

NO TIME FOR MURDER

Maxwell Grant

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CHAPTER I

HIGH above Manhattan's narrow streets, the lights of the penthouse twinkled like the beacons on a mountainside.

Below the penthouse gulped a man-made canyon; on the other side, across another crevice, loomed the mightier mass of a silent office building, towering like a protecting summit shielding the refuge from harm.

Yet there was terror in that isolated penthouse that hung balanced between black depths and bulking whiteness. Stark terror that dominated every action of the haggard, hunted man who dwelt there.

Like a trapped beast, the man was roving the rooms of his luxurious retreat, flicking off lights, turning them on again in obedience to ever-changing whims. He wanted light as a protection against his fear, but he felt that darkness would in turn be the best safeguard against a living menace.

Pacing through a modernistic bedroom, the man paused in stoop-shouldered style, to study his own wan features in a mirror set between two lighted wall brackets. His face, long and gaunt, was white to the crest of his bald forehead, and the fear of years was expressed by twitching wrinkles.

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His lips were twitching too, more nervously than Rufus Debley had ever seen them act before. He tried to tighten his chattering teeth, but his lips still quivered. Then his hands, clawing the glass surface of the table below the mirror, did their part to assuage his dread.

Instinctively those hands groped to a drawer; fumbling they drew it open. A sharp hiss sighing through his gritted teeth, Debley clutched the feathered thing that lay in the drawer. His eyes lowered to view the curious effigy with the scarlet feathers and wood-carved human face and with that glance, Debley regained at least a modicum of self-control.

"The Quetzal!" Glancing upward, Debley stared at his reflected face. "I still have it. Why should I fear its threat after all these years?"

In answer, Debley's reflection hardened. The years that he had mentioned seemed to wipe themselves from his face, lines and all. With a leer of contempt, Debley flung the Quetzal image into the drawer and shoved the latter shut. Hands no longer trembling, he reached to the wall brackets and turned them off. Shoulders straightening, the gaunt man stalked toward his living room.

At the doorway, new fright gripped him and in a trice, Debley had become his cringing self again. Hands raised pleadingly, he was backing into the darkened bedroom, gasping for mercy as though he did not expect it. Stumbling against a chair, Debley flattened and lay moaning until nothing happened.

The sound from the living room, the thing that had so disturbed the fear-ridden man, was nothing more than the flap-flap of a window shade propelled by the slight opening above the sash. As this fact dawned on Debley, it allayed his panic; coming to his feet, he strode through the living room and delivered a confident smirk toward the pane of the offending window.

Again, Debley's countenance grinned back at him. No longer haggard, it seemed to announce that no danger could lurk outside, since this window, like the rest in the penthouse, overlooked sheer space through which nothing less agile than a mountain goat could navigate.

There was just one false note in the laugh that Debley forced between his teeth.

The reflection showed because of the penthouse lights. By the same token, Debley's gaze was unable to penetrate the outside darkness. He wanted to assure himself that such blackness was empty; hence with a return of his old fervor, Debley sprang about the living room, extinguishing lights everywhere.

When only one light remained, Debley was gripped by his old alarm. Darkness with its encroaching gloom, carried a menace all its own. Here was the spectacle of a fear-maddened man, shrinking from the very darkness which he hoped would shield him, seeking refuge in the only corner of the room where a light still glowed.

From that vantage point – if it could be called such – Rufus Debley darted his wild eyes to every cranny as though expecting some specter of the past to rise and devour him. His frenzy, ever on the increase, drew beads of sweat from his high forehead, while his lips, parched by the same fear, demanded moisture which Debley supplied with quick nervous licks from his tongue.

Singular how the gloom created noises of its own, more horrendous than the visual phantasms which Debley expected but did not see!

From somewhere in the darkened penthouse came a sharp click-clack that might have been anything from the opening of a window to the door of the elevator. It might even have been the door of the fire tower, for

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Debley, forgetting his terror for the moment, was nudging himself toward the hallway to stare at a red light shining from the corridor's end.

Then, startled by a rattle from another direction, the fear-stricken man was plunging back to the lighted corner which he had personally turned into an oasis amid this desert of thickened gloom. His hand, plucking as though to grasp a weapon, found a telephone parked upon a small stand.

The rattling sound was a trifle, apparently nothing more than the joggle of a metal ash-stand, disturbed by Debley's hurried footsteps across the floor. Nevertheless, the man was glad that he could still establish communication with someone outside the penthouse, for he lifted the telephone and began to dial a number. After a few fumbles, Debley completed the operation and was rewarded by a voice across the wire, even though it was not the one he expected to hear.

"Hello... Tolland?" Debley was hoarse with anxiety. "No, you won't do! I must talk to Tolland... Yes, I mean Colonel Tolland..."

The pause that followed was not to Debley's liking. His next words were savage, so fierce that seemingly they buried his fear.

"It's life or death I tell you! Only the Colonel would understand... He'll talk to me if you let him know it's Debley on the wire... I don't care if he's sending someone... I must talk to Colonel Tolland..."

The call ended with the abrupt click of the receiver from the other end. Cut off from the outside world, Debley became frantic. His attempts to dial another number failed three times before he managed it; this time when a voice came, Debley fairly panted his message.

"Inspector Cardona? Yes, this is Rufus Debley... That's right, the commissioner told me I could call you... It's here, inspector, the thing that means death... No, not just the Quetzal image. I mean death itself..."

"Listen!" Debley cupped his hand around the mouthpiece, hoping it would pick up sounds like a microphone; "You can hear it creeping... Yes, creeping through the darkness... Lights? Why should I turn on lights? So death can find me?"

"It isn't human, the thing that seeks me... It may have been human once, but now..." Debley's pause included a deep gulp. "But now, well maybe it's a ghost... A killer's ghost, that drives me to destruction... Listen! You'll hear why I can't stand it any longer..."

Real though his terror was, it did not totally suppress Debley's ingenuity. He was hoping that Cardona would hear something, the flapping of that window shade that had scared Debley personally with its uncanny flapping. But the shade was no longer obliging; its sound no longer came. Over the phone, Cardona's gruff voice admonished Debley to "hold tight" and with that there was another receiver click.

Letting the phone slip back to its stand, Debley raised his head and stiffened. He'd worked up his imagination to the pitch of stark realism, for now he fancied that he could hear those creeps that he had mentioned. If the recipients of Debley's phone calls doubted Debley's sanity, they were not alone in the opinion. Debley now was willing to grant that he was mad.

Twitching fingers kept time to those creeping sounds that Debley thought he heard, until the slowing of his hands indicated that the illusion had diminished. Then, coming to his feet, Debley crossed the room and reached the darkened window, glancing back across his stooped shoulder as though expecting a creeping shape to pounce upon him.

