trace of his other identity, for as he left the darkened back stairs, he thrust his bundled cloak and hat beneath the hand rail.

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Stan wasn't surprised at seeing Cranston; he'd expected Margo's friend to be around.

The servant was already hammering at Althrop's locked door, but the only answer from the study was a bleating moan. Drawing the servant away, Cranston hit the door shoulder first at the hinge side. Hearing the woodwork crack, Stan hurled similar jolts each time his friend drew back.

Loosened hinges broke under one of Stan's heaves. As Stan lurched forward with the toppling door, Cranston extended a firm hand to grip him back. The clutch wasn't necessary, for Stan Weldon recoiled of his own accord. Sight of the thing on the floor was enough.

The thing wasn't a monster. It was worse. It was Roscoe Althrop.

No face could have symbolized frenzied doom more vividly than Althrop's. His crabby countenance was contorted to a shape resembling a composite picture of a dozen demons. He looked as though his shrieking soul had traveled to some infernal region, only to return and paint the dead face to match a horror seen there.

If so, the spirit was gone again, for Althrop was very dead. His eyes were glassy in their sockets, his teeth were gritted as though they had gnashed their final moan. As for the cause of death, it was plain, too, pointed out by the middle fingers of Althrop's spread hands that were planted just above his shoulders.

Each finger indicated a deep gash in Althrop's throat, jagged marks that might have been delivered by one of Thull's mastiff's. Something as vicious as any hellhound was responsible for Althrop's doom. The automatic that Cranston drew looked puny in dealing with a lurking menace that could cause such death.

Nevertheless, Cranston pursued his search, while Stan was pressing Margo back so she wouldn't get a look at Althrop's body. With Cranston moved the stolid servant, drawing furniture aside, that the man with the gun might be ready if a thing should spring to new attack.

But Althrop's study was empty to the last nook!

Cranston's inspection ended at the window. It was firmly clamped from the inside and its thick pane was puttied tight in place. Putting away his gun, Cranston gazed grimly at Althrop's face, with its tightened death grin that seemed to lock the secret of the tragedy that had produced it.

This was death's challenge to The Shadow:

Doom had struck in a locked room so devoid of hiding places that only the presence of the dead man's body proclaimed the tragedy possible!

CHAPTER X. CRIME'S NEXT TARGET

DEEP was the hush that clung to the scene of death—so deep, that outside noises encroached like dim reminders of another world. One sound, reaching Cranston's ears, linked with a recent past that seemed singularly remote. It dated back to when he had been The Shadow.

The sound was the baying of Thull's mastiffs. Judging it to be a quarter mile away, Cranston stepped to the window and looked toward Thull's. He was about right on the distance, for he saw the mastiffs emerging beyond a small clump of woods that marked an approximate quarter mile.

Thull was keeping up with them, showing remarkable speed for a man of his weight. It was a long way back to Thull's house, but there wasn't anything to prove that the man with the dogs would head there. Contrarily,

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Thull seemed to be veering from the angle pointing to his place, treading more toward the line that went straight to Grebb's.

A long, whistling sound came from somewhere outside. Not overloud to start with, it trailed to nothingness. It could have been Thull whistling for the dogs, but it resembled more an arrow, whining on a long-range flight. The noise carried a slight whimper rather than a trill.

Besides, though the dogs did not stop, the sound was not repeated. Thull could have gone too far for a whistle to be heard again, or he might be out of breath. But those points were speculation, like Thull's destination. The main thing was Cranston's next move:

A last look at Althrop's body.

The death leer had widened with the shrink of Althrop's lips. No longer did that grin express the past; it seemed to forebode a future menace, creeping closer with every fleeting moment. If Althrop could have leered like that in life, he would have applied the grin to one person only:

Dariel Grebb.

Strange death had encroached upon Althrop's premises before, though its stroke had been outside the house. Similarly, there had been grim tragedy on Grebb's estate. Tonight, the weird menace had penetrated indoors to pluck Althrop as its victim.

Death done to Roscoe Althrop could be in the making for Dariel Grebb. Thus did the past mesh with the future.

Turning to the servant, Cranston told him to stand guard; simultaneously, he gestured Stan and Margo downstairs. They went, expecting Cranston to follow, which he did, but they were surprised to see him peer from a doorway connecting to the kitchen. Over the arm that he kept out of sight, Cranston was draping the black cloak that belonged to his other self, The Shadow.

Compeer Chandos was standing by the side door. It was open and he was gesturing outdoors.

"I heard dogs," Chandos was explaining to Margo. "They were baying, and a man was whistling for them. Unless"—Chandos turned and cocked his head to look at the speaking tube in the hallway wall—"unless it was Althrop whistling through the tube to summon me."

While Margo was explaining that Althrop had died, the shriek from the second floor marking his demise, Cranston beckoned to Stan. Next came Cranston's gesture toward the telephone on the table beside the unwrapped century plant.

"Call Grebb's," undertoned Cranston. "Ask for Harry Vincent. Tell him just what happened here. Warn him that it may strike where he is."

Harry Vincent was a secret agent of The Shadow.

Reaching the telephone, Stan turned to ask if Cranston knew Grebb's number. Stan had to call the operator to get it, for Cranston was gone. He must have left through the kitchen but Stan wasn't sure, because it took his eyes a few moments to discern things beyond the connecting door.

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Curious how Stan's eyes couldn't quite focus themselves to the kitchen's dimness. His nerves must have slipped after he looked at Althrop's body. As Stan blinked, his eyes were all right again; the vague blackness in the kitchen had cleared.

It didn't occur to him that he had seen solid blackness dispel itself in the cloaked form of The Shadow, again in his favored garb! Nor did Stan catch the grim but fleeting whisper that marked The Shadow.

OVER at Grebb's mansion, two visitors were receiving a much warmer reception than Althrop had given Stan and Margo. But the warmth wasn't from Grebb himself. Standing in a cozy room he called his den, Grebb was chilling the atmosphere with a cold-faced stare.

The warmth came from the fireplace, where a large log was burning briskly. Two men were seated, facing the fire. One was James Farman, considered by Grebb to be a mere acquaintance rather than a friend. The other was a young man named Harry Vincent, who had arrived about the same time, coming here at Farman's request.

Squinting toward Harry, Grebb's crabby face seemed to be wondering why a chap of his clean-cut personality should be associated with so shrewd a person as Farman. Grebb suspected a catch to it, and so intimated.

"So your specialty is minerals," expressed Grebb to Harry. "That's why you wanted to meet me, because Farman said I was interested in minerals too." Turning abruptly to Farman, Grebb queried sharply:

"Might I ask where you obtained such information?"

Farman hedged by muttering something about it being "common talk," whereat Grebb sneered. It would be common talk, in his opinion, the sort passed about by servants who were untrustworthy or rumored among gossiping acquaintances. At last, Farman found an out.

"It was Jed who mentioned it," remarked Farman cagily. "He talked about some logs he brought here, that you said were rocks. I thought it was another of Jed's exaggerations, until he mentioned that he found the logs near Castle Chandos. So I presumed that they were specimens of petrified wood belonging to the compeer."

Grebb tilted his head, expecting Farman to go on.

"Jed said you sent them back," added Farman. "So you must have known what they were—"

This time, Grebb interrupted by turning his back on Farman. Mention of logs reminded Grebb that the fire needed another. Lifting one, he tossed it into the flames, cracking the burning log already there. Sparks showered, fire leaped with vivid tongues that looked like fantastic creatures leaping toward the chimney.

Warming his hands as he stooped before the fire, Grebb spoke testily across his shoulder:

"All this is pretext on your part, Farman. Obviously, you want to meet Compeer Chandos, because you have learned that he is coming here this evening. Very well. If you and Vincent will retire to the parlor until Chandos arrives, I shall ask him if he would like to meet you."

Going out, Farman darted a nasty look at Grebb, who was still stooped before the fireplace. Following Farman, Harry closed the door and felt the outer knob stiffen under the clicking latch. A polite servant showed them to the parlor, which was just across the hallway.

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Unlike Althrop's, Grebb's house was quite modernized. Though the den boasted an old-fashioned fireplace, the furnishings were up-to-date, and the same applied to the parlor. It was like a stream-lined lounge, with its chrome and leather chairs. The parlor had a fireplace, too, but warmth and flame were supplied by a gas log.

As the guests seated themselves, Farman started to say something, but halted when he saw the servant was still around. Harry's manner was more nonchalant; as a veteran agent in The Shadow's service, he had run into many situations more ticklish than this.

At least, such was Harry's opinion so far. It should have altered the opinion when the telephone bell began to ring.

The sound came from Grebb's den. The servant shifted uneasily in the hallway and finally went across to listen. For a moment, he acted as though about to knock at Grebb's door. Changing his mind, the servant left the hallway, and Farman began to growl about the way they'd mismanaged things with Grebb.

The telephone bell still jangled.

A frown clouded Harry's frank face. He wasn't listening to Farman; the telephone bell seemed more important, though Farman apparently didn't think so. Still, Grebb might have a policy of ignoring phone calls; that could be why the servant hadn't knocked at the door.

The ringing ceased and Harry settled back to accept a cigarette that Farman proffered. But before he could strike a match, Harry heard the jangle begin anew.

Someone was persisting in an effort to reach Dariel Grebb. The very clangor of that bell cried horror. Grebb should certainly be sensing it, more so than his visitors, for Grebb was in the room with it.

Why didn't Grebb answer?

Harry shot a quick look at Farman, wondering why he was trying to out talk the telephone bell. But Farman wasn't talking any longer; he was coming to his feet, his face displaying a hunted look. Gripping Harry's arm, he exclaimed hoarsely:

"Listen!"

Still, Farman didn't seem to hear that ominous bell. He was concerned with something from a greater distance, that came louder as it sounded anew. Harry heard it, the baying of great hounds coming full tilt for Grebb's house!

"Thull's dogs!" exclaimed Farman. "I knew he'd been letting them loose! Here's where we clinch the case against him!"

DASHING out through the hallway, Farman yelled for Grebb's servants to come along. Harry followed, still hearing the telephone's jangle, though it was almost drowned by the clatter. Wrenching the front door wide, Farman sprang out to a broad porch ablaze with light shining a welcome for Compeer Chandos. By then, Farman had gone too far with his urge.

Up from the darkness of the front lawn sprang the two mastiffs. They loomed so huge that Farman must have thought he was seeing double in terms of Jed's devil monster. He couldn't even shriek when he opened his mouth; his hands, lifted for protection, looked like feeble paws.

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Hooking Farman with a sweeping arm, Harry actually hurled him back through the front door and followed with a rolling dive. One of the servants slammed the door just as big forepaws thumped it. A furious scratching dwindled suddenly and a pounding started, accompanied by a man's frenzied voice.

“Let me in!”

Thinking the mastiffs had seized a victim, Harry yanked the door open. The man outside was Thull; he'd already called the dogs off. But his face was stricken with a horror that surpassed the grotesque. He seemed to be looking through Harry as he shouted to Grebb's servants:

“The monster killed Althrop! It nearly murdered me! It can travel anywhere, everywhere! It may be coming to get Grebb!”

Hearing sudden growls from the dogs, Thull wheeled quickly about. He shrieked that he saw yellow eyes rising out of the trees. Raising a shotgun he was carrying, Thull howled:

“The devil monster! The thing that kills and laughs!”

Harry saw the eyes blink just before Thull fired. The shotgun's kick landed Thull in Harry's arms. Instantly, there came an answer both to Thull's shout and shot. A weird laugh, throbbing sinister from the trees, that Harry knew to be The Shadow's!

Perhaps The Shadow was denying the impeachment that he killed by delivering the laugh alone. But Thull didn't take it that way. Wrenching away from Harry, he reached the front of the porch and let go with the other barrel of the shotgun, straight at the massed blackness where the trailing laugh still echoed!

As the sounds of the gun blast died, there came a silence as heavy as the darkness. Whatever the creature in the night, Thull must have bagged it. The mastiffs believed so, for they were loping across the lawn to fetch whatever Thull had slain.

A silence so complete that it seemed final to Harry Vincent; a soundless death knell for his chief, The Shadow!

CHAPTER XI. MARK OF DOOM

THE DEATHLY silence was indeed complete, because, among other things, the ringing of the telephone bell had ceased. Had the sound continued, it could have been heard on the porch, but Harry didn't notice its absence. He was waiting, hope as good as gone, to see what might happen when the soft-footed dogs reached their prey.

If The Shadow still lived, he could handle them. He might have to shoot them, but it would be warranted if the dogs attacked him. Then, as the beasts reached the trees, Harry felt a mingled surge of hope and horror.

Something was standing there between two trees, for the dogs made a leap at it. But the thing didn't even try to beat them off! They pawed and worried in a way that Harry couldn't understand.

Someone was asking Grebb's servants why they didn't go and see what the dogs were about. They replied cautiously that they didn't want to visit that spot at night. It was the stone wall where they'd found a mangled body of a prowler close to a turn in the road. So that was the thing between the trees—the stone wall!

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The dogs were starting to nose about the wall. This time, they would surely find The Shadow. Angrily, Harry swung to tell the servants that he'd go where they wouldn't. He stopped short when he saw the man who was speaking to the servants.

Lamont Cranston, nonchalant as ever, was standing right by the front door, gesturing idly with a thin cigar that rested between his fingers!

Like a thing out of a very distant past, Grebb's telephone bell began to ring again. The calm smile that Cranston was giving Harry turned to a slight-traced frown. Cranston's impassive eyes became alert as they surveyed the group, noting that it had an absentee.

Casual but steady came Cranston's query:

“Where is Grebb?”