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At the window, Debley forced a laugh and looked out into the dark. He could see the lights of other buildings through a drizzly mist and no longer was he troubled by sight of his own reflection, since it was not there. What bothered him was the shade, for Debley couldn't understand its silence until he raised it; then his eyes became incredulous.

No longer was the window lowered those few inches from the top. It was tightly shut and its catch was locked!

Debley's senses, like his sanity, were now in doubt unless the fault belonged to his memory. He hadn't any recollection of having closed that window; in fact, it had been open those few inches only because the sash was stuck and Debley lacked the strength to force it shut. To have managed this unconsciously strained even Debley's exaggerated imagination, yet the mere suggestion aroused another and more potent doubt.

Turning suddenly from the window, Debley crossed the darkened living room with the groping stride of a blind man. Finding the door of the bedroom he entered and stumbled his way to the table by the wall. There without reaching for the lights, he gripped the table drawer and dragged it open; his hands made a quick snatch for the feathered doll with the beak-shaped wooden profile.

Out came those same hands, palms up, their fingers twitching into fists. A spasm quivered Debley's shoulders as his lips delivered a truly terrorized cry. For months Debley had preserved a token which stood for impending doom, yet somehow its possession had given him the belief that he could thwart its menace.

Tonight, Debley's courage had broken. To regain it he wanted to clutch the effigy that threatened death but had not killed. One grip of that feathered doll would have sustained Rufus Debley until friends arrived, but his hope was to be unfulfilled.

The Quetzal image was gone!

CHAPTER II

LONG and fearful were the moments that held Debley in their rigid spell. Through the man's frantic brain teemed sounds that he knew were very real. Real elsewhere, but not here, unless they were being carried through the ether from a spot both strange and distant.

Those sounds that grew in Debley's mind were the thrumming beats of Aztec drums; maddening, ceaseless tattoos that belonged to the peaks and canyons of the Mexican mountains, not among the fissured towers of Manhattan.

Strums of death!

As they had hounded others, so were they seeking Debley, whose brain was now too distraught to tell the real from the false. Debley knew only that the impossible had happened twice: first, the closing of the jammed window; again, the disappearance of the Quetzal doll. Two events that could not be, yet were; both occurring in a place that could only be reached by Debley's one trusted friend, Colonel Tolland, who was too ill to visit him!

No wonder that Debley thought he heard those drums from the past, dread symbols of the immediate future. Only a hand of fate could have invaded here; and the clutch of its murderous fingers was meant for one man only: Rufus Debley.

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Then came the clang that by its reality broke the hammering of the mythical drum beats. Debley recognized the sound of the elevator door, proving that a friend was here. One man alone had a duplicate of the intricate key that Debley used to bring the car to the penthouse level. Colonel Tolland must have changed his mind and ventured through the drizzly night to learn the cause of Debley's fears.

Taking a deep breath, Debley pressed a hand across his forehead as he turned toward the living room door. But it wasn't sweat that his palm found there. Mystified, Debley stood momentarily rigid; then swung about, aghast.

In the bedroom was another window, not far from the table from which the Quetzal doll has disappeared. The bedroom window, as Debley recalled it, had been tightly locked, but it was no longer. Wide open, it was letting in the drizzle, and Debley, frantic over the disappearance of the Quetzal, had been oblivious to the dampening rain against his face!

No longer oblivious, Debley gave a cry as he stumbled toward the living room. He heard creaking footsteps from the hall, louder than the creeping sounds that he had fancied earlier, and a low, cautious call came from the same direction. Debley voiced a cry of welcome that stopped as suddenly as it began.

Something long and slender, slicking with the speed of a whip lash, wrapped itself around Debley's neck and ended his vocal effort. That same coil hauled the frantic man from his feet and tumbled him back toward the window, producing the clatter of an overturning chair along with the thump of Debley's body.

Strong arms in the darkness were hoisting Debley up from the floor, literally somersaulting him toward the window as he tugged at the ropy strand that twined his neck. Only as he struck the sill did Debley realize that he was aimed for a quicker death than strangulation. The rope was already releasing itself when Debley snatched for the sides of the window.

All was as futile as it was frantic.

The rescuer, who came charging through from the living room, caught only a muddled glimpse of Debley's tumble across the drizzle-drenched sill. The darkness was almost impenetrable, certainly too thick to reveal the murderer who had made the death toss, Debley was visible only because his dressing gown, flinging across his head, disclosed the white shirt beneath it. But there was no mistaking the fact that the plunging object was a human bound to certain destruction.

Reaching the window, the man from the living room stopped short the moment that his hands touched the slippery sill. Perhaps he erroneously supposed that Debley's plunge had been the result of an accidental skid, or it might have been instinctive precaution that halted him, when he felt the cold dampness of the woodwork.

Certainly, instinct had much to do with his sudden turnabout and the way he sidestepped to a corner of the room. There, crouching in the blackness, the arrival drew a gun and listened. However taut his nerves, they weren't disturbed by the imaginary beats of Aztec drums. What this listener heard was very real, though it was something which Debley had doubted earlier.

The sound was a slow creeping noise moving through the only exit, the doorway leading to the living room. Following it was a slithery sound, like that of a snake working its way along a floor.

Roused to sudden action the man from the corner became a lunging figure of vengeance. Gun ahead of him, he drove out from the bedroom and through the living room toward the hall. One glance across the lighted living room told him that it was empty.

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That left the hallway as the only choice. The door of the elevator was closed, and the only light in the hallway came from the red bulb that marked the fire exit.

Below the red light, blackness.

Out of that blackness surged a figure that wasn't waiting to be challenged. Nor was there any hesitation from the doorway of the living room. There, a fighter followed the line of his own aiming gun, lunging before he fired. The close range would have favored him, if it hadn't been for the speed of the man he sought to intercept. They locked a moment before one could tug his trigger.

Gun shots, when they came, were diverted upward. Bullets pounded the steel ceiling and ricocheted along the hall. Amid the fiery spurts, two figures twirled in a fantastic tussle under the weird glow of the unblinking red bulb. It was as if the mad imagination of Debley's half-demented mind had given birth to eerie creatures that survived him, judging by the way the grapplers faded and reappeared in the half-light.

One fighter was responsible for the double illusion. He was cloaked in black, his head topped by a slouch hat that totally concealed his features in the gloom. The other man was of more than average build and wiry in action; striving to clutch his adversary, he became partly wrapped in the latter's cloak.