“In his den.” Harry nudged in through the front door. “We left him ten minutes ago; maybe more. That's the third time somebody has tried to ring him up.”

Without a word, Cranston strode into the house, his manner as commanding as it had been at Althrop's. He reached the den door and knocked there. His immobile face did not show worry, but Harry's did and the servants saw it. They linked Harry's expression with the wild things that Thull had shouted on arrival.

Like trained seals, the servants appeared suddenly, one with a crowbar, the other with an ax. After giving the doorknob another try, Cranston took the ax and slashed the edge of the door. He returned the ax, received the crowbar and applied it to the place that he had chopped. A deep pry, a deft wrench, and the door flew open.

There lay Dariel Grebb, huddled on the hearth before the open fire, which was burning briskly, with occasional crackles. While Harry stopped to answer the telephone and learn that it was Stan, Cranston approached Grebb's figure. The servants were hurrying to open the windows, but Cranston stopped them with a gesture.

“No use,” he declared. “Your master is dead. Look at those windows” —Cranston's tone was methodical—“and tell me if they are firmly latched.”

The windows passed inspection, but the servants still couldn't quite believe that Grebb was dead. Despite its position, his body looked quite peaceful, more as though he'd met with a fainting spell than death. But Cranston dispelled the servants' doubts in no uncertain fashion.

Cranston simply raised Grebb's face in a slight sideward tilt and let them have a look at it.

Horrified gasps came from the stooping servants. Hisses echoed back from the hollow of the fireplace, as though the flames expressing a sibilant, ghoulish delight. The fire crackled, bringing more demoniac sounds from the moist log, while the flames contorted in a macabre dance.

Lurid, flickering was the light that crossed Grebb's face, but the ruddy glow merely emphasized the expression already there. With all their trepidation, the servants couldn't match their master's contorted features. Althrop's hideous countenance was peaceful compared to Grebb's. This victim, in his moment of sudden, horrendous death, had literally thrown his whole visage out of joint.

Grebb's eyes were staring opposite ways; his jaw had slid far to one side to make way for his tongue, which hung like a leathery appendage. All moisture was gone from Grebb's mouth and face, yet his arms had

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shielded his face from the heat of the hearth.

That a living monster had done the deadly work was evident when Cranston tilted the body sideward. Upon Grebb's chest was the brand of the murderous thing that had slain him.

Grebb's shirt front was seared away in the fashion of a slash. Sparks, even flames from the fire, could not have produced that result; they would have burned or seared. His chest looked as though it had received a knife thrust from a white-hot blade that scorched straight to his heart!

Unless a human hand had supplied that stroke, it must be the work of some reptilian creature whose hot breath had been furnaced by a stomachful of living coals. This case resembled the stabbing bite of a sizable poison lizard, except that instead of deadly saliva, flame had been injected.

WHATEVER the murderer, it must be somewhere in this room. Such, at least, was the opinion of all but Cranston, who had so recently arrived from another sealed chamber of death. Nevertheless, he watched the hunt progress. Indoors, Grebb's servants lacked timidity, or else the shock of their master's death had jarred it out of them.

They took all the furniture apart, poking into every cranny, until they satisfied themselves and all other witnesses that no creature larger than a flea could have escaped their search. The only spot left was the fireplace, so they dashed water on the flames.

Like something alive, the fire hissed and faded. Smoke swelled through the room, then drifted up the chimney, smoke that was tinged a sickly green from the dying embers. Using flashlights, the servants peered up the chimney. The damper was open, but its slits were too narrow to allow the passage of anything formidable enough to account for Grebb's death.

From the doorway, Thull was explaining his angle of the case. He began by claiming that someone had let his dogs loose, implying that the person might be Jed Guphrey. Cranston knew that Thull was lying for a start, because while disguised as The Shadow, he, Cranston, had seen Thull unleash the dogs.

The reason for Thull's falsehood became apparent as he proceeded. He didn't want to admit that he had gone deliberately to Althrop's. Alleging that he had found the mastiffs in that vicinity, he added that he had seen a monstrous creature wing from Althrop's house. The thing had attacked Thull, but the dogs had saved him; fearing that the creature had winged for Grebb's, Thull had rushed here to give the alarm.

Despite himself, Thull was admitting that whoever might have murdered Althrop would have held the same intention regarding Grebb—a thing which definitely applied to Thull!

The reason Thull overlooked that point was his worry regarding something else. In reaching Althrop's study window, he hadn't stayed long enough to learn that it was clamped from the inside. Should investigation prove that window to be unlatched, Thull would be making himself Suspect No. 1 if he admitted he'd been outside it at the time of Althrop's death.

Yet Thull, a champion of bungling, was practically stating that he'd looked in on Althrop; otherwise, he wouldn't have known that the man was murdered!

On one point, Thull told the truth. He said he'd detoured by his own house to get the shotgun. Even though he'd started straight for Grebb's, he must have made that stop, because he hadn't been carrying the weapon at Althrop's. The shotgun wasn't a minor item from Cranston's viewpoint; it had offered him serious complications upon his own arrival at this house.

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Newcomers were arriving to give their version of what had happened at Althrop's. Meeting them in the doorway of Grebb's den, Stan and Margo were astounded to learn of the second murder. Harry Vincent hadn't mentioned it when answering Stan's phone call; he'd simply said to come over.

Stan and Margo had come in Althrop's car, bringing Compeer Chandos with them. The old naturalist had packed away his plants and was bringing in a suitcase full of rock specimens to show to Grebb. The compeer's kindly face showed disbelief, then grief, when he heard of another friend's death. Sadly, he asked to be taken back to the castle, so Cranston deputed Harry to drive him there in the roadster.

Finding the car at the side of the porch, Harry stowed the plants and rocks in the rumble and took Chandos in front. Going out by the lane, Harry gained an answer to The Shadow's miraculous escape from the point-blank fire of Thull's shotgun.

Those blinking eyes had been the roadster's headlights taking the turn by the stone wall. Aiming at the lights, Thull had pulled trigger just after the car swung from the path of fire. The Shadow's laugh was a teaser to draw Thull's second shot close to the same spot; likewise, the mirth had drowned the sudden spurt that The Shadow gave the motor.

Driving the car in toward the house, The Shadow had extinguished the lights and let it coast the final stage. He'd stowed away his hat and cloak, to arrive as Cranston.

BACK at Grebb's, the other visitors were leaving, among them Leonard Thull, whose blunt face relaxed when he learned that Althrop's death was as complete a riddle as Grebb's. No longer did Thull deal in regrets. His lips wore a knowing smile when he left the house. He was no longer worrying about competition in any deal he might propose to Compeer Chandos.

Alone in Grebb's den, Lamont Cranston stooped beside the fireplace. He studied the ashes, which were gray, with streaks of black. Oddly, the black stretch formed a curious pattern, shaped much like a lizard.

Sifting those ashes through his fingers, Cranston found trifling particles of green, but what interested him more was a whitish substance that powdered under pressure, becoming a very fine dust. It bore the appearance of volcanic lava reduced to a pulverized state.

When Lamont Cranston left, a short while later, his eyes lacked their impassive gaze. Not that they had taken on the penetrating power that characterized The Shadow; that would have been poor policy for Cranston in his present guise.

Instead, those eyes were reflective, distant in their stare. They were the eyes of a dreamer gazing into an imaginary realm and picturing what it might produce if projected to reality!

CHAPTER XII. SPEAK OF THE DEVIL

STAN WELDON felt like a social outcast. That came from being cooped up with Leonard Thull, a man whose mind had worn its single track right down to the roadbed. But there wasn't any way of getting out of it. Stan was still working for Thull on good advice.

The advice came from Lamont Cranston, whose easy way of getting good results commanded admiration. Not that Cranston had cracked the devil mystery, or anything like it; but if anyone could, he would. After a day or two of inquests, with the same old misadventure verdict, Cranston had left for New York, planning to be back the next night.

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This was the evening of Cranston's departure, or rather it was the morning after, for the town clock had just struck midnight. Wearing his cap and sweater, Stan was standing outside Thull's front door looking far across the valley to tiny lights upon the southern hill.

The lights were from Farman's house, still populated by a few guests at his perpetual house party. Margo Lane was there and so was Harry Vincent, the student of mineralogy.

Stan had wondered somewhat why Farman had dragged Vincent up here. It looked a lot as though Farman intended to mooch in on the Chandos proposition, as a competitor to Thull. But Stan was rather well convinced that Vincent's presence was of Cranston's arrangement, which put matters in a better light.

Still, Stan wasn't inclined to trust Farman any farther than he would Thull, which in each case amounted to about three steps from the man's own front door.

The countryside was lonely and bleak, except for the distant lights at Farman's. No lights at all from Althrop's house or Grebb's. Both mansions were closed, the servants departed. Castle Chandos was blanketed in the darkness of its valley; no longer did the greenish flickers recur from that vicinity.

A swirling wind blotted out Farman's lights. Stan thought it curious, until he noted white flakes against his sweater. It was the season's first snowfall, and more than a flurry, considering the way the wind was rising.

Stan went indoors. In the kitchen, he found Thull nursing a bottle of applejack, the favorite beverage of this region. Brushing the snow from his sweater, Stan remarked:

"Better lay off that stuff, Thull. First thing you know, you'll be seeing devils the way Jed does."

"I've seen devils," muttered Thull thickly. "Saw one over at Althrop's."

"You mean the thing the dogs couldn't find?" laughed Stan. "They were as bad as you were. That proved itself when you took shots at Grebb's stone wall and the hounds chased down to bring it back."

Pouring himself another drink of applejack, Thull pushed the bottle at Stan, who declined, remembering how he'd talked too much after sampling Farman's brandy. That had been among friends, considering that Cranston and Margo were two to Farman's one. But Stan didn't class Thull as a friend. He preferred to let Thull do the talking.

"I saw the thing, I tell you," Thull insisted. "Saw it kill Althrop! Like this"—Thull clawed his throat and gave his hand a wiggle—"that's the way it took him... And Althrop dropped... like that!"

By demonstration, Thull shoved a glass from the table. It crashed on the floor, but he didn't seem to notice it.

"What did the thing look like?" Stan inquired.

"It was a snake," replied Thull. "Only, it turned into a bird and came, zoom, right at me! I was outside Althrop's window."

"Why didn't you say so at the inquest?"

"Couldn't say so. Would have disputed my own testimony. I didn't know Althrop's window was locked until too late. Anyway, who would have believed me? You don't even believe me."

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Stan shrugged.

“It's hard to believe,” he said, “because you still haven't explained how the creature finally got out.”

Thull reverted to the former theme; his brief battle with The Shadow. He argued that the snake–bird must have found a way out when it made another try. The fact that it had enlarged into a man–sized bat impressed Thull as just something else in the nature of the beast. He added though that he'd heard it whir past him somewhere in the dark, after he started away from Althrop's.

“Another new angle,” remarked Stan. “You should have mentioned it —at the inquest.”

“Why should I?” demanded Thull. “They didn't believe Jed, so why should they believe me? They'd have said I was trying to alibi my dogs. Too many people say they've seen the dogs loose.”

“Which they have.”

“That's silly! Who could have let them loose?”

“Anybody,” retorted Stan. “Those mastiffs are trained to stalk and fetch, but they're friendly around the kennel.”

Angrily, Thull took a final drink and pounded the bottle on the table. He said he was going to bed, which he did, after several stumbles on the stairs. Stan decided to turn in, too. Going to sleep, he wondered how much there might be in Thull's story.

Stan's own experience with a creature that vanished like a ghost; his subsequent trip across the castle fence, were taller tales than Thull's. But at that they were just preliminary to the weird tragedies that had snuffed out Althrop and Grebb.

WITH morning came a new phase in the mystery of the devil monsters. Roused by a hammering at the front door, Stan went to Thull's room and tried to shake him awake, but it wouldn't work. So Stan went downstairs, to find a committee headed by Squire Bates. They had Jed Guphrey with them and the half–wit's broad grin was tickling his ears.

The squire wanted to know what Stan had heard during the night. When Stan said nothing, the squire showed him how much “nothing” could be. Out on his morning wood haul, Jed had seen evidence of a devil monster and had forthwith reported it.

To begin with, both of Thull's dogs were gone. Their kennels were overturned, the chains broken. A light layer of snow showed clumpy tracks leading away. Those tracks stopped near a stone wall, which had very little snow on top. At one bare spot, however, were the packed imprints of the clumpy creature's feet.

Twenty yards away was a barn with a shed attached. On the shed roof were the same footmarks, showing where the creature had landed with its next bound, for there wasn't a sign of anything in the snow between. Above, on the edge of the barn itself, were two more prints over the hayloft door. With that second hop, the devil monster must have cleared the peak of the roof.

On the other side of the barn, which the investigators reached by a wide detour, any evidence was spoiled by a farmer's foot tracks to his house. But the flying monster, estimated by its footmarks to be a dozen feet high, wouldn't have stopped so close after its huge jump. The group went farther along and discovered traces by another stone wall a hundred yards away.

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Here the thing had landed near an old well, and then hopped to the roof of the well shed on another take-off. There were marks of paws at this spot and while everyone was wondering about them, a mastiff's head poked out of the well house. The dog was Lodi and when he saw Stan, he whined a greeting. Stan snapped his fingers and Lodi came from the well house.

They found Presto under a clump of bushes on the other side of the stone wall. The inference could only be that the flying terror had carried off both dogs at once, and finally dropped them because they impeded its tremendous flight. Neither dog was hurt, but that could be because the creature had been lugging a double burden.