It was grimly reminiscent of Debley's fate, this struggle. Once enveloped in the folds of his own dressing gown, Debley had been lost, an easy prey to a murderer's final stroke. The man who had been too late with rescue realized this and was fighting against becoming the victim of a similar climax. All the more ominous was the fact that the fray was carrying both men along the hall toward a window that opened on the far side of the penthouse.

That window was a square of blackness and through it swirled the drizzle. This window gave promise of aid in avenging Debley's death.

Such was the thought of the belated rescuer who had failed to save Debley's life. Straining to the full, he tried to fling his opponent through the opening, but the twist of their grapple veered them. They reeled away, then back again with a most surprising result. As they reached the window, the drizzle no longer greeted them. Instead of encountering space, sideward lunging shoulders glanced against a solid pane!

How or why the window had closed itself concerned the battlers only so far as it had been eliminated as a factor in the struggle. Zigzagging along the hall they bounced from wall to wall until they neared the doorway into the living room, where suddenly they broke apart.

It was the cloaked member of the pair who dived into the living room, coming suddenly about with a drawn gun to answer any shots that his opponent might provide. But the other man did not recover from amazement in time to resume the fray. Across the hall, he was still grabbing for a vanished foe when his hand clutched the elevator door. On impulse, he yanked it open and sprang inside the car.

By the time a streak of living blackness launched from the living room, the elevator was rumbling downward. Instead of halting, the cloaked figure kept on to the door of the fire tower, beneath the red light. There, briefly, this mystery fighter was tangibly revealed, enough so to identify himself by the title which had made him famous.

He was The Shadow, master crime-hunter, whose enigmatical ways were a terror to men of evil. Yet tonight, despite his uncanny prowess, The Shadow had encountered complications as puzzling as those that he himself produced.

To anyone other than The Shadow, this would have marked the end of a trail; but as his cloaked form merged with the darkness of the fire tower, a strange, whispered laugh filtered back through the self-closing door.

That tone told that where this adventure was concerned, the episode in Debley's penthouse marked the beginning, not the climax!

CHAPTER III

THE old brownstone mansion stood silent, almost lonely, as though huddling against the drizzle that swept the obscure side street. It wasn't the only building in the block, but it gave that impression when compared to the houses that flanked it.

It looked like the patriarch of the block, this house, but it was actually the youngest of the row. It had been built by someone who wanted to improve the neighborhood, but nobody else had followed the example. So there it stood, a brownstone scarecrow of the nineties, supported by brick relics of the eighties, all forgotten in the wake of time.

There were a few lights in the brownstone mansion, all dim and deep within their windows, but the man from the drizzle scanned them closely before approaching the steps. Then, as an added precaution, he looked across his shoulders to make sure that no one was watching him from the street. Satisfied that he was unobserved, he muffled himself deep in his dark raincoat and went up the steps.

At the door, the man had trouble with his keys. He carried them loose in his pocket and one key in particular bothered him. It was the size of a door key, but thinner, and the muffled man finally solved the problem by putting this key in his vest pocket; then, from among the others, he found the one that unlocked the front door.

Coming into a large and gloomy vestibule, the muffled man removed his hat and raincoat, hanging them on a large old-fashioned hat-rack. Opening an inner door he stepped into a large hallway, darting quick glances from left to right. Seeing no one, he began stealing toward a stairway, only to halt and turn suddenly as solid footsteps came from the rear of the hall and a stolid voice inquired:

"Is that you, Mr. Gregg?"

The man from the night finished his quick turnabout at a table where some mail was lying stacked. His tone was nonchalant as he replied:

"Yes, Sarge. I just came in. I was stopping to see if I had any mail."

As he spoke, the nonchalant man found a letter that was addressed to Gregg Tolland. He kept his face turned as he opened the letter, but the mirror beyond the table showed his features. In this mild light, Gregg Tolland might have been termed handsome, but the illumination was much in his favor. There were sharp lines in his face that gave it a bitter expression. Still, the expression could have been attributed to strain, for Gregg was nervous even though he did his best to conceal it.

In comparison, the man called Sarge was as stony-faced as a Mayan idol and equally blunt in speech. He put his next question directly and abruptly:

"Did you go to Debley's?"

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Gregg nodded from the mirror. Then:

"I went there, but I didn't see him. There was some excitement around the place."

Sarge had stepped close. His blunt face showed plainly in the light, a blunt, faithful countenance that fitted his husky build. He was the sort of man who either spoke his thoughts directly or said nothing. This was a time when he preferred to speak:

"Perhaps I should notify your uncle."

At Sarge's statement Gregg wheeled from the table, clutching the letter in his hand. His tone was sharp and defiant with a trace of obstinacy.

"I told you there was excitement at Debley's. Do you want to alarm my uncle? You know how he has been acting lately, living over his past, muttering about those dreams of his."

For a moment, Sarge's deep eyes glared with wakening anger. Then with what seemed a reserve cultivated through years of long training, Sarge nodded.

"You are right, Mr. Gregg," said the stolid man. "Still, the colonel will ask why you did not talk to Debley."

"Tell him I forgot the key," returned Gregg. From his trouser's pocket he produced the loose group. "Look for yourself so you can say I didn't have it."

"But the colonel reminded you –"

"Of course he did, and I forgot. After all, who would remember a key to an elevator door? Of all the absurd notions! When I realized I didn't have the key, I knew I couldn't go up to Debley's penthouse, so I came home. I'll tell my uncle tomorrow. If he wants, I can see Debley then."

Sarge was still doubtful.

"But the letter said the key was very important," he reminded. "I can't see how you forgot it, Mr. Gregg."

There were footsteps coming down the stairs, but Gregg gave them no attention. Less nervous than before, he was facing Sarge in the light, and the thrust of Gregg's chin gave his features a strength that appeared as a genuine expression.

"The letter came to my uncle," announced Gregg firmly. "It may have been important to him, but not to me. After all, I receive important mail of my own" – he brandished the letter in his hand – "this letter, for instance."

Sarge nodded his head as though he intended to bow out. Meanwhile, the footsteps were reaching the bottom of the stairs.

"And may I ask you a question, Sarge?" demanded Gregg, sharply. "Have you been looking after my uncle while I was gone? Just what is he doing now?"

"He is asleep," replied Sarge. "He didn't want to be disturbed, so he said."

"What could have disturbed him?"

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"There was a telephone call."

"From whom?"

"From Mr. Debley. I told him you were on your way to see him."

"But you didn't mention it to my uncle?"

"Of course not. I have already mentioned that the colonel was asleep."

The footsteps had stopped. Accompanying them was a man younger than Gregg Tolland, but firmer of face and in a sense more mature. He had the square features of the Tollands, but his manner was casual, his poise unruffled. He didn't need to thrust his chin to add emphasis to his words. More on the handsome side than Gregg, this newcomer was quite satisfied with his appearance as it was.

"Hello, Cousin Gregg," he said coolly. "So you didn't see Debley after all. Too bad, with Sarge and myself waiting so patiently to hear what was worrying the old coot."

"I'll thank you to keep out of this, Dave," returned Gregg. "If you heard what I said to Sarge, it stands."

"Of course." Dave gave an indifferent nod. "I just didn't want you to forget that I'm part of the Tolland family, too."

"You can remind Uncle Jeremy of that," asserted Gregg. "I'm going upstairs to see him now."

Before Gregg could reach the stairs, Sarge's heavy hand was clamping on his arm.

"The colonel is asleep, Mr. Gregg."

"All right, I'll waken him."

"Sorry, Mr. Gregg. He said he wasn't to be disturbed."

Savagely, Gregg flung the opened letter back on the table as though he wanted his hands free to deal with Sarge. Looking beyond the stolid man, Gregg saw Dave, standing with folded arms, smiling from the foot of the stairs. His chin losing something of its thrust, Gregg spoke in a growl:

"Since there are two of you, I'll forget it. I'll give the key back to Uncle Jeremy in the morning; that is, if I can find it in my room."

Before Dave could supply some appropriate bit of sarcasm, the impending altercation was forgotten. The three-cornered discussion became trivial compared with events upstairs. From somewhere on the second floor, a door banged open, and with it came an unearthly shriek that carried murder in its cry.

Rooted, the three men could only stare dumbly upward as they heard the sound of rapid, scuffling footsteps approaching the head of the stairs. Again, the shriek horrified them and with it, a gray-haired man came lunging into sight, a dressing gown trailing behind him.

It was Colonel Tolland, the man who had insisted upon having his sleep. He was wearing slippers and his dressing gown served instead of coat and vest; otherwise he was completely dressed. But the wild look in his gray, glazed eyes gave the impression that he was viewing a horde of devils somewhere on a level with his

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gaze, which was directed straight beyond the top of the stairs.

Sarge sprang to action.

"Another nightmare!" Starting up the stairs, the brawny man added a warning: "Look out, Colonel! You'll be falling down the stairs!"

Already on the brink; the gray-haired colonel caught the banister and stopped his tumble. Clinging there he shook his head in dazed fashion, finally relaxing and spilling sideward into Sarge's arms by the time the servant had arrived. Absorbing the colonel's fall, Sarge retreated down the stairs, steadying old Tolland as he came. By the time they were at the bottom, Colonel Tolland was shaking his head and recognizing the other faces.

It was Dave, not Gregg who supplied the next response. Stepping quickly across the hall, the younger nephew turned on the lights in a living room and called:

"Bring him in here, Sarge."

"I'm all right." There was a slight crack in the colonel's tone. "Just another dream – only another dream –"

Sarge was guiding old Tolland to the living room. There, the colonel settled in a chair and fumbled in his pocket for a ring of keys which he finally produced.

"He wants brandy," added Dave. "Get it, Sarge, from the study."

Taking the keys, Sarge crossed the hall and unlocked another door, turning on lights beyond it. By then, old Jeremy Tolland was staring from one nephew to the other, finally centering his gaze on Gregg.

"You're back, Gregg!" exclaimed old Jeremy. "Then you've seen Debley –"

Halting, old Jeremy drew himself erect in his chair and amended his own words:

"But you couldn't have seen Debley! I was dreaming about him! I saw him falling, falling off from a high cliff, the way Clavier fell –"

Sarge was coming with the brandy and his interruption was timely where Gregg was concerned. Trying to find words, the elder nephew was failing badly when Sarge interrupted:

"Drink this, colonel."

"But I've got to know about Debley!" insisted Jeremy, pressing the brandy aside. "It was another of those dreams" – he was turning his head around the group – "those dreams that never fail. Tell me, Gregg –"

Again there was an interruption, this time from the telephone bell. It was Sarge who answered the call and conducted a short, blunt conversation while the rest listened tense. Then, hanging up, Sarge stated simply, stolidly:

"You were right, Colonel. Debley is dead. He fell from his penthouse window half an hour ago."

His head lowered in resignation old Jeremy Tolland started slowly toward the stairs, and this time it was his favored nephew Gregg who supported him. Stolid as ever, Sarge watched the pair until they reached the

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second floor; meanwhile Dave, in that casual way of his, was stepping over to the table by the mirror.

"Look Sarge." Dave's low tone broke the silence. "This is what Gregg called an important letter."

Dave handed the opened envelope to Sarge. In it, the latter found an advertising sheet offering shirts and neckties at bargain prices. Raising his deep-set eyes, Sarge met Dave's keen gaze and gave a slow, understanding nod that retained but little of his usual reservation.

"Better turn out the lights," suggested Dave, coolly. "We can talk about this tomorrow – after we know more."

Lights blinked off in the old mansion, darkening the living room and the study opposite. Viewed from the street they were like vanishing beacons telling that this house alone had been subjected to some unusual disturbance.

Across the street, a figure watched the old mansion blacken through the drizzle; then that same form turned and blended with the darkness. Gloved hands drew the folds of a dampened cloak more tightly as unseen lips whispered a strange, significant laugh.

CHAPTER IV

POLICE COMMISSIONER WESTON regarded suicide a nuisance and did not hesitate to say so. He felt that Debley's death was a case in point.

Seated in the grill room of the Cobalt Club, his favorite stopping place after office hours, Weston felt free to express his opinion to a pair of interested parties.

One was Weston's friend Lamont Cranston, a calm-faced gentleman who made a good listener; the other was old Colonel Jeremy Tolland who also was a member of the exclusive Cobalt Club.

"Debley was scared by his own imagination," defined Weston. "Scared to the point where he was ready to do anything that would bring escape from his fear. So he found his refuge, a few dozen stories down, right in the middle of the sidewalk."

Cranston's expression remained unchanged, which made Weston wonder whether or not his friend was convinced. As for the old colonel, his square features simply sagged.

"You were here, Cranston, the first time Debley called," reminded Weston. "That was two nights ago. Remember?"

Cranston nodded.

"I could have gone directly to Debley's," conceded Weston, "but the man talked like a fanatic. In fact, he didn't even ask me to come there; he just wanted me to stand by in case he had trouble from some image called a Quetzal."

"An effigy of an Aztec god," confirmed Cranston. "Debley probably brought it back from Mexico. Am I right, Colonel Tolland?"

Old Jeremy nodded, his expression listless.

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"Yes, Debley had been in Mexico," affirmed Jeremy. "That was where I first met him, some years ago."

"But what about the Quetzal image?" demanded Weston. "What could it mean?"