"That other dog of Thull's," remarked the squire, "the one he calls Buskin. It's over at Doc Crowder's. He says its leg was hurt and its neck was clawed some. What do you know about it, Weldon?"

"I only know about the leg," replied Stan, "but I suspected that Buskin was more hurt than Thull supposed."

"Did some critter fly off with it?"

"Thull didn't think so," recalled Stan. "But he may change his opinion after he hears about this."

What Thull had to say was simple. He didn't believe the thing when he first heard it. But when he was shown the proof positive, he shook off the effects of his applejack binge and decided to help look for more evidence of the monster that had carried off his faithful dogs.

The course was eccentric as far as traced, so the searchers went in various directions. It was Thull himself, alert to the quest, who arrived at the courthouse with news of further tracks. They were off the dirt road leading through the valley, near another stone wall, marks of a hop-skip-jump with the wall as a final stepping stone. On Farman's side of the road, they pointed to the sprawling house upon the hill.

Cutting across fields, Jed Guphrey went in eager search of evidence that would support the tale that Thull had substantiated. The final tracks were spotted by Jed on the roof of Farman's garage; from there, they had taken off for nowhere, since no more were found. No footprints other than the monster's were found anywhere near the garage, except those that led from extra cars, parked at least thirty feet off.

THE arrival of the townsfolk brought questions from Farman and his guests; in turn, they were asked what they had seen or heard the night before. The answer was nothing; some cars had come in late, and a few had left early, but nobody reported anything out of the usual.

Among those most interested in this new evidence were Harry Vincent and Margo Lane. They left promptly to survey the evidence elsewhere. As for Stan Weldon, he went to the hotel for breakfast and was there when Leonard Thull came back from the courthouse. Driving back to their house on the hill, Thull kept chuckling to himself. He finally let Stan in on it.

"Instead of my belonging to Jed's half-wit class," declared Thull, "they've decided that Jed has a whole brain after all. Maybe that's not complimenting me, but I'm just as pleased."

"Then they think the devil thing is real?"

"How can they help it?" returned Thull. "They've all seen the evidence, and they weren't drinking applejack. Well, they won't be springing any more rumors about my dogs. If Buskin did get loose that night, it was because the devil monster grabbed him and dropped him somewhere else."

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They were swinging in beside the house when Stan thought of another subject. He expressed it to Thull:

“What about Compeer Chandos?”

“There's no hurry in his case now,” replied Thull. “He is probably grieving over his friends Althrop and Grebb, not knowing they were out to trim him. Well, I've suffered like they did, but fortunately my dogs took the brunt of it and survived.

“Stay a few days longer, Stan; on full pay, of course. After things have settled down, I'll visit Castle Chandos; and I'd like you to come along, because you've already met the compeer. That is, you've talked to him. I didn't have a chance, the night Grebb died.”

From the kitchen window, Stan watched fresh flurries of snow. He noted that the sky was clearing, but that didn't sweep the clouds from Stan's mind. One thing was bothering him badly: the fact that the monster's tracks had led to Farman's. That last hop from the garage could have landed the devil thing right on top of Farman's house.

There were many gables on Farman's dwelling, with a flat space hidden among them. Whatever the devil creature was, it must live somewhere, and wherever it did, someone was harboring it. Which meant that James Farman was looming large in Stan's catalogue of suspicions, something with which Stan knew that Margo Lane would agree.

Still, Stan wasn't fully satisfied. Something else was creeping through his mind. Turning from the window, he went to the china closet and found Thull's bottle of applejack. At a time when sober people were seeing whacky things, applejack might be the treatment to keep normal.

That wasn't Stan's only thought. As he studied the line where the liquid ended, he had a better idea. He noted particularly that the level was marked with a penciled line. Rather than pour applejack down the sink, Stan erased the line and drew another two inches above it.

A very neat beginning, Stan decided. The snow wouldn't melt before evening, because of the continuing flurries. Tonight, with the bottle as his guide, Stan Weldon might be seeing devil monsters in the making!

CHAPTER XIII. FALSE VERSUS TRUE

WITH appraising glance, Leonard Thull watched Stan Weldon reach for the bottle and fall short. It wasn't just Stan's hand that flopped; his head did, too. His arm brushing the glass, Stan rolled it from the table; stretched as he was, he didn't budge when the glass crashed.

It was night, and Stan had been breaking the monotony by punishing the applejack. Thull had refused the stuff, claiming he'd taken too much the night before. But now Thull reached for the bottle, drew it toward him and measured the distance from the pencil line to the liquid level.

More than two inches were gone, enough to prove that the “liquid lightning” was taking hold on Stan. Placing the bottle close beside Stan's hand, Thull arose and stole out through the back door, closing it gently behind him.

Immediately, Stan roused from his pretended drunk. He'd pulled the act just as neatly as Thull had the night before. Peering past the edge of the window shade, Stan saw Thull out in the garage. The man was packing things in the big rear compartment of his coupe.

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Bringing the car out, Thull returned to the back door. By the time he opened it, Stan was again faking a stupor. What Thull then did was very peculiar. He collected all the ice cubes from his large electric icebox.

Not just the cubes that were in the freezing tray, but a lot more. Evidently Thull had been piling them away. As he packed the ice cubes in a sizable cardboard carton, he kept laying pieces of newspaper between the chunks of ice. That done, Thull brought a large paper bag from a sideboard and took it along with him.

There was one thing that Thull had left behind: the shotgun. Picking up the double-barreled weapon, Stan crooked it under his arm. Getting his cap and pulling it over his head, he sneaked out by the side door, intending to get a lift on the rear bumper of the coupe.

A hand from the corner clamped firmly on Stan's arm, the one that held the shotgun. Before Stan could wrench the weapon free, a voice was telling him: "Come along." In the moonlight that had replaced the snow clouds, Sam recognized Harry Vincent. He was right: Vincent was Cranston's friend; not Farman's.

Harry hurried Stan to the nearest trees, where the roadster was parked so Thull wouldn't see it. They were in their car by the time Thull drove out, and Stan expressed his appreciation to Harry for having provided this preferable conveyance. The roadster was on slippery soil, but Harry had coasted it there, so their start was easy and silent. Harry simply released the brake and let the car glide until it reached gravel.

Then, in gear and with the motor purring, they were following Thull, whose car taillights were showing like red dots, a quarter mile ahead. Stan gave a slight laugh.

"So you figured it out, too, Vincent?"

"Part of it, anyway," replied Harry. "Some of it was too pat to be real. The business of the dogs, for instance."

"That's the way it struck me," acknowledged Stan. "Thull tried to do too much at once. By proving there was a devil monster, he could make his own story stand. Trouble was, he wanted to alibi the mastiffs, too. But he doesn't have to have them with him tonight. He must be framing something else."

Harry looked toward Stan and queried:

"Why the shotgun?"

"I didn't want Thull to come back and find it around while I was missing," replied Stan grimly. "He might go looking for me with it. He's rather careless with a shotgun, you know. Besides, I might use it to throw a scare into Thull himself."

Harry was remembering Thull's careless ways. They'd given Harry a scare of his own, the time when Thull had apparently blasted The Shadow off to glory. While Harry was thinking of The Shadow, Stan did the same in other terms. Aloud, Stan inquired:

"Is Cranston back yet?"

"He'll be back any time," replied Harry. "Margo wired him about the new developments. He's probably seen the newspapers, too. The New York sheets are full of devil-monster talk, all over again. The reporters are back in Glendale."

THEY saw Thull's car stop near a house on the outskirts of Glendale. Stan identified the house as the residence of Squire Bates. Watching from their own parking spot, Stan and Harry found the moonlight

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sufficient to show all of Thull's actions.

From the back of his car, Thull took a floor mop and a bridge lamp. To each, he attached a sawed-off tennis racket, which he wrapped in burlap. One went on the end of the mop, the other fitted to the tip of the bridge lamp's long extending arm.

“What a cinch!” exclaimed Stan. “All he has to do is poke the end of the mop in the snow. Say, he could have done that from the door of the hayloft, to make marks on the shed. But why the bridge lamp?”

“He used that for the marks on the barn roof,” decided Harry. “The lamp isn't heavy, and he could swing it so the long arm came up and over the edge. A neat bit of work.”

“Getting in the barn was easy, too. Thull could have used the side where the farmer had walked through the snow. But there were other marks, near the stone walls. How could Thull have gotten to those places?”

“You're seeing how,” replied Harry. “Keep watching.”

There was a stone wall leading in behind the squire's house and Thull had begun to walk along its top. Practically bare of snow, the stones didn't leave many tracks. But Thull was settling those by the simple expedient of stooping with a whisk broom and brushing them away!

Harry suggested that they steal closer and watch the rest. While they were coming from the car, Stan undertoned an explanation of the dog angle. Thull had simply told the mastiffs to follow him along wall; he'd ordered one to jump to the well house, and the other to the bushes. It was just like ordering them to their kennels, a thing which Thull often did. Once placed, the big dogs always stayed put, being well trained in such obedience.

From the stone wall, Thull poked marks on the ground. Next, he took a long reach to the roof of the squire's shed, adding a few more marks. He picked up the bridge lamp, weighed it, but decided he couldn't use it. That didn't matter; tonight, Thull had a better trick.

There was a high elm that branched over the squire's house. Coming back along the wall with his props, Thull picked up something that proved to be string ends. As he raised them, Stan and Harry could see the loop itself, leading over the highest branch above the squire's house.

“Thull must have used a rock to toss that string this afternoon!” exclaimed Stan. “He had plenty of opportunity while the squire was down at the courthouse making statements.”

Thull had opened his large paper bag and was pouring the contents of the carton into it. Harry asked what was going into the bag.

“Ice cubes,” replied Stan. “A couple of hundred of them. Look! Thull is hauling it like a big kite right over squire's house! It won't take long for that ice to melt through the paper—”

It didn't. Thull was back in his car when the crash came. Like the clamping claws of a real devil monster, the ice cubes hit the roof with a loud, spreading clatter, amid a flurry of the slips of newspaper that had kept them separate. Bouncing to the ground, the cubes plumped through a snowdrift to join other jagged ice that formed a layer beneath. That snow was already pockmarked by icicles that had dropped from the roof edge. Thull had tabbed such details earlier in the day.

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Thull's car was instantly away on a quick coast down the road. Whipping after it, first from the wall, then along the road itself, came the remnants of the paper bag, hauled along by its string!

Harry started a quick coast to take up the trail, keeping the car lights off. The moonlight was sufficient to follow the road, and when they were passing the next turn, Harry and Stan both heard the clatter of opening windows, the shout of excited voices, coming from the home of Squire Bates.

SKIRTING the town, Thull pulled into a narrow but well-traveled lane and there unloaded his props again. Without intending a pun, Stan remarked that Thull was probably up to some new deviltry; to which Harry opined that this was the time to show up the farce. Between them, they promptly figured out a system quite as cute as Thull's.

Instead of entering the lane, Harry would drive around to the other end, as though coming down from Farman's by a short cut. At the right time, Stan would let rip with the shotgun from the rear end of the lane, then simply slide from sight and wait.

Two things would happen: people would come on the run from the squire's, which wasn't far away; Thull would scramble back to his car, fling his props aboard and start through the lane. But he wouldn't get through; he'd meet Harry's car coming the other way, and the lane was too narrow for cars to pass each other.

There Thull would be, blocked off, with the squire's friends arriving to find his proof of fakery. At best, Thull could only flee from his car, leaving the evidence behind. It was one of those things that couldn't fail to work; so Harry drove away, leaving Stan starting his short sneak into the lane.

Since there was time to wait, Stan crept forward to see what Thull was doing. He saw Thull standing on the top of his coupe, using the bridge lamp to tamp fake devil prints on the roof of an old tool shed belonging to a quarry that flanked the lane.

To Stan, this explained how Thull had put similar prints on top of Farman's garage. His suspicion regarding Farman turning to sympathy, Stan felt more resentful toward Thull.

Drawing his cap back, Stan aimed the shotgun toward the blackness that represented the old quarry. What a racket the coming blasts would make, without hurting anybody! There would be plenty of echoes, for the quarry was deep. High above, Stan could see its far brink, jagged with rocks along the edge.

About to pull the first trigger, Stan halted and raised his eyes. He thought he'd seen motion from the quarry brink, as though a rock were about to topple. But no; all was normal there.

Or was it?

Raising the cap visor higher, Stan squinted in disbelief. One of the rocks that had shown jagged black against the snow patches was no longer there! Yet it couldn't have fallen into the quarry, for there had been no crash.

The thing couldn't be a rock. It must be something else. What else, Stan knew instantly when he heard the whirl. By then, it was too late for Stan to shout a warning.

A flying creature of immense size slashed through the saplings just above Stan's head, the air reverberating with the gust of its great wings. So swift was the concussion that its passing suction spilled Stan to one elbow and whirled his loosened cap from his head.

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As he landed, Stan heard a hideous shriek that he thought must be the devil monster's, until its trail of anguish proved that it was human. Looking up into the moonlight, Stan saw who had screamed and why. Leonard Thull was no longer standing on his car top, faking oversized footprints in the snow on the tool-shed roof.

The real thing had arrived to disprove the false and wreak a horrendous retribution on the faker. High in the air, Thull was a helpless, dangling thing, flying for the treetops, much like the paper bag that he had hoisted above the squire's roof.

The thing from the night had seized him. Thull was clutched in the claws of a creature with massive, scythe-shaped wings, a crocodile's body, and an elongated snout that would have served a Gargantuan wolf. Bird, reptile, beast, in a sense all three, the tremendous monster was carrying off its human prey to some strange bourne from which no victim could return!

CHAPTER XIV. THE WRONG MAN

MADLY, Stan flung the shotgun upward and fired. He aimed high so he wouldn't hit Thull, or what was left of the man who was taking the squeeze of the flying monster's claws. That high shot was better judgment than Stan calculated, for the whirring creature's rise was so swift that it came right into the path of the gun blast.

It was like flinging acorns at a locomotive. The spatter of buckshot didn't even scratch the whirling monster. It heard the report, though, for it turned its long-beaked head back over a wing and Stan saw eyes of yellow-green that had a flash like poison. All the more reason to use the second barrel!

Stan let the eyes have it.

The yellowish orbs were gone, but only for a moment. The flying monstrosity had simply blinked. Stan was meeting with the same invulnerable thing that had confronted The Shadow on his arrival in Glendale. But tonight, the thing was carrying off a man instead of a dog!

There wasn't a pergola to obstruct the creature's path and enable Thull to save himself, as Buskin had. Tonight, the devil monster's take-off was on a swifter, larger scale. It was using the momentum gained by the long swoop from the quarry brink to carry upward again.

Still, Stan's shots scored, though their hits didn't hurt their living target.

The look back and the blink were just enough to mar the creature's course. It tangled, or at least its claws did, with the top branches of a tall pine tree, about the only obstruction it couldn't easily clear. Stan saw the high tree bend like a sapling as the monster performed an aerial stumble across it.

Rushing along the road, Stan saw a thing scale toylike from the treetop. It was Thull, either too hurt or too scared to scream. His whirling body was pitching headlong toward one of his favorite stone walls, but he cleared it by several yards. Meanwhile, Stan was dashing along beside the wall.

Reaching Thull, Stan found the man was dead. Some passing boughs had broken his fall, but not enough to help. Thull had struck exactly on his head, which was jammed so deep between his shoulders that it wasn't pleasant to see, even in mild moonlight. But something even more unpleasant was coming Stan's way.

A rumble of air announced it. Dropping back, still clutching the shotgun, Stan saw the fierce eyes of the monster looming down upon him from the background of the trees. At first, he thought that they were merely widening; then, in a twinkling, he guessed that the creature's lightning approach was the reason for their sudden enlargement.

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The stone wall jarred as the creature's weight pounded it. Beak and claws were doubled together, coming right at Stan, as the thing decided to take him as its prey, instead of reclaiming Thull. With all his might, Stan clubbed the butt of the shotgun at the mighty mass of living doom.

Spinning, Stan struck the stone wall shoulder first. The shotgun was mashed from mere contact with one of the creature's talons. Stan's sweater was half gone; the same claw had snatched it. But the menace was past, for the aerial reptile was away again. Back against the wall, Stan saw it cross the glowing surface of the moon.

It would have been a hop from left to right, the kind Jed meant, had the moon been lower. But Stan wasn't interested in such minor specifications. He was getting to his feet, stumbling up the slope, anxious to find out where else the creature went.

To the left lay the deep valley, black despite the snow. If that darkness had engulfed the creature, it could only have gone to Castle Chandos. But Stan remembered the eccentric manner of the monster's flight, so he turned to look elsewhere. There, over the brow of the hill, he caught a last glimpse of the winged beast, settling in a spot that could only be its nest.

There was no mistaking it. Stan could judge the creature's size by comparing it with the landing spot. The thing was nestling in among the gables of Farman's sprawling house!

Stan could see it turn its long-beaked head and fling its equally proportioned topknot, which at close range made it appear much like a gargoyle. Settling in its nest, it seemed all head because its wings were folded. Then Stan saw only gables in the moonlight.

So Farman was the devil's keeper! In faking tracks on Farman's garage, Thull hadn't been far wrong—if Thull had actually faked them. The thing now was to reach Farman and pin his crime upon him. Stan didn't wait to contact Harry; there was no time to lose. On the run, he continued up the slope.

THERE were people outside the house when Stan arrived there: Farman, Margo, a few other guests. They were talking about shots that had been fired from a distance. Jestfully, Farman was suggesting that someone might have seen Jed's devil monster, when Stan injected himself into the scene.

Both fists clenched and waving, the capless man with tattered sweater flung straight at Farman. Though he didn't realize it, the terror of Stan's own experience was gripping him like a reflex. His voice was an insane shriek, as he accused:

“Not Jed's monster! Yours, Farman! I saw it carry Thull away and drop him dead! I was the person who tried to stop it with those shots. I saw where it came—right here to your house, Farman!”

As Farman dodged to avoid the fists, Stan gripped him instead. Flinging Farman into other hands, Stan shrieked for them to hold him. Inside the front door, Stan grabbed the first weapon he could find, which happened to be a heavy cane. Gesturing up the stairs, he told Farman's servants that the monster was on the roof and yelled at them to grab other cudgels and come along.

They grabbed Stan instead.

Farman was in from outdoors, because his friends had simply let him go. He was blocking his own stairway, and he had a drawn revolver. Farman was excited, too, making it plain that he was prepared to stop Stan at any cost.

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From the doorway, Margo wondered. Farman's gun, the frenzy he was showing, the fact he wouldn't let Stan go to the roof, were all moot points. What could Farman lose if he did let Stan go up? Nothing, unless Farman was the man who harbored the devil monster!

To Stan, the sight of Farman's revolver offered him a better weapon than a cane. He simply broke free from the servants, rushed Farman and took his gun away before he could fire it. The servants, swinging canes and pokers, overtook Stan.

To escape the massed attack, Stan had to reverse his course and go outside again, where there would be more scope. Margo obligingly stepped from the doorway to let him pass.

There was little doubt that Stan could have staved off an attack from indoors, now that he had obtained a gun. The question seemed whether he could cow Farman's friends and servants by threat alone. If not, Stan would have to use shots to reach the stairs. For a moment, he paused, as though hoping to win over some of the group through argument.

It was impossible to argue with another group that flung suddenly upon the scene. From the corner of the house came Squire Bates, bringing a batch of townsmen armed with shotguns. With a long, accusing wave, the squire indicated Stan and shouted:

“There's Weldon, men! He's the murderer! Seize him before he kills others, as he murdered Thull!”

Wheeling toward the house, Stan was just ahead of the aiming shotguns, only to find himself blocked off by Farman's faction, surging outward. It wasn't the idea of giving Farman's unarmed friends a sporting chance that made Stan veer back toward the townfolk. He wanted to clip the men with shotguns first; that was all.

Stan didn't realize that he'd be shooting into a hornet's nest. He didn't even hear Margo's fervent call, warning him to give up the mad attempt. Only the sheer impossible could halt Stan from the suicidal course that would pin him, alive or dead, with a real manslaughter charge to back the mistaken accusation of murder.

THE sheer impossible happened. That was, all witnesses took it to be such except Stan Weldon, and he was the person most concerned. Others might have ignored the swoop of monstrous blackness that precipitated itself from the roof of Farman's portico. But not Stan! He knew the menace of the thing that was swooping down. It must have hopped from the roof, the devil monster, again seeking Stan as its prey!

Death to the thing!

It would end the terror and mean Stan's vindication. Forgetting the human wolf packs that were converging upon him, Stan swung his gun around and up, to fire a point-blank hail of lead into the clawed creature with the glaring eyes. So close it was, that its clutch came as Stan fired.

The incredible outdid itself.

So sudden was the creature's change, that Stan thought his shots had deflated it. The thing wasn't twenty feet broad by a dozen high; Stan had chopped it right down to his own proportions. Nor were its eyes yellow; they were darker, and they burned. Hands, not claws, were gripping Stan; their clutch wasn't sharp: it was hard, like iron.

One fist was tight on Stan's wrist, pushing his gun hand aside. His bullets hadn't clipped the monster! It seemed actually a gargoyle draped in a jet-black shroud, but it had the ambitions of its larger self, for it was whirling Stan clear from his feet, away from the portico, into what seemed another take-off!

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Came clashing sounds back at the portico. Wooden canes and metal pokers were slashing the barrels of shotguns. The men who were seeking Stan had met without finding him! Startled, they looked upward, thinking the roof of the portico was the only place where he could have gone. But a vertical leap of a dozen feet struck them as beyond Stan's capability.

So completely had the mighty blot of blackness enveloped Stan, so swiftly had it whirled him from the paths of his attackers, that the occurrence would have rated as a major miracle if someone hadn't taken a chance look toward the lawn and seen Stan reeling there. Fighting off his rescuer, Stan had managed to wrest free, disregarding the whispered laugh that sounded in his ear.

The Shadow's laugh!

Most men would have understood that tone. Unfortunately, Stan's sole recollection of The Shadow as a black-cloaked personage dated to a time outside Castle Chandos. Then, The Shadow had somewhat confused himself with a queer gray creature; at least, in Stan's mind. Tonight, Stan was in no mood to differentiate between monsters, gray or black.

A gun roared as the combined groups started for Stan. It was The Shadow's automatic, fired by a seemingly invisible hand, for he was lost in darkness. Well-placed shots that sizzled mere inches wide, The Shadow's fire broke the charge. Then he was on the whirl again, swooping at Stan from an unexpected direction, pulling him to a car that was arriving by Farman's driveway.

It was Harry Vincent's car, and he climbed out the other side in a hurry. A warning hiss from The Shadow was sufficient to inform Harry of Stan's mood. Still swinging about, wanting to gun The Shadow but failing utterly to find him, Stan was propelled into the car and the door slammed after him. That deed at least impressed Stan as resembling rescue. Grabbing the wheel, he started the car around and out the drive.

No shots followed Stan's flight. Men by the house were hearing a weird laugh, traveling the other way. Thinking in terms of monsters, too, they blazed away in the wrong direction. They learned their aim was wrong when someone spied a fleeting shape cutting over toward the driveway that Stan had left in his new gained car.

Reaching the portico, Harry turned to see a final blaze of shotguns. The laugh chopped short, with only its echoes trailing from beneath the trees; but Harry wasn't worried. The embankment flanking Farman's driveway was as good as the stone wall at Grebb's.

Under the portico, Farman was expressing a testy opinion to Margo.

"That fool Weldon!" snapped Farman. "Accusing me the way he did! Coming here after the wrong man!"

"I would term it the other way about," spoke a calm voice. "Those friends of yours are hunting Weldon. They are going after the wrong man!"

Margo Lane turned in amazement. Standing beside her, quite unruffled by his recent exploit as The Shadow, was that master of nonchalance, Lamont Cranston!

CHAPTER XV. ONE BY ONE

THE man hunt was on.

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There was no stopping it, even if Cranston had preferred to do so. He felt it better that Stan should be found and apprehended. Cranston reached that verdict after he'd heard Harry's confidential report.

The case against Stan was this:

Squire Bates, aroused by a mysterious clatter on his roof, had summoned friends to help ward off a devil monster's forays. They had just uncovered tracks that appeared to be the monster's, when they heard gunshots from the quarry.

Heading there, they had discovered Thull's car, containing improvised paraphernalia for the faking of a monster's tracks. Thull was gone, but lying nearby was a cap identified as Stan's. Looking for further traces, the searchers had discovered a man's footprints alongside a stone wall.

The human tracks led to Thull's body; beside it was a shotgun so badly smashed that it was obviously the lethal weapon that had just about split Thull's skull in half. The same footprints led up the hill to Farman's house, and it seemed likely they were Stan's.

At least, the townsmen had given Stan a benefit of doubt; until they reached Farman's house and discovered Stan on a rampage. Now, with Stan in flight, it was perfectly proven that he was the man who arrived from the hill, for Farman and his guests had alibis. That was, all except Cranston, but it was understood that he had returned in Harry's car, the one Stan seized. Such being the belief, with no objections, Cranston allowed it to stand.

As for Stan, nobody knew or cared whether he or Thull had perpetrated the monster fakery. Perhaps both had worked together on the hoax. There still couldn't be any justification for Stan murdering Thull, and Stan's effort to blame the kill on a monster was repudiated by the evidence which proved such a creature to be a hoax.

Standing in front of Farman's fireplace, Cranston summed up the case in different wise. He began with the assumption that Stan had encountered a devil monster and had tried to save Thull from it. He was simply going on the facts that Stan had shrieked, filling in the rest. Two of Cranston's listeners agreed: Harry and Margo.

There was one other listener: Farman. This being his house, he couldn't very well be excluded from the conference. Farman's face showed occasional disbelief at mention of the monster, but there were moments when he seemed to worry. Watching Farman constantly, Margo observed those flickers.

"Now that the pressure is off," observed Cranston, "Stan will probably surrender peacefully, if found. The sooner he is in jail, the better."

"How's that?" put in Farman quickly. "I thought you believed his devil story."

"I do," affirmed Cranston. "The jail is one place where the monster can't get at Stan. It wouldn't tear down as easily as your summerhouse, Farman."

There was something of a scoff in the smile that Farman gave as a reply.

"Still, Althrop wasn't safe," continued Cranston, "nor Grebb. Other creatures, lesser in size but more deadly, were responsible for their deaths. On the whole, I think it will be best to find Stan privately and bring him here."

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Farman laughed outright.

“And where will you find Weldon so easily?”

“Over at Thull's,” returned Cranston coolly. “He's sure to return there sooner or later.”

There was a heavy rap at Farman's door. A deputy sheriff had arrived, bringing Cranston's car, which had been found in the valley road, where Stan must have abandoned it. The deputy reported that the search was ranging far and wide; he then left to rejoin it.

DECIDING to make the trip to Thull's, Cranston took Harry and Margo along. Searchers stopped them a few times on the way, but did not hold them, nor inquire their destination.