Jeremy's eyes gave a mild but steady stare.

"It might mean death, Commissioner."

"Then what became of it? Inspector Cardona searched the premises and couldn't find it. Do you think that Debley actually had such an effigy?"

Slowly, Jeremy shook his head and the action prompted Weston to another question:

"Why don't you think he had it, colonel?"

"Because if it did mean death," replied Jeremy, "Debley could not have kept it long. The curse of the Quetzal is swift, Commissioner – if it really is a curse."

It was Cranston who recognized how equivocal Jeremy's statement was, but Weston took it as support of his own argument. Hence Weston proceeded:

"Consider the absurd precautions that Debley took. He began by harboring himself in the most isolated penthouse that he could find, perched among office buildings rather than apartment houses."

As evidence, Weston introduced a photograph of the penthouse and its building, studded with a dotted line which began with the window from which Debley had plunged and curved down to his landing spot.

To Cranston, the picture was more graphic than Weston supposed. The commissioner's friend was studying it from other angles. He was noting the much taller building that towered across the street from Debley's on the side where the living room window faced.

That higher structure was a Gothic skyscraper, a gingerbread product of the pre-modernistic period. It rose almost straight and its infrequent ledges were very narrow, ornamented with quaint posts that bulged from the low stone parapets. It was an archaic type of decoration that some old-fashioned architect had included with his plans.

Cranston's eyes moved slightly, slowly, as though visualizing a pendulum swing from one of those stone gee-gaws. Next he noted that the ledge surrounding Debley's penthouse was similarly embellished with a sparse row of solemn gargoyles that peered like stone sentinels.

Perhaps it was purely a coincidental thought that brought a dry, morose chuckle from Colonel Jeremy.

"Poor Debley," commented Jeremy. "Maybe when he came home he looked up at his penthouse and saw one of those gargoyles. Such a face would make him think of Quetzal."

"Debley never left the penthouse," put in Weston. "That was another of his eccentricities."

"Could he have been leaning out to stare at a gargoyle's face?" queried Jeremy, absently. "That might have accounted for his fall."

"If he didn't know about the gargoyles," argued Weston, "he wouldn't have tried to look at them."

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"Perhaps he had a subconscious impression of them, Commissioner."

Weston gave a snort that didn't ruffle Jeremy in the least.

"The subconscious is the greatest factor in our lives," continued the colonel. "Only those who have not experienced its influence deride it, and they speak through ignorance. Now I for one can testify –"

Impatiently Weston rapped an interruption with his knuckles and gestured to the photograph.

"See for yourself, Colonel. There is no gargoyle outside the window where Debley jumped."

The commissioner was right, but he overlooked something which was intriguing his friend Cranston. There was a stone gargoyle directly outside the window that was at the end of the penthouse hall; that very window which had so mysteriously lowered itself during The Shadow's grapple with the man who had fled in the elevator.

Again, Cranston was picturing a pendulum, its hanging point that gargoyle. Across another street from the penthouse was the side roof of an office building, an extension several stories high. Then Cranston suddenly interrupted his own conclusions to hear more of Jeremy's.

"Debley's mind was governed by the subconscious," the colonel was telling the commissioner. "Not merely receptively, which would have accounted for his creation of the Quetzal delusion, but in an active way. I can testify –"

"To what, Colonel?"

Reverting to one of his brusque moods, Weston was thinking that he could trap Jeremy into some sort of an admission, however minor it might be. What Jeremy delivered was something even more fantastic.

"At the moment of his plunge," assured Jeremy solemnly, "Rufus Debley became a human radio station. He flashed a message of terror through the ether, hoping that some sensitive mind would pick up that signal of distress. One mind did." Stopping abruptly, Jeremy looked from man to man and nodded. "That mind was my own."

Weston's knuckles paused on the point of another interruption. Then:

"You mean Debley projected a thought of the Quetzal image?"

"No. His thoughts were drowned by their own static." Jeremy's head gave a regretful shake. "Being in a subconscious state, I received an impression of Debley's fall. I was enjoying one of those half-sleeps that are a compensation of advancing years, except when some horrified mind-cry interrupts them."

"Then you were dreaming of Debley."

"Yes, Commissioner, of Debley and of mountains. Of Mexican Sierras where I first met him years ago."

"And from that past you chanced to have a nightmare."

"Not from the past, Commissioner. My dream was of the present. Debley's fall proved it."

"I see." Weston nodded as though humoring the old colonel. "Tell me, do you have many of these present dreams?"

"Very few," returned Jeremy. "Most of my impressions come from the future."

Weston's stare became incredulous.

"The subconscious mind is free in time as well as space," explained Jeremy. "When I take my half-naps I deliberately seek future pastures and find them."

While Weston sat wondering how he could deal with the crack-pot colonel, Cranston took over the situation with the query:

"Are your future visions realized, Colonel?"

"Quite often," replied Jeremy. "Understand, I do not trust my own memory of them. I usually check them with Sergeant Gavitt."

"Sergeant Gavitt?"

"My old orderly of the first World War. Why, only this morning, I told Sarge —"

Jeremy's eyes were gaining a far-away stare; his lips were forming into a smile that denoted anticipation. Then, as though tearing himself from the future that he had envisioned, the colonel shook himself and became erect in his chair. His gray eyes were firm as they centered on Weston; smiling lips reverted to their melancholy droop.

"You were speaking of Debley's precautions," reminded Jeremy. "Perhaps they were absurd; we all acquire curious notions as we grow older. Why not proceed with the discussion, Commissioner? Possibly we may be able to analyze Debley's fixations."

Glad of the suggestion, Weston nodded and turned to his notes, hoping that he could keep the subject on Debley's eccentricities rather than Jeremy's. But Cranston, though he offered no objection to the switch, remained interested in Jeremy's theme of the subconscious.

Whatever might be said regarding Rufus Debley would be interpreted in terms of Jeremy Tolland, so far as Lamont Cranston was concerned. For Cranston's eyes, watching the old colonel mildly, carried a deeper insight than they disclosed.

They were the eyes of The Shadow.

CHAPTER V

NOTES weren't the only data that Weston had gathered concerning Debley; he had actual exhibits. The first that he tossed on the table was a thin steel key. With it, Weston furnished the comment:

"The key to Debley's elevator."

Colonel Jeremy gave the key a puzzled stare.

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"It was an automatic elevator," explained Weston, "but it hadn't any button for the penthouse floor. You had to use this key in the switchboard."

Apparently Jeremy had never heard of such a key.

"Where did you find it, Commissioner?"

"On Debley," replied Weston. "That's how we managed to get up there. Of course there was another way, the fire tower, but it had a door with an automatic lock at the top. Nobody could have used that route either."