Arriving on Thull's bleak hill, they found it as deserted as Cranston expected, except for the mastiffs, which were gazing in melancholy fashion from their kennels.

There wasn't long to wait. Soon Stan's figure appeared, coming from the direction of Althrop's. He jumped down from a stone wall, proving that he'd used the best of systems to throw off trailers. Thull's trick of covering his own footprints while making devil marks was proving useful to Stan.

“Contact him, Vincent,” ordered Cranston quietly. “He knows you will believe his story.”

Harry slid from the car and intercepted Stan near the side door, much as he had managed it earlier.

From the gestures that passed between them, they were getting along admirably. Relaxing in the car, Margo let Lamont watch the conference while she gazed idly elsewhere. Suddenly, Margo riveted.

The thing that startled the girl was a grotesque shape coming forward from the stone wall. It was like a winged monster creeping along the ground. The thing was hunched, and its wings seemed half folded; so ominous was the sight that Margo couldn't budge nor scream. Her hand slid, rather than reached, for Cranston's arm, beside her in the darkened car.

Once she encountered that human arm, Margo was able to tighten her fingers. Their very tingle told Cranston of an approaching menace even before Margo gasped:

“Look, Lamont!”

At that moment, the big creature dwindled. Just as Stan had mistaken The Shadow for something disgorged by the devil monster, so had Margo erred. She'd magnified the approaching figure into part of its own shadow, moving ahead of it in the moon-bathed snow.

The dwindled monster was only Jed Guphrey, the erstwhile half-wit. That Jed no longer deserved his former rating was proven by his present smartness in knowing where to look for Stan Weldon. Worse, he'd just spotted Stan and Harry beside the house.

As Cranston was sliding into cloak and hat, Jed raised a prolonged “Hi-Yaaaaahhh!” that brought deputies dashing from the road. It was The Shadow who surged forward to meet them. If he could break this rush, he knew that Harry could get Stan away all right.

The deputies didn't know just what hit them, so suddenly did The Shadow whirl into their flank. They dived away, coming around with shotguns and rifles, only to dive farther as The Shadow jabbed shots into the

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ground around them. Then The Shadow was gone as suddenly as he arrived.

They saw him next overtaking Jed, sprawling the big yokel in the snow. For Jed was the one man in the crowd who would be watching where Stan and Harry fled.

Losing time with Jed, The Shadow was immediately cornered by the charging deputies, much to Margo's consternation. But he'd chosen himself the proper corner, the one by the dog kennels. Margo saw blackness blend with the wall of the house; next, she heard the clank of chains. The shouting deputies were met by Presto and Lodi, who flattened them with flinging forepaws.

The mastiffs weren't exactly savage. They didn't know whether to welcome or attack these strangers, so they compromised by worrying them. Getting the dogs quieted, the deputies glared flashlights all around the kennels and against the indented house corner. They couldn't find a trace of The Shadow. He had vanished like the term his name implied.

As a last thought, the deputies rattled at the house windows, only to find them latched. They decided that The Shadow must have filtered out among them, so they went their way. But Margo, watching from the darkened car, was sure she'd have seen a fleeting streak of blackness against the snow.

She was right; The Shadow hadn't filtered away. He appeared suddenly from beside the house itself. Then, away from the snowy background, he blended into the gloom beside the car. In her amazement, Margo forgot the awe that Cranston's cloaked guise always produced upon her. Eagerly, she exclaimed:

“Lamont! How did you... where were you?”

“In a doghouse,” came The Shadow's reply, in Cranston's most whimsical tone. “Lodi's, I think. I didn't peek out to read the name while the flashlights were around.”

“But they used the lights everywhere—”

“Not in the kennels. At least, not deep enough to make out the back walls. Mastiffs are large dogs; those kennels are deeper than the deputies thought.”

Margo began to express further admiration of The Shadow's chameleon tactics, when Cranston's steady tone interrupted with:

“Which way did they go?”

“Over toward Grebb's,” replied Margo. “Jed went with them, and they took the dogs.”

“I don't mean the deputies.”

“Oh!” exclaimed Margo suddenly. “Stan and Harry! Why Stan started running down toward the valley, so Harry went after him.”

There was a strange note in Cranston's tone, something that, for once, impressed Margo as a semblance of alarm, when he said:

“Go down to the valley road. Watch for them outside the castle gates. If they arrive... wait!”

Before Margo could reply, there was void in the darkness beside her. The Shadow had gone.

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DOWN where the thick trees sheltered the ground from the snow, Stan Weldon sank panting on the ground. He could see the dim, color-tinted lights from the stained-glass windows of Castle Chandos. Their glow was cheery, friendly. But as Stan rose to his feet, a chill swept over him. He felt that he was a man bereft of friends.

Proof to the contrary arrived in the shape of Harry Vincent. Hearing Stan move about, Harry stumbled up beside him. Stan's voice showed appreciation when he thanked Harry for staying along with him. Thanks expressed, Stan's tone hardened:

“What's your advice, Vincent? To give myself up?”

“Not at all,” returned Harry tactfully. “It looks like we're both in the same mess, particularly if Jed recognized me. Let's squirm out of it.”

“How?”

“We'll talk it over when we get to the road. If we hear any cars coming, we can take to a stone wall.”

They stole out from the trees and moved through the light snow surrounding Castle Chandos. Some of the odd bushes were still in bloom, the rock gardens were glistening in the moonlight. Stan led the way around the unfinished wing, on the assumption that no one would be watching from that side of the house.

As they reached the front corner, they saw parking lights wink off from a car arriving outside the gate. Stan gave a nervous twitch, as though to dart away.

“It may be Margo,” suggested Harry. “Wait here while I find out. I'll blink the lights if it's all right.”

The big gate wasn't locked. Harry opened it with a slight clank, which he didn't try to cover when he saw the roadster. Approaching the car, he whispered for Margo to blink the lights, which she did. They waited for Stan, but he didn't appear.

Starting back to find him, Harry paused suddenly at the gate. He was staring back along the snow, toward two sets of footprints, one his own. The others, Stan's, were plain in the moonlight, but they stopped a dozen feet from the corner of the house!

Margo's voice came guardedly from the roadster, inquiring the trouble. Harry replied in a hushed tone.

“I'm not sure,” he said. “Stan may have traced back, using his own footprints. If he didn't”—Harry paused, then added grimly: “Well, in that case, there's plenty in his story of a devil monster that carried Thull away.”

Whatever the case, Harry wasn't going to let Stan down. On the chance that Stan had retraced his path again, Harry went through the gate. The noise of its closing made Margo nervous; she slipped from the car and hurried to the gate. Peering through, she looked for Harry. He wasn't in sight.

The thing was puzzling, for Margo was sure she'd gotten to the gate before Harry could have reached the castle. On sudden thought, she looked for footprints. She saw the path that Harry had made from house to gate. There was a second line of prints beside it.

That second line was most curious. Beginning from the house, the marks came toward the gate, but stopped. Those were Stan's footprints. Beginning from the gate, the path consisted of Harry's footmarks returning. They formed a direct line toward Stan's, only to stop short of them, with a dozen feet between!

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Chilling moonlight froze Margo where she stood. She swayed as though caught by the flicker of the moonbeams. Then, impelled by stark terror, Margo turned, flung herself into the roadster and kicked the starter. She was away, driving madly, desperately, along the skiddy road.

One by one, two men had vanished, prey to some unseen horror which by its sheer invisible prowess outmatched the devil monsters already reported.

Margo Lane wasn't fleeing for her own life alone. Upon her depended two other lives—those of Stan Weldon and Harry Vincent, provided there was still time to save them.

Only one being on earth could possibly provide a rescue, and Margo was on her way to find him:

The Shadow!

CHAPTER XVI. TRAIL OF DISASTER

IT wasn't until she'd skewed the car into Farman's driveway that Margo remembered the final word of The Shadow's instructions. Just one word:

“Wait!”

Margo hadn't waited. She'd gone before The Shadow reached the valley, leaving him to enter the snare unwarned. That thought was such misery to Margo that she was almost starting a return trip to the castle, when a hopeless realization gripped her.

How could she warn The Shadow if she did go there!

To do so, she would have to enter the ground and pass the very corner where two men had disappeared as though the earth had gulped them, which it couldn't have, because its snow-clad surface was still undisturbed. And even if she did go, Margo would be too late.

By now, The Shadow would have traversed that very spot! Visible against the betraying snow, even he might have met the fate that Margo was willing to accept for her error of omission. No, it was better to apply The Shadow's order to wait, but in a different fashion.

Margo could wait here, on the chance The Shadow would return.

If he didn't, she would know what happened to him and could at least tell the story to someone else. One person, at least, would believe it. Clyde Burke was back at the local hotel, with the other reporters, and he was one of The Shadow's agents.

Minutes passed and became more pressing. It wasn't just the chill of the air and the cold of the moonlight that worried Margo. She felt she wasn't safe out here. Things had happened on a weird scale, right in this very yard, that night when the gale had blown Margo and Lamont into Glendale and all its incredible problems.

It would be better to go indoors. There, Margo could clinch things by phoning Clyde. For all she knew, the future might be resting in her hands alone. It wasn't safe to let it stay so. Leaving the car, Margo approached the house, but as she did, she opened her handbag and drew out a stubby automatic.

There was still Farman to consider. Lamont had never denied Margo's suspicions of their host. Tonight, Stan had arrived demanding that Farman show him to the roof, to search for a flying creature that Stan was sure

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had landed there.

Farman had refused!

There was the answer! The Shadow had given Farman leeway, even though the man was keeper of the devil monster. Farman knew where everybody had gone to look for Stan. He could have arranged for Jed to go there; then sent his flying devil to the valley, knowing that would be the short cut back!

Margo was already in the house when those thoughts fully gripped her. Too late to turn back now and go downtown to find Clyde, for there were footsteps coming from the stairs. Looking in that direction, Margo saw Farman approaching, a quizzical expression on his foxlike face. Instantly, all of Margo's inward impressions packed into a single impulse.

Swinging straight toward Farman Margo aimed the stubby automatic and ordered:

“Lift your hands and turn around! Then lead the way to the roof!”

Farman smiled as though he didn't believe that Margo was in earnest. Gradually, his face clouded and he started to say something. Margo interrupted, stating that if Farman tried to call his servants, she'd shoot. She reminded Farman that his hands were supposed to be up. He lifted them slowly, then flung them forward fast, bringing himself with them.

He was jumping Margo's gun.

Maybe Farman remembered his own hesitancy when Stan had jumped on him. To Margo, it seemed that Farman's form was in air, approaching like a diver in a trick slow-motion movie. All the while, her thoughts were flashing “yes” and “no” like blinking lights going red and green. Then one “yes” stuck.

Margo's gun was right at Farman's chest. Those darting hands that seemed to creep were still short of their goal. With time to spare, Margo's trigger finger tugged and she heard the report of the shot which stood for justice or murder—which, she did not really know.

To Margo's amazement, the tongue of flame spurted wide! Yet Farman was stopping in his tracks, hurled back by something. As for the recoil of the tiny gun, it was tremendous. It literally bowled Margo backward and sent the weapon flying from her hand.

Everything—the gun stab, Farman's lunge, Margo's forward thrust —had been diverted by a spasm of blackness that drove into the midst of things, like smoke in solid form!

FROM the corner where she landed, Margo saw blackness clear. Out of its smoky mist appeared the head and shoulders of Lamont Cranston, then hands, as though rinsing themselves of an inky film. One finished with a fling, as though tossing blackness aside, while the other pressed something silver that flipped open like a book.

“Cigarette, Margo?”

Cranston was reaching, helping Margo to her feet, as he proffered his platinum cigarette case. Slightly dizzy from her whirl, Margo was seeing black specks. She realized she'd seen bigger ones after her sudden landing. No wonder she'd had the illusion of The Shadow literally blurring from his cloaked shape into Cranston's!

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Suddenly remembering Farman, Margo looked for him. He was lying in the opposite corner, and Margo feared that her shot had told. She wouldn't have fired it had she known Lament would arrive so soon. She was telling Cranston so, when Farman began to rise, gently pressing his hand to his chin.

“Sorry, Jim,” Cranston apologized. “I could brush Margo off, but I had to hook you clear out of the way. Your chin offered good leverage. It was just with the heel of my hand, you know.”

Farman didn't know. It had felt like a fist to him. But he was mollified when he saw Cranston pick up Margo's gun from the far side of the hall. Farman was remembering how close the bullet had whistled; but oddly, he couldn't recall seeing Cranston intervene. Farman wasn't acquainted with Cranston's other self, The Shadow.

Apparently, though, Farman had been getting thicker with Cranston than Margo realized. That was further indicated when Farman nudged his thumb Margo's way and said:

“She must have believed Weldon's monster talk. She wanted to go up to the roof and see what was there.

“Of course, I promised you that I wouldn't let anybody go up there tonight. I even stayed here after everybody else started out to hunt for Weldon.”

“I know,” nodded Cranston, “It was the right thing, Jim. But we'll go up now, and Margo can come along.”

Cranston delayed to light his cigarette. When he came along, he stayed slightly in the background and Margo was sure he was bringing the hat and cloak that he had so recently discarded. The roof itself was dark because of the gables, but there was no mistaking the mechanical contraption that was parked in the center.

It was a wingless autogiro!

“The very latest,” announced Cranston. “I flew it back from New York this evening.”

“Weldon must have seen it landing on the roof,” put in Farman. “He mistook it for the crazy monster that Jed talks about, but nobody ever saw.”

“Wrong, Jim,” reproved Cranston. “Weldon did see a devil monster, so called. I sighted something of the sort myself while I was flying in here. Why do you suppose I brought the giro here and asked you to keep it a strict secret?”

“You mean... you're going to hunt the devil thing?”

“Exactly—and all the rest of its playmates, small and large. Don't worry, Margo”—Cranston curbed the girl's impatience with a gesture—“I know what happened to Stan and Harry. I saw their tracks in the snow by Chandos Castle. That's another reason why I'm going there”—he waved his same hand toward the giro—“in this!”

So the riddles lay with Compeer Chandos!

Such had become the only answer. The feud between Althrop and Grebb had clouded things, until their deaths had eliminated them as possible master schemers. Thull's blunders were too tactless to be subterfuges on the part of a genius. Cranston had therefore picked Chandos as the hidden brain immediately after the unexplained deaths of Althrop and Grebb.

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Cranston was tossing something into the autogiro, probably a hat and cloak, though it was too dark to see. From the side of the plane, he turned and declared methodically:

“Thull must have bungled all along. He led us astray on the question of Althrop and Grebb. They weren't swindling Chandos; it was the other way about. My theory is that Althrop financed the compeer's expeditions, hoping for a fortune from rare plants; while Grebb put up cash, expecting the same from minerals.”

“But why did they let him get away with it?” demanded Farman. “Two misers like Althrop and Grebb!”

“Their feud was the reason,” returned Cranston. “Each thought that the other was being duped, and that made it all the sweeter. So when the right time came, and both became suspicious, Chandos eliminated them. Knowing what the devil monster is, I can picture the other creatures he has used. Having revived one form of prehistoric life, Chandos could produce another fabulous species. That seems to be his real hobby.”

Cranston was in the autogiro. Farman pressed forward to put another question—one that interested Margo, too, despite her eagerness for Cranston to get started.

“But Thull was drawing suspicion from Chandos and thrusting it on me,” declaimed Farman. “Why, then, did Chandos murder Thull?”

“Because he knew that Thull had guessed too much,” concluded Cranston. “Chandos wanted none of Thull, nor his deal. None is the right word; the result proved it. Moreover, Chandos knew his real monster would find Thull while he was planting evidence of a fake one. With Thull's hoax exposed, there would be no more talk of devil monsters. Not a shred of suspicion could remain to blemish the future of Compeer Chandos!”

THE roar of the motor drowned the whispered laugh that Cranston uttered as a mocking challenge to the master schemer whom he had just denounced. For with the instant take-off of the autogiro, Lamont Cranston had become The Shadow.

As the whirl of the big horizontal blades lifted the ship with the speed and precision of an elevator, Cranston's arms were dipping into the black cloak, his hand was placing the slouch hat on his head.

High above Farman's rose the man-made thing that rivaled in speed and bulk the living monster produced by Compeer Chandos. Then, when his ship was but a spinning dot against the moonlit sky, The Shadow cut off the motor. Far beneath was a block of gray, its center a sparking square: Chandos Castle, its glass-topped courtyard vivid as a diamond in a baser setting!

Silent was the giro's descent, precise the hand that guided it. Laying this ship squarely to the mark was a matter of comparative ease. Great windmill blades were braking the drop as a parachute would; but this was a controlled machine that could rise again at instant's notice.

All the while, The Shadow was looking for flaws in the square-shaped diamond. As the object enlarged, he saw them—open panes in the very center of the tropical room.

A great gap loomed, larger than the autogiro. From the silent ship came a low but quivering laugh, as chilling as the frosted moonlight.

Compeer Chandos hadn't locked his bird roost for the night. Perhaps his gigantic pet was still at large; if so, all the better. A creature of a different plumage would find that roost instead, though Chandos might at first mistake the autogiro for the pterodactyl.

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As such had The Shadow defined the devil monster: a flying lizard of the prehistoric period, probably belonging to the latest of the pterodactyls. Amazing creatures that still could exist in certain remote lands, which Chandos had probably scoured in order to find his specimen.

Apart from the adventure of it and the lives that lay at stake, The Shadow had a scientific interest in this case. His eyes were fixed below as the yawning center of the castle loomed up to receive the autogiro.

No sign of the creature yet amid the foliage in the midst of the lighted hothouse. Time now to play the brain for the autogiro and berth it as cleanly as the flying lizard was wont to roost. The Shadow flicked a control; the giro tilted to the perfect angle and followed the course of a parabola inward to its goal.

The ship was above one edge of the open roof when from the other came its seeming twin, the difference being that the duplicate whirred. Hearing the sound, The Shadow looked straight across the pit; by then, the similarity of the flying things was gone.

In contrast to the autogiro with its wingless body and spinning windmill, the creature from the night had a gargoyle head and double-folding wings. In its vicious eagerness to keep a marauder from its nest, the homing monster was showing itself in full.

The Shadow saw it unmistakably, and knew it for a pterandon, latest and greatest of the pterodactyls, in fact the largest of all flying creatures known to exist. He tripped the giro's motor, whipping his craft into an upward lurch, just as the pterandon slashed its scythe wings for a similar lunge.

There, above the yawning roost that was large enough for one but not for both, these creatures of the past and future locked. Nature's most gigantic winged experiment had clashed with man's ultimate in controlled mechanical flight!

The crash was as mighty as the issue of nature versus man. Its result was the echo of the ages, another case of mutual destruction. The autogiro folded in a mass of tangled wreckage, wrapped within the mangled wings and body of the pterandon. Together they plunged, creature and machine, down through a thick strew of foliage that ripped to shreds beneath their crashing weight.

With the impact, blackness enveloped The Shadow. Trapped in the locked mass so tightly that he couldn't budge, he was helpless during the drop that marked the end of his disastrous trail. During what seemed a lazy spin, he knew that the ground was coming up to meet the monsters that had clutched him deep in their embrace.

The ground struck like a ceiling above The Shadow's head. With it, blackness was complete. The echoes that rattled the partitions of the hothouse and carried out through the open dome of Castle Chandos were loud and long in their reverberations.

They were not heard by The Shadow.

CHAPTER XVII. MONSTRODAMUS

HARRY VINCENT and Stan Weldon each were looking at a face that neither had ever expected to see again.

They were looking at each other. To both, it seemed hours since they had been confined in separate cells resembling the oubliettes of medieval castles, those dungeon pits into which prisoners were tossed and forgotten.

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One thing alone had broken the monotony—a jarring crash that had carried even to those lower cells, shuddering the very foundations of the castle. Each prisoner had thought—and hoped—that the walls would cave about him; but the cells had stayed intact.

Then the compeer's servants had appeared.

Optimus was in charge of Harry; Maximus controlled Stan. The meeting of the prisoners and their gun-bearing guards was taking place outside a brass-faced door that suddenly opened of its own accord. Side by side, each prodded by a gun, the prisoners were marched into the strangest room that they had ever seen.

It contained one thing they recognized: Compeer Chandos.

The master of Castle Chandos was attired in a robe of purple trimmed with gold. On his gray head rested a coronet, its golden points tipped with scintillating diamonds. At an angle across his lap lay a scepter, adorned with a giant emerald, that seemed the crystallized embodiment of that vivid green flame so often noted above Castle Chandos.

In one corner of the room stood a globe five feet in diameter. Its interior was lighted and it was revolving slowly. But its surface did not map the earth; it was a star globe of the heavens, with brilliant dots that represented the constellations.

Opposite was a stand much like a reading desk. Spread upon it was a book of gigantic proportions, its open page embellished with illuminated lettering. Beside the throne was a hollow ball or glass, like a fish globe, except that it was fully rounded and had no opening. Within were tiny creatures moving amidst foliage of every imaginable hue; grotesque creatures that looked like spiders in an animal form; things that were magnified by the curved glass that bounded their three-foot domain.

“We have met before,” spoke the man on the throne. “You knew me then as Compeer Chandos, the name that I chose to give the world. You are fortunate mortals, to be told my title of the future, even though you will not live long enough to reveal it.”

Rising, Compeer Chandos stepped forward. As he lowered his arms, he disclosed a curious emblem embroidered upon his robe, a circular device of a golden snake looped to form a circle. But it was not to that emblem that Chandos pointed.

Stepping aside from the throne, the man in purple waved his hand and ordained in a dramatic voice:

“Behold!”

Upon the back of the throne, emblazoned on the curve that marked the line of the compeer's shoulders, was a name in jet-black letters that stood vivid against the golden setting:

MONSTRODAMUS—

“You have heard of Nostradamus,” spoke Chandos, “the savant whose prophecies have carried through the centuries. Persons have wondered sometimes why his predictions were obscure. I shall tell you why. Beneath them lies a greater riddle than the prophecies themselves.”

Stepping to the great book, Chandos turned a page and laid his finger upon a line of lettering, which he did not deign to read. He kept on turning pages and pointing, to other references as he continued with his discourse.

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“Nostradamus belongs to the past,” resumed Chandos, “but his knowledge belongs to the future. What could be plainer! The past linked to the future! His was the knowledge intended for a man of practice to take and shape. A man who would honor the memory of his predecessor, Nostradamus, by turning that future to its predicted mold!”

Closing the book, Chandos crossed to the great star globe and let his fingers trace the passing constellations. In a tone that resembled the chime on a bell, he declared:

“In the past, there were monsters. Great creatures who controlled the earth but could not rule it. In the present, we have brains that can rule but fail to control. Drawing from the past, the present can shape the future. I am the man intended for that mission!

“I have rediscovered and revived the monsters of the past. It is right that my name should resemble theirs. But in using them to shape the future, I shall follow the prophecies of Nostradamus, so my name should be a tribute to him as well. Thus I stand before you as the man of things to come.” Turning, Chandos drew himself erect, and proclaimed: “I am Monstrodamus!”

TO the astonishment of the prisoners, Maximus and Optimus promptly flung their guns aside and fell prostrate to the floor. If either Harry or Stan had guessed that such folly would happen, they could have ended the travesty then and there.

The thing that was most grimly humorous was the attitude of Compeer Chandos. Swelling with the pride that he felt belonged to Monstrodamus, old Chandos was totally oblivious to the freedom that the prisoners had gained. But he was so pleased by the homage shown by his servants that he refused to accept it further.

Chandos waved his hand to end the obeisance. Coming to their feet, Maximus and Optimus picked up their guns on the way and became their stolid selves, each covering a prisoner. It was all completed while Harry and Stan were still staring at each other.

At least, it gave the prisoners hope. Should Chandos again blare the name “Monstrodamus,” Harry and Stan would do some bowing of their own, but not in the direction of Chandos. They would bow straight for the guns and grab them.

Unfortunately, Chandos was finished with his kingly role. He discarded crown and gown, revealing his dark-gray suit and skullcap as the attire beneath the regalia. He was smiling in a very friendly way when he brought forward the hollow globe that contained the crawling things.

“My first experiment,” declared Chandos. “A microcosmic world, existent in itself. Animals, plants, in equal balance, living on forever. It proved that what was, shall be. That was why I traveled everywhere in this larger world, seeking old things in far places and delving into the distant past, knowing that I should find what I desired.”

Chandos told his servants to conduct the guests to the tropical room. Instead of going to the main section, they entered one of the side compartments. There, Chandos reached into a deep box and brought his arm out slowly. Coiled from wrist to shoulder was a thing that looked like a black snake.

“A flying serpent,” identified Chandos. “Mentioned by Herodotus, the ancient historian. In Buto, in Arabia, he learned that with the spring, these creatures flew through a gorge to Egypt, only to be met and destroyed by flocks of ibises.

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“That is why the ibis became the sacred bird of Egypt, because it saved the land from destruction. Later, commentators doubted Herodotus, but I believed him. Because of the ibis, the flying serpent became extinct, or nearly so. No creature ever becomes entirely extinct. I finally found the flying serpent in Arabia.”

Chandos carried the serpent to a narrow pipe that was upright on the wall. The thing uncoiled and went up through the pipe. Maximus reached in another box, took out a guinea pig and climbed a ladder. As the serpent emerged, Maximus extended the guinea pig.

There was a hiss, a strike, and the guinea pig fell lifeless from the servant's hand. Dropping from the ladder, Maximus was away before the serpent could choose him as further prey. Doubling itself, the serpent returned down the pipe. Chandos was awaiting it with motionless arm; the serpent crawled around his wrist. Carefully, Chandos slid the coils over his hand and gave an upward fling. The serpent straightened, its scales flipped out like the feathers of arrows and it flew through the air with a sharp whirl, landing in the box where it belonged.

“When I took the flying serpent to Althrop's,” declared Chandos simply, “it was wrapped around the century plant. I sent it up through the speaking tube and it came down again. I carried it to the door and sent it home. These creatures have an ancient instinct to return wherever they came from. That is why they always tried to return to Egypt, in spite of the ibises.”

HAVING thus admitted one gruesome murder, Chandos apparently remembered another, for he turned on his heel and beckoned for his guests to follow. He led them straight down to the cellar, to the furnace, where Optimus pulled the door wide. Chandos pointed to a deluge of dancing flames.

“You have heard of Benvenuto Cellini, the most eminent goldsmith of the sixteenth century,” spoke Chandos. “If you have read his autobiography, you will remember that when he was five years old, he was in the basement chamber of his home watching a fire of good oak logs.

“It was then that Cellini's father pointed to a creature like a lizard that was disporting in the intensest flame and told his son that it was a salamander, a creature that dwelt in fire. Cellini's ears were boxed so he would remember it. I shall not use violence to make you remember my salamanders. Your lives will be too short to bother.”

The salamanders were certainly in Chandos' furnace, a dozen or more of them. Fierce creatures, lizards the size of baby alligators, writhing like the very flames in which they disported. Chandos did not approach the fire too closely. These creatures were untrained, as Grebb's case proved. There had been one in Grebb's fireplace.