Leaning back in his chair, Jeremy clasped his hands across his diaphragm.

"Then Debley's death couldn't have been murder."

"No, Colonel, it couldn't have," emphasized Weston, "but there might have been an attempt upon his life. Look at these."

The things that Weston termed "these" were bullets, a few badly bashed, that he tossed upon the table. Still curious, old Jeremy surveyed the leaden pellets until Weston queried:

"Recognize them, Colonel?"

"I can't say that I do."

"You should, because you probably dodged a lot during the first World War."

A light dawned in Jeremy's eyes.

"Bullets from a Luger automatic?"

"That's right," acknowledged Weston. "Caliber nine millimeters, an odd size that would run a little larger than a .35 if there happened to be such a gun. The identification experts say they were from a reconditioned automatic."

"Where did you find them, Commissioner?"

"In Debley's hallway, near the elevator. You know the place of course."

Jeremy shook his head.

"You mean you never went there, Colonel?"

"Never, Commissioner. Debley phoned and wanted me to come there the other night, but the weather was too inclement. Sarge wouldn't let me go out."

By now, Weston was convinced that Jeremy could hardly have influenced Debley's suicide. The colonel's comments were neither avowals nor denials of a connection with Debley, and they were varied enough to carry the ring of truth. Nevertheless, Weston pressed home the question:

"What do you make of the bullets?"

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"Tell me more about the hallway," suggested Jeremy. "How was it located? If I knew, I might give an opinion."

From his notes, Weston brought a carefully drawn floor plan of the penthouse. Studying the diagram, Jeremy gave a nod. Then:

"Very simple, Commissioner. Debley must have imagined he saw things in the hall. It would be the natural place from which any menace would arrive. Since he was bothered with hallucinations, it is quite probable that he fired those shots himself."

"But we didn't find the Luger."

"Nor did you find the Quetzal. Debley may have disposed of both, perhaps a week ago, or a month."

The possibility made a definite impression upon Weston and Cranston was equally intrigued, but from another standpoint. There wasn't any reason why Jeremy should brush aside the matter of the gunfire unless he specifically wanted to cover up the fact of a certain visitor to Debley's at the time of the scared man's death.

This to Cranston was quite as interesting as the thing that Weston didn't recognize at all; namely, that Debley's penthouse wasn't quite as inaccessible as the police supposed. It wasn't that Cranston was just thinking of how he had personally entered the place as The Shadow by working on the fire tower door. His mind was still on the photograph which showed those nearby buildings.

Again, Jeremy seemed to pick up Cranston's thoughts. Quite blandly the old colonel suggested:

"Of course, Commissioner, someone might have managed to reach the penthouse from outside. When I was in Mexico –"

"This isn't Mexico," interrupted Weston, testily. "New York doesn't have mountain goats, or burros, or whatever else they have in Mexico. But since you knew Debley when you were there, tell me something about him."

With a shrug, Jeremy spread his hands.

"What is there to tell? We were both there to make our fortunes and we did. Of course we made enemies too."

"What sort of enemies?"

"Enemies who tried to swindle us or promote schemes to put us out of business. But we made our own way, honestly enough. We became used to threats."

"You and Debley were partners then?"

"Never. Our paths crossed occasionally, that was all. We conducted similar transactions, largely in transportation, but I made my fortune in mining whereas Debley's came from oil."

"Then you know nothing of this Quetzal threat that drove Debley to his own destruction?"

"I have heard of it. A Quetzal image is considered dangerous if it comes from the wrong person."

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"And Debley knew some wrong people?"

"No more than I did." From a position to which he had gradually slumped, Jeremy drew himself erect. "I can assure you of this, commissioner: any menace that Debley may have imagined could be directed quite as much against myself."

Jeremy was rising as he made that statement; reaching for a cane, he was preparing to hobble from the grill room when Weston stopped him with the query:

"You mean you are in danger, too, Colonel?"

"As much as Debley was," affirmed Jeremy, "and perhaps more so. Only I am not asking for protection."

"And why not?"

"Because I am not governed by my imagination," chuckled Jeremy. "Or let us say" – he paused, giving Weston a canny, sidelong glance – "let us say that I have faith in my visions. Some of my dreams have been realized; I have no fear of death."

Cranston was leaving along with Jeremy. Up the stairs from the grill room and out through the foyer, Cranston observed that the old colonel's cane was more an ornament than a necessity. Jeremy's hobble seemed scarcely more than a mode of stretching his legs; once under way, his gait began to show agility until he saw that Cranston noticed it.

Then, slowing wearily, Jeremy placed one hand against Cranston's arm, to steady himself for the few steps leading to the sidewalk, and confided:

"You can't be spry at my age, Cranston. Just a trifle too much energy and the old crick catches you in the back. One thoughtless step from a curb and my leg might double under me. Poor Debley, he was too young for his years. Why, I wouldn't have the strength to open a window, let alone pitch myself out!"

As he spoke, old Jeremy was glancing across the street, looking for his car. His words were hardly uttered before he belied them in a most singular way. At sight of Colonel Jeremy, the chauffeur of an old-fashioned limousine began to pull the big car from the curb beyond a cross street, giving it a quick start to beat a changing traffic light.

On the other side of the street, a girl saw the light go green and started to cross. A moment later she was squarely in the path of the lunging car and realized it. With a shriek, she flung herself ahead of the limousine, taking the only path which enabled her to avoid passing cars.

Before the girl had completely sprawled, old Jeremy was springing from the curb, leaving the alert Mr. Cranston rooted beside the equally frozen door man. Tossing his cane as he went, the colonel made a diving scoop that rolled the tumbling girl right into his arms. With a brawny heave, he brought himself full about, inches from the bumper of the screeching car and actually out-raced it in his scramble for the curb, carrying the girl with him.

The chauffeur managed a swerve that aided Jeremy's swift rescue and brought the car to a sudden stop. Flushed with pride at his own prowess, the colonel didn't realize that his feat was out of character until Cranston reached him. Then, abruptly, Jeremy let the girl change from a featherweight into a burden too heavy to be handled alone. Panting heavily, he let her weight sag into Cranston's arms.

Yet there was still something of triumph in the old man's manner. Unable to restrain his enthusiasm, he exclaimed:

"I dreamed this, Cranston! I dreamed it last night and it has happened! Go tell the commissioner that you have seen it happen, a dream of the future coming true!"

CHAPTER VI

Lamont Cranston didn't go and tell the commissioner. He couldn't very well invade the Cobalt Club carrying a girl. The stuff of Jeremy's dreams had faded, and something had to be done about it.