“Earth, water, air, and fire,” asserted Chandos. “Those were the elements named by Paracelsus, who stated that living creatures were found in all. Among those belonging in fire were salamanders. Modern scientists would laugh and ask you to show them a salamander in a fire.

“Fools! Would they expect a goldfish in a glass of water drawn from a kitchen faucet? Fish are found only where water is perpetual. To find my salamanders, I went to the crater of Mount Vesuvius, where fire is eternal.”

Chandos gestured for Optimus to close the furnace door. Arms folded, the compeer stared with the glittering eyes of a pronounced enthusiast.

“Fish can live out of water,” he declared. “Salamanders can live out of fire... for a time. How did the salamander appear in the fire in the Cellini basement chamber? The answer was stated: the fire was of good oak logs.

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“I found that my Vesuvius salamanders would burrow into oak. I packed the cavities with powdered volcanic lava and brought the logs home. It took tremendous heat to revive those salamanders after their long journey; a heavy strain on my chimney, but I renewed their vigor.

“A few days ago, I let the liveliest specimen burrow into a fine oak log, which I promptly packed and placed outdoors for Jed Guphrey to find. That log found its way to Grebb's fireplace. I was sure so active a salamander would lose but little vigor from its brief trip.”

Chandos finished with a long, cackling laugh. It wasn't necessary for him to unravel further the secret of Grebb's mysterious death. Harry had personally seen Grebb toss the log that cracked the deadly one already in the fireplace, and stand there warming his hands in invitation to the fiery lizard.

There was a regretful note to the finish of the compeer's cackle. He was thinking of the salamander.

“Poor creature!” mourned Chandos. “It went to ashes when the fire was extinguished. But Grebb's death was worth the sacrifice. Like Althrop, he was beginning to doubt the bargain he had made with me. Grebb thought I was gathering minerals like pitchblende and other rarities on my expeditions. Althrop thought I was bringing home exotic plants from which I could extract remarkable drugs.

“Fools! I studied minerals to discover fossilized bones to aid my search for creatures supposedly extinct. I brought back curious plants so that the creatures I did discover would have the proper food upon which they could live and thrive. But Thull was the greatest fool of all, thinking that I delved in alchemy. Bah! Anyone should know that it is impossible to transmute base metals into gold!”

Such acknowledgment from Compeer Chandos, the man whose pastime was bringing the incredible to reality, was enough to bury the myth of alchemy forever. But Harry and Stan weren't thinking along such lines. They were wondering how soon their own burials, if any, would take place.

CHANDOS had other things to show them, and it wasn't good policy to object. He led them upstairs and through the castle to the unfinished wing, where they saw a creature they had already met.

It was a diplodocus, a form of dinosaur, weighing twenty tons and boasting a neck and head that were more than thirty feet long.

The diplodocus was a vegetarian, but it was easily trained to pick up smaller creatures and place them where demanded. It was the thing that had snatched Stan and Harry in such quick succession from the ground outside the castle. Poking its head out through an open skylight, it had done each task so suddenly that the disappearances seemed phenomenal.

Stan particularly detested the diplodocus. He wasn't interested in the fact that Chandos had hatched it from an ancient egg preserved in the thick ice of an Alaskan glacier. Stan should have been on the lookout for the thing, for it was the very creature that had tossed him over the fence, the first time he came to Castle Chandos.

That night, the compeer had been working the furnace heavily to put the salamanders in fettle. The diplodocus should have very carefully lain Stan right down through a gap in the central hothouse. What stopped it was an annoying flare from the chimney. Startled by the vivid-green light, the almost brainless diplodocus had tossed its head the other way and let its human burden fling away.

Even those monsters had their limitations, though Chandos stood ready to prove that under his application their combined force would be invincible. The thing that interrupted was the arrival of the third servant, Fortissimus, accompanied by another pair that Chandos did not name.

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Fortissimus acted as the spokesman, thus proving he was the bravest of the lot. For when he announced that the pterandon was dead, Compeer Chandos flew into a rage. He ordered Maximus and Optimus to take the prisoners to the throne room.

Arriving there, Chandos put on his robe and crown. But he didn't swell and proclaim himself as Monstrodamus. All Chandos did was bellow:

“Bring in the murderer!”

Fortissimus and his two companions left. They returned with a thing so limp that it looked like one of the prehistoric creatures. But when they flung the black shape on the floor before the throne, it proved to be neither bird, beast, nor reptile, either singly or in grotesque combination.

This thing was The Shadow!

CHAPTER XVIII. DEATH BY DEGREES

WHILE waiting for the figure on the floor to stir, Chandos calmly told Harry and Stan what their fate would be. Each was to be assigned to a separate compartment in the partitioned hothouse. Those sections, Chandos explained, were more numerous than a tour of the premises had revealed.

Chandos was looking straight at Stan, who remembered how he had followed a much-mixed trail when he came here with Cranston. By those twisty routes, Chandos had led his visitors right past certain compartments and around them. Those must be the extra divisions to which Chandos referred.

Continuing, Chandos stated that each special compartment held its quota of antiques and horrors in the form of creatures that most scientists believed were found only in fossilized form. That wasn't all; some of the monstrosities were hybrids of Chandos' own development. The various creatures were segregated because certain species did not get along together.

However, they all had a common enemy: namely, man. How long Harry and Stan would last was the question that really interested Chandos, because he regarded the test to be a valuable experiment. Whatever happened, he'd see that the victims weren't too badly mangled.

“You are both outlawed,” sneered Chandos. “So I shall let your bodies be found by the searchers who are at present looking for you. Someone will have to take the blame for killing you, so I have chosen Jed Guphrey. So far, he has managed to elude my diplodocus, but I have another creature that will surely capture him.

“Jed has been cautious of late, but tonight he is helping a widespread search and will forget himself. I shall let him see all my creatures, send him forth in company with your bodies. I am sure that Jed will tell his story according to my order. Should he even begin to describe my creatures”—the snake emblem quivered as Chandos gave a shrug—“well, who would believe him?”

A low laugh answered. Though weak, it carried traces of a challenge. Looking toward the floor, Chandos saw The Shadow rise to hands and knees, then sag back again. There was anxiety in the expression of the man whose title “Monstrodamus” deserved accent on the first two syllables, though that wasn't how he pronounced it.

Harry saw the compeer's expression and recognized its significance. Chandos wanted The Shadow to live, in order to deal him death befitting the crime he had committed.

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The pterandon, whatever it might be, had evidently rated as the prize prehistoric pet package. Correctly, Harry judged that it was therefore the flying thing that Jed had described as a devil monster.

The Shadow was showing remarkable recuperation, much to the delight of Chandos. The next time he rose, he reached his feet; reeling, he looked for something to grasp and finished by embracing the huge stellar globe, as far as his arms could extend around its huge girth.

The Shadow's weight being insufficient to stop the globe's revolution, he rolled with it and would have toppled, but for the quickness with which the compeer's servants caught him.

They marched The Shadow before the throne, that he might hear the decree of Monstrodamus.

Singularly, Compeer Chandos did not overly denounce the cloaked culprit. The compeer was becoming reconciled to the death of the pterandon, recognizing it as another landmark in the history of evolution. It was the avowed purpose of Chandos to match monsters against men in a titanic struggle which would eventually result in the world supremacy of Monstrodamus.

Since the applied power of such creatures as the pterandon depended upon their master's brain, Chandos would have to allow for the machines that men might employ to counteract them. The crash between the flying lizard and the whirling autogiro was the first instance of the sort, and Chandos would remember it in shaping his future policy.

Dwelling upon the subject of his prehistoric pets, Chandos avowed that they could accomplish all that machines could manage, and more. Land, sea, air were not the only realms that he could conquer. He had creatures that could live in fire; others that operated in the depths of the earth.

His only lack was mass output. He couldn't sacrifice a pterandon for each aircraft that one might destroy; nor could he raise enough dinosaurs to cope with fleets of tanks. Such monsters, therefore, would become auxiliaries only.

Salamanders, winged serpents, were equally deadly and more fearsome. By their use, Chandos could eliminate the greatest men of brain. Unmolested in this forgotten castle, Chandos would secretly, mysteriously lop off the heads of government and industry throughout the world, until chaos would be universal.

Chaos from which Monstrodamus would emerge supreme. He could wait for that day, this master in the purple robe and diamond-studded crown. Already the world was wrecking itself through strife and warfare, and the weaker, the more disorganized it became, the sooner would begin the reign of Monstrodamus, creator of his own predicted destiny.

RISING from his throne, Chandos swept his arms wide to dismiss the subject and at the same time halt the bows that his servitors were about to give. Like The Shadow, Harry and Stan were cut short of an opportunity to make a break for safety.

“Bring the captives,” commanded Chandos. “I shall use this one”—his gesture was toward The Shadow—“in the greatest of all experiments in death. The demonstration will prove the combined power of my chosen creatures. It will be death by degrees, each step an added impetus toward the instinct that no human can suppress: Fear!”

As Chandos uttered the word “Fear!” even Fortissimus shuddered with the other servants. Surveying The Shadow as a vulture would its prey, Chandos narrowed his eyes to twinkling beads that reflected his evil delight at gaining so intrepid a subject for the test to come.

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They reached the central section of the glass-topped courtyard, the portion that had been the pterandon's roost. No longer robed as Monstrodamus, Chandos blandly remarked that his flying lizard had been on the wing the time when he had shown his visitors through this place.

The remains of the now dead pterandon had been removed, along with the wreckage of the autogiro. Apparently this central chamber was to be the scene of The Shadow's coming ordeal.

Maximus and Optimus started to take Stan and Harry to other compartments. Chandos ordered them to keep the prisoners here. He wanted them to witness what happened to The Shadow. Their own deaths, later, would be pleasant in comparison, and Chandos was inclined to be lenient toward Harry and Stan.

No longer unsteady, The Shadow was surveying the giant hothouse. By daylight, the glass divisions had not been apparent, though The Shadow had suspected them because of the way certain pliable plants had seemingly extended straight upward in air, like beanstalks.

At present, under artificial light, the glass walls showed reflections. Thin, horizontal cracks were plain at various altitudes, proving that portions of glass could slide up sectionally, one past another. Among the camouflage of matted plants, The Shadow could even detect the outlines of control levers.

Thus Chandos could at any time lessen or enlarge the scope of any invisible compartment. The case applied even to this central room, for there was a dividing streak across the middle of its plant-tangled floor, ending by a prickly plant that was topped with a spiny bulge three feet above the ground.

Pressing The Shadow toward a stumpy, gnarled tree that looked like a miniature Banyan, Fortissimus and his companions gave the cloaked prisoner a sudden spin that sent him backward against the wide boughs. The Shadow stumbled across something that instantly became alive.

Up from the tropical matting came two pinchers much like giant lobster claws. They pinned upon The Shadow's knees, toppling him back against the gnarled tree, where his arms went wide and his hands clutched the boughs. Lesser claws tightened on his legs and ankles, while an appendage like a great looped tail came whipping up.

Looking down, The Shadow saw a dozen eyes glaring from the six-foot monster. The thing was a giant scorpion, a relic of the fossil period. Its tail was acting as though it bore a poison sting, but the creature didn't try to use it. Recalling that there was a genus of false scorpions, The Shadow decided that this was one of that group's forebears.

With its tremendous size, the thing didn't need a stinger. Its real menace were its chelas, those huge pincers that gripped The Shadow's knees. Had they tightened, they could have sheared right through their captive's knee joints; but the giant scorpion preferred to consider its prey awhile, before dismembering it.

At a word from Foitissimus, the other helpers slapped things like slimy ropes upon The Shadow's arms as they stretched against the tree boughs. The ropes wrapped of their own accord, and The Shadow stared to see what the living lashes were.

Eight feet in length, each was a giant earthworm!

Nothing prehistoric about these. They were specimens from Gippsland, in Australia, where they were commonly found. But like so many creatures of this isolated continent, these monstrous worms were unquestionably the survivors of a once widespread race. They were the sort of specimens that Chandos would naturally collect as evidence of retarded evolution.

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PINCHED by the giant scorpion, lashed by the mighty earthworms, The Shadow had other treats in store. Chandos appeared with his flying serpent and let it coil around The Shadow's neck, to dart its fangs about his face.

Knowing that this thing had murdered Althrop and later darted at the window where Thull was peering through, The Shadow remained motionless, hoping that the thing would ignore him and return to Chandos as it had before. But the serpent remained, its occasional hisses telling that it suspected The Shadow to be a thing alive.

Far fiercer was the hiss that came from dead ahead. The scorpion dropped its probing tail to The Shadow's waist level, and The Shadow viewed the new horror that Chandos had just supplied. Maximus and Optimus were setting down a great open-fronted stove, filled with coals so hot they spurted greenish flame.

Hissing amid that hellish furnace were the salamanders, lashing their fiery bodies out through the front. Level with The Shadow's chest, they were ready to stab their scorching dagger tongues the moment the cloaked figure shrank away. The Shadow did not shrink; indeed, he couldn't, not with the grip that other monsters held upon him.

Chandos had brought the salamanders to inspire further terror in his captive. But it was impossible to produce more of something that was, so far, absent. The Shadow's eyes were steady, placid, and Chandos recognized it.

The master of monsters called for something that made even Fortissimus shudder. Nevertheless, the boldest servant brought it—a flat, oblong box that fitted upon the furnace top on a level with The Shadow's gaze.

Popping the lid back, Fortissimus sprang away. Even Chandos did not look at the contents of the box; he watched The Shadow instead. Clamped as he was, The Shadow had no choice but to view the new horror. At first, he saw only a layer of coarse gray sand; then, as the grains absorbed the heat from below, the sand stirred.

Up reared a reptilian head with eyes that actually sent stabs through air, straight at The Shadow's own. A mouth spread, emitting a long green tongue from a blood-red gullet. Above the creature's hideous visage puffed a spiny crest—yellow surrounded by spots of white resembling a diadem. Claws raised from the sand, bringing with them wings instead of shoulders. Thus did the creature poise on the fringe of its granular bed.

Eye to eye, The Shadow was meeting the gaze of a thing that couldn't exist, but did.

The monster was a living basilisk!

Through centuries, ancient savants had averred that such a creature could be found amid the hot sands of the Sahara Desert, if anyone chose to look at it, which no one did. For the deadly, phenomenal poison of the basilisk lay in its gaze!

Compeer Chandos believed such ancient legends. He had good reason to credit them. Modern scientists had discredited such creatures as the eight-foot earthworms that at present bound The Shadow's arms, only to eventually admit that such creatures could exist, and did.

On ancient testimony of Herodotus, the compeer had obtained a flying serpent that had survived the watchful ibis. The latter evidence of Cellini had enabled him to discover salamanders in the volcanic lair from which occasional specimens were carried by eruptions, to astonish the human inhabitants of a less hellish domain.

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So Chandos had sought a basilisk and found one.

Other terrors failing, Chandos had produced the one that no mortal could face and survive. He had captured the basilisk in the dark of the moon to avoid its murderous glance. He knew why the creature poised; it was waiting until its stare had slain; then it would spring to gorge upon its prey.

But Chandos was behind the upraised box lid, ready to slam it down. He didn't want the basilisk at large, where it might turn its glance at anyone, Chandos included.

Across the creature's chest, Chandos saw The Shadow's eyes fix in a glassy stare. Their color was startling, myriad in hue, a reflection of the basilisk's own deadly optics! So motionless, so unblinking were The Shadow's eyes, that Chandos was convinced the basilisk's optical stabs had won.

Chandos looked at the basilisk, knowing that the creature itself should recognize by instinct when its prey had succumbed. Claws stirred the sand; winged shoulders lifted. Chandos heard a triumphant hiss from the vicious gullet beneath the stabbing eyes that he did not care to see.

With a sharp clap, the compeer slammed the lid and thrust the heated box to Fortissimus, who received it in the folds of an asbestos cloth. Another hiss resounded; this triumph came from the lips of Chandos himself.

The death degree of Monstrodamus stood delivered—to The Shadow!

CHAPTER XIX. DAWN OF TERROR

AT the touch of Chandos' hand, the scaly serpent uncoiled from The Shadow's neck and wrapped about the compeer's arm. Two servants pried rods into the scorpion's pincers and released the creature's grip upon the victim's knees. The binding worms were taken from The Shadow's arms.

The cloaked figure did not slump. It stayed rigid, stiffened, like the eyes that were glazed in a perpetual stare. With a sweep of his hand, Chandos tumbled the figure forward. A frozen statue, The Shadow struck the ground with a crash that was silenced by the clustered foliage. Already, Maximus and Optimus had removed the salamander stove, to return its creatures to their furnace. While awaiting their return, Compeer Chandos stood with folded arms, surveying the basilisk's work. A thing to remember, the victim's symptoms in a case like this. So sudden was death, that it brought rigor mortis with it.

Dim dawn was streaking the sky above Castle Chandos, tinting the strange scene within. The dawn of a new era, presaging the reign of Monstrodamus! For Compeer Chandos stood worthy of his self-chosen title. Having conquered The Shadow, the master of monsters could overwhelm any foe on earth!

There was one slight detail: the disposal of Harry Vincent and Stan Weldon. Instead of sending them immediately to their respective chambers of death, Chandos lifted his head and gazed expectantly at the dawn. With a side tilt, he listened toward the ground. A faint rumble reached him. Chandos gestured and Fortissimus drew a bush aside.

Fearful was the creeping sound that came from the earth itself. Then from a deep burrow emerged a man-sized shape in gray, carrying a burden equal to itself. Letting the burden drop at the compeer's feet, the gray creature squatted like a mammoth rat and looked at its master, Chandos.

The thing from the ground was a monstrous mole!

More than that, it was the gray ghost that had appeared and vanished outside Castle Chandos!

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As for the burden that the mighty mole had brought, it happened to be Jed Guphrey, somewhat mauled, but greatly startled after his involuntary underground trip.

Though trained to retrieve any humans that it met, the mole did not feast on such. It preferred giant earthworms of the Australian variety, so its master fed it a pair, the same two that had recently bound The Shadow like whipcords. Meanwhile, Chandos commented upon nature's compensations.

Since small worms were preyed upon by small moles, the existence of giant worms had urged Chandos to look for giant moles. He had found this one in Australia, by dint of long search in the Gippsland region. It was the handiest of creatures to bring in prowlers.

No wonder the thing had seemed a gray ghost, even to The Shadow!

That night, when trailing Stan, The Shadow had sensed an intervening creature that he couldn't see, its burrowing the simulation of footsteps. The motion of moles was like swimming through the earth, and this giant specimen, in diving upward, had literally sprung from the ground. Meeting more than it could handle, it had dropped away with the same speed, while The Shadow was reeling away with Stan.

The next day, Compeer Chandos had planted a rock garden over the mole hole, thus concealing his monster's work. He would probably do the same with the spot where the creature had captured Jed.

COLDLY, firmly, Chandos was addressing Jed, only to receive the half-wit's vacant stare. Jed was his old self again after his weird experience. Maximus and Optimus arrived and yanked the dull man to his feet, but he still wouldn't listen to Chandos.

Jed was staring at what he thought was his old friend the devil monster, shrunk to human size. He was looking at the cloaked shape of The Shadow, and the fixed glow of the glassy eyes scared him.

“That thing is dead!” stormed Chandos, referring to The Shadow. “Dead, like you will be if you do not listen! There are words you must remember, Jed, to repeat exactly as I tell you.”

Looking dully at Chandos, Jed was nodding, though he did not understand. But he couldn't keep his gaze on the compeer. His eyes drifted back toward The Shadow. Halfway, they froze, and Jed's lips let out a hoarse cry as wild as any yet heard during the whole past reign of horror.

Nothing could stop this madman. Flinging Maximus and Optimus aside, Jed made a wild lung toward Chandos, who jumped aside. The giant mole saw the crazed man coming and ducked down into its burrow. Its specialty lay in trapping unsuspecting prey; to the mole, Jed in action was a monster as horrid as itself.

Fortissimus went flying as he tried to block Jed from the door; like the other servants, he bobbed up again, drawing a gun to shoot the crazed fellow. But not a shot was fired after Jed. Another and more important target announced itself—with a laugh.

Turning at the weird mirth's challenge, Chandos and his followers saw The Shadow, back to life!

On his feet, the cloaked fighter was drawing automatics that his captors hadn't bothered to collect. Jed alone had seen The Shadow rise; that was why the half-wit had gone berserk. Knowing that Jed still classed him as the devil monster, The Shadow had timed his revival to Jed's glance, thus starting a sudden and helpful confusion.

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There was death in the gaze of the basilisk, but not to humans. Chandos had confirmed so much of the ancient legend, that he had taken the rest for granted. The eyes that The Shadow really watched were the compeer's, above the basilisk's crest. They'd been gloating so expectantly, that The Shadow, whose predicament was complete, had decided that the best solution was to gratify Chandos' wish.

Long versed in the study of hypnotism, The Shadow had set his eyes in the stony gaze that went with a cataleptic state. To a degree, he had applied self-hypnosis, wherein a mesmerist becomes his own subject. Nothing could have more amply illustrated the fabled result of a basilisk's deadly glance. The Shadow's ruse, supplemented by his rigid sprawl, had completely deceived Chandos into thinking that his cloaked captive was dead.

Preserving the hoax to await the best opportunity, The Shadow gained a perfect break. He'd flung Jed into things much as Chandos sprang his monsters. Now The Shadow was following through with his own attack!

WHEELING toward the door The Shadow gestured Stan and Harry through, commanding them to follow Jed outdoors. Thinking that the cloaked fighter was coming with them, they went. But The Shadow reversed his course and stayed, whirling back to deal with Chandos and his servants.

They scattered ahead of The Shadow's gunfire. Into the thick foliage, they paused to stab back shots. Chandos was with them, or rather one of them, for none were close together. Hardest of all to find, the skull-capped leader was aiming a revolver with the rest.

They needed such weapons, Chandos and his men, to control some of the lesser monsters that flourished in their domain. When it came to gun against gun, they outnumbered The Shadow three to one. They were six in all, Chandos and his servants, each with a gun to fight The Shadow's brace of automatics.

Bullets were pounding the shockproof glass that formed the various partitions. With a sudden laugh, The Shadow vanished into a mass of vines just ahead of converging gunfire. His hand found a lever and tugged it. There was a rumble as a large panel of glass rose.

Guns were blazing at echoes only. From across the central room the laugh was repeated, tuned to another rumble. The Shadow had opened a second of the special compartments. Chandos and his followers liked monsters; The Shadow was letting them have them.

But not in the style they wanted. These were monsters that wouldn't mix, the things that gushed through on paw, hoof, and wing. A dog-jawed cynoganathus, shaped like a half-sized hippopotamus, tangled itself with a great-billed hadrosaurus in a quick preliminary bout. Giant tree frogs, bold because of bulk, hopped full force at waddling pareiasauri, only to find that their prey could fight back.

Smaller creatures proved themselves the tougher. They were armored, many of them, ancestors of armadillos and hermit crabs, constructed on a larger scale. Darting down from an upper section that The Shadow opened, came monsters resembling bats, and birds like crocodiles.

Most powerful of all was a saber-toothed tyrannosaurus, a half-grown creature that stretched a mere twenty feet and stood half as high. Terror even of the fighting monsters, this creature chewed its path right through the shambles, lashing its tail to stun passing prey.

The lease on human life was short. Chandos and his men had become the victims of the winners when the monsters finished fighting one another. They were trapped in the deepest portion of the place, having gone there in vain quest of The Shadow. Already, some of the servants had succumbed to the thud and flay of the mighty monsters.

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From somewhere near, Chandos shrieked a hopeful cry. Too late!

The Shadow had already thought of it—the bush with the prickly knob that served as lever for the central glass. His laugh was a taunting answer to the shriek that Chandos gave. Hearing the mockery above him, Chandos looked up.

High in the air, The Shadow was rising toward the open dome on the wide edge of a sheet of glass that became a thick-walled barrier, blocking off the last faint hope of escape for Chandos and his tribe, since they were cooped up in a place that had no outlet, along with half the fighting monsters!

The Shadow had known that the spiny lever must control something of this nature, for the simple reason that the pterandon could never otherwise have left its nest. All creatures of the order pterodactyl were ledge dwellers that had to light on overhanging brinks to resume flight.

In modern setting, they preferred stone walls, milldams, quarry brinks. They could swoop past car tops and snatch away victims like Thull. But they couldn't land on flimsy pergolas, to prepare for another hop, without wrecking such frail structures. To overcome the pterandons limitation, Chandos had provided this mechanical ledge, that it might hop the wall around the castle courtyard.

The Shadow was no pterandon; nor did he have his autogiro. As the great glass stopped, he found himself far above the range of the fighting monsters that were making the castle quake. But he was isolated, a target for Chandos and the other gunners, whose last minutes of life could still be spent in taking The Shadow along to their doom!

Bullets ricocheted from the towering glass as The Shadow groped on the edge—shots which The Shadow could not answer under present stress. They were finding the range, those marksmen, for one bullet skimmed The Shadow's hat brim. Still, The Shadow had twenty feet to cover at this crawling gait!

Straight at The Shadow came a great, inquiring head, thrust from the open top of the castle's new wing. It was the diplodocus, tamest yet most gigantic of the castle's creatures, and the only one still cut off from the prehistoric battle!

A GREAT mouth took The Shadow; much as a scoop shovel would, and swung him across the roof just as a final volley of gunfire sounded from deep below. Those shots were the last; not because Chandos and his sagging followers could no longer find The Shadow, but because they, themselves, had just been found by their own monsters.

Carrying The Shadow almost to the ground outside the castle, the diplodocus hesitated. From the gate out front, Harry and Stan saw it reverse its lift, to swing the cloaked figure back where it had found him! But hardly had the upward motion started, before The Shadow blazed both guns into the brainless creature's face.

Dropping The Shadow to the ground that was so close, the monster whipped its head over the edge of its huge kennel and deep within.

Shots were stabbing after it from The Shadow's guns, and in its fright, the diplodocus stampeded. A lash of its mighty tail quivered the castle; then the thing was crashing toward the building's depth with all the power its many tons could pack!

The very dawn seemed to thunder as stones collapsed amid the great crash of glass. Its inner walls smashed, the entire castle caved into its hollow courtyard, burying monsters, living and dead, prehistoric and human, in a great mass of rubble that crushed the mightiest of all the monstrosities, the diplodocus that produced the

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crash under persuasion of The Shadow's gun stabs!

Thick and gray was the cloud that covered the echoing scene. The rising dust seemed to suppress the thundering echoes. When the cloud dispelled, the silence was complete. This dawn of terror had brought twilight to the rule of Compeer Chandos. The Monstrodamus of the future belonged with the creatures that had returned to their prehistoric past.

From somewhere came a strange, trailing laugh that told the triumph of The Shadow. Its fading echoes lingered above the gray pile of tumbled stone that had once been Castle Chandos!

THE END