The girl's face was turned upward from Cranston's shoulder and since her eyes were closed he had a chance to study her features without being impolite. It was a nice face, winning in its oval shape, with a slightly dark complexion that harmonized with the brown hair beneath the dangling, blue hat. An attractive face that would be even prettier with soulful eyes, particularly if brown; factors which were still in doubt.

By now, the chauffeur was out of the car, disputing matters with the colonel, but they soon came to one mind. Both were shaky, Jeremy because of heroic exercise, the chauffeur from the shock of having the girl spring right out of the asphalt before he could apply the brakes.

"It was my fault, Colonel," the chauffeur was conceding. "You'd better rest a bit, sir. I'll find your cane."

The door man had already picked up the cane. He handed it to the colonel, who thanked him. Then:

"You couldn't help it, Sarge," said Jeremy with a warm clap on the chauffeur's shoulder. "After all, we've teamed up for a lot of years. We never fail each other in a pinch, do we?"

"Never, Colonel."

"And besides, this was fated. Remember, Sarge?"

"Remember what, sir?"

"The dream I had last night. About an accident with a girl in blue. Remember, I said I heard her scream and I was clutching for her when I woke up?"

Sarge shook his head.

"I remember you waking up," he recalled. "You were sitting in bed shouting something, but you didn't say what it was about."

"It was at breakfast that I told you of the dream."

"I must have been watching the toast, Colonel. You always burn it if I don't. If you spoke about a dream, I probably didn't hear you."

"But I told you to drive cautiously coming here —"

"You always tell me to drive cautiously, Colonel."

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The girl was stirring from Cranston's shoulder, so he took a look at her eyes. They were thankful if not actually soulful and their proper color, brown. The girl seemed quite comfortable and rather pleased that she was still alive, for she gave Cranston a very grateful smile and murmured her appreciation of the rescue.

"Thank Colonel Tolland," suggested Cranston, as he steadied the girl to her feet. "I suppose he does deserve thanks, although it was his own car that nearly ran you down. But what about your name, so that I can introduce you? Mine happens to be Cranston."

"I'm Shirley Malcolm," replied the girl. Then, a trifle puzzled: "Did you say Colonel Tolland?"

"Colonel Jeremy Tolland."

"I've heard my father mention him," the girl recalled. "The colonel has something to do with mining, hasn't he?"

"I think he has," smiled Cranston. "We can ask him when he finishes his argument."

The dispute was just about over, with Sarge bowing out. The colonel had added that unfinished dreams were always of special significance, invariably bearing a good omen. He was even insisting that all his trust in Sarge was based on dreams and having made that point, the colonel turned to greet the young lady who had first crossed his path in the dream world.

Cranston supplied the introduction and Jeremy returned Shirley's smile with a bow. When the girl mentioned her father, giving his full name as Roland Malcolm, the colonel responded with a prompt nod.

"Of course I've heard of him," stated Jeremy. "A metallurgist, isn't he?"

"He was," the girl acknowledged "but he has been ill the past few years."

"Too bad, too bad," mused Jeremy. "Where is your father, here in New York?"

"No. I'm here alone," replied Shirley. "Looking for a job if I can find one."

"Tut-tut! Never look for a job," philosophized Jeremy. "Let jobs look for you. There are too many good jobs and too few good people. No, no" – impatiently Jeremy waved his cane, before the girl could interrupt – "don't ask me the same old question: What are you to do while waiting for a job? I'll answer that for you.

"You're coming with me, Miss Malcolm, so you can write your father, wherever he is, and tell him you've fallen into good hands." His face broadening, Jeremy chuckled. "You really fell into my hands, didn't you? Well, we can forgive Sarge since everything ended happily. Here's the car, so get right into it." Taking Shirley's arm, Jeremy guided her toward the car, then turned and asked suddenly: "Coming our way, Cranston?"

Cranston wasn't but he said he was. He asked for time out to get a briefcase that he had left in the Cobalt Club, and Jeremy granted the request. When Cranston joined the others in the car he found that Shirley had also gained the privilege of a stop-off at her hotel in order to pick up a suitcase. So the car went first to the hotel.

It was a very dilapidated hotel which could better have been termed a run-down boarding house, a fact which caused Jeremy to "tut-tut" as soon as Shirley had gone inside. The interior of the limousine was very gloomy in the darkness of this side street and old Jeremy's voice carried a hush as he spoke to Cranston.

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"I talked to the girl while you were getting your briefcase," said Jeremy. "She didn't want to come to my house; didn't think it was right to impose on an old friend of her father's."

"How old a friend of yours is her father, Colonel?"

"Well, I've heard of him," replied Jeremy. Then, his tone critical, he added: "But how could I make many friends up here, while I was down in Mexico?"

"I don't suppose you could."

"Of course I couldn't. Some of my best friends are people I've never met. Let's say Malcolm is one of them."

"Because of your dream?"

Jeremy chuckled wisely at Cranston's question.

"Because of my dream," the colonel admitted. "Thoughts carry, Cranston, not only from the past but far into the future. You can believe it, because you've been to strange places."

Cranston nodded in the gloom.

"There's nowhere stranger than Mexico," continued Jeremy, "not when those Aztec drums begin to throb. Often I've heard them in the mountains and they bring strange thoughts to you. Your past comes back and spreads itself into future vistas. I know, because every night, I seem to hear those drums."

"Do you think that Debley heard them?"

"Unquestionably, but they drove him frantic. It wouldn't have done any good for me to go and see him."

"Couldn't you have sent someone?"

There was sharp whiteness in the gloom as Jeremy's eyes turned hard upon Cranston. For a moment, Cranston could sense that the colonel was growing tense. Then, very calmly, the old man spoke.

"I might have sent my nephew," he mused. "That is, my nephew Gregg, who is more reliable than Dave. I want you to meet them some day, Cranston. But speaking of meetings, it was most fortunate that I met Miss Malcolm when I did."

"Why was that, Colonel?"

"Because she tells me she was already packed and planning to go home this evening. All last night she was worrying about it, wondering who could help her stay longer."

"And that thought flashed straight to you?"

"It flashed everywhere, Cranston. All it needed was for someone to receive it, as I did."

Pondering briefly upon Jeremy's statement, Cranston decided to probe the old colonel's theory.

"Tell me, Colonel," questioned Cranston. "Do you find thought reception a common occurrence in this dream state that you mention?"

"Very common," rejoined Jeremy, "but I have waited a long while for a well-defined fulfillment of a chance event like tonight's meeting with Miss Malcolm. I have always wanted to learn what would follow in such a case."

"You've talked about it often, I suppose?"

"Only to Sarge, though he probably wouldn't remember. My dreams don't impress him." Jeremy paused and strained his eyes from the car window. "Suppose we discuss this some other time, Cranston. Here comes Shirley with her suitcase."

The limousine dropped Cranston and his briefcase a few blocks from the Tolland mansion so that he could hail a cab and continue his own journey. But Cranston, it seemed, was also of the opinion that paths once crossed should cross again.

Instead of stopping a cab, he stepped to a darkened doorway and performed manipulations with his briefcase. In a few moments The Shadow glided forth fully garbed in black. Then, with a swift, easy stride, this master of the night moved, discernible only by the blackness that floated across lighted patches of sidewalk only to be consumed by the darkness beyond.

Five minutes after he had left the limousine, The Shadow, formerly Lamont Cranston, was making a silent, invisible patrol of the street in front of the brownstone house, watching for new developments.

The Shadow's wait was brief.

Set above a side passage by the old house was a second story window, dim with light, which The Shadow decided must be the guest chamber to which Shirley had been assigned. Very suddenly that light blinked off.

Half a minute passed; then sharp, tiny glimmers came from the side window, the blinks of a flashlight sending a code. From the pauses, The Shadow recognized that there must be an answer, so he shifted into the deeper darkness to gain a better angle. From there, The Shadow saw the responding blinks.

They came from the second floor of an old dilapidated house further down the street and on the other side. As they paused, The Shadow glided from the passage and headed straight for the other house.

However accidental the meeting between Jeremy Tolland and Shirley Malcolm, these signals did not belong in the realm of chance. To The Shadow they were another marker in the trail of the missing Quetzal and all it might represent!

CHAPTER VII

The man in the vacant house gave his flashlight a sweep as he extinguished it, and the passing glow was enough to show his face. It was a youthful face, a trifle on the sallow side, and reasonably handsome.

Perhaps those features demanded a better light to show them at their best, for the smile that was forming as the fleeting light passed it carried the leer of the professional schemer. Or it could have been that the sallow man, stationed here alone, was not averse to dropping a more pleasant mask.

Whatever his true appearance, the man was certainly crafty in manner. Working his way across the empty room, he was careful to use his flashlight only in the spots most needed as he probed out through the doorway into a long hall. His stride alone was careless, for he made no effort to deaden the creaks of the floor beneath

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his feet.

However, sound could matter little in an empty house. Light was something that could be seen; hence, it was more important to conceal. Except for those necessary signal blinks, the sallow chap was handling his business well.

In the hallway, the intruder was guided by an open window, dimly visible at the rear. Half way along, he paused to listen without using his flashlight. It wasn't that he had heard sounds; he merely wanted to make sure that none arrived, because he planned a side trip. Satisfied that the house was undisturbed, the mysterious visitor entered a side room and gleamed his light along the floor.

He found what he wanted, a telephone. Lifting the receiver, he heard the dial-tone and chuckled. Then, without the benefit of flashlight, he dialed in the darkness. A voice answered and the young man gave a "Hello."

Instantly the voice at the other end showed sharp suspicion. Its tone came in a quick, vicious stab.

"Who is it?"

Though confident so far, the man with the flashlight became suddenly hesitant. Then:

"It's Vic."

Again a stabbed query was returned:

"Who's Vic?"

"Victor Brett." The sallow prowler suddenly became defiant. "Maybe I've got the wrong number – so what?"

Starting to slam the receiver, Brett heard a change of tone. Its suavity was familiar, so he resumed the conversation.

"So it's you after all." Brett laughed as he brought the receiver to his ear. "Say – I thought I'd hit the wrong number."

"Sorry, Vic." The tone was oily. "I didn't expect to hear from you so soon. Where are you?"

"In the empty house. The phone was connected and I dialed in the dark; that's why I thought I'd slipped. What was wrong at your end?"

"Only that I wasn't taking chances. Did the girl get located?"

"She did and she coded the whole tale. The old colonel fell, and flat."

"The nephew, Gregg?"

"Suspicious, but it doesn't matter. The chauffeur, Sarge, is on her side."

"Where is Dave?"

"Not home."

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"All the better." The suave tone showed full satisfaction. "All right, Vic, I'll stop by tomorrow."

Ending his call, Brett gave the flashlight a brief gleam to locate the door. With long, creaky strides he reached the hallway, made the turn toward the rear and stopped dead still. In one brief space between his footfalls, Brett fancied that he had heard an echoing creak from somewhere in the house.

More tense than ever, the prowler waited. Nothing occurred until he took a few steps of his own; then, again he caught an echo, this time placing it on the stairs. From the way Brett's fist tightened on the flashlight, it was his only weapon, but his sharp drawn breath proved that he wouldn't hesitate to use it as a bludgeon if a crisis came.

Brett didn't use the light again. His eyes were becoming accustomed to the darkness. He could see the outline of the window plainly, for the reflected glow of the city gave it the appearance of a square panel etched with twilight. His work here done, Brett preferred a sneak to the window rather than standing this untenable ground. So Brett began his sneak.

The creaks from the stairs sneaked too.

It was too much for Brett. Though more than half way to the window, he turned about and made a few steps the other way, to draw those creaks closer. They came, but Brett wasn't listening; governed by a sudden afterthought, he wheeled toward the window.

Brett was right regarding what he'd seen.

No longer a panel of twilight, the window had become a frame for a living silhouette consisting of cloaked shoulders and a head that wore a slouch hat!

Brett had glimpsed it once; now he was glimpsing it again. Instantly, the image vanished, producing the effect of a drawn shade. All went black at the window and Brett knew why.

The Shadow had raised his shoulders, blocking off what light remained. By now he was through the window with a forward lunge.

Savagely, Brett shoved the flashlight toward the window, pressing the switch to throw the glare into the invader's eyes. Stopped within a dozen feet, the flashlight's beam began to shorten as though gobbled by blackness. The Shadow was on the way. Dropping back, Brett whipped the flashlight up above his shoulder intending to fling it hard.

A hand snatched the flashlight from behind!

It was the man from the stairs, the creeper who had profited by Brett's problem with The Shadow. In snatching the flashlight, the man from the stairway made a crosshand grab and the glow lashed across his face. As briefly as Brett's face had shown earlier, the square features of Gregg Tolland were revealed. It was unmistakably Gregg, to anyone who might have recognized him, for his chin had the forward thrust that he affected when he became fighting mad.

Hurling the flashlight away, he jabbed one hand to Brett's throat and used the other to swing a gun at the head of the man he neither knew nor saw. Only by freak strategy did Brett offset that thrust. Remembering The Shadow, Brett gave a mad whirl carrying Gregg with him. A lunging shape crashed into the grapple that was Gregg and Brett.

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Far better than he expected was Brett's strategy of turning a simple tussle into a free for all.

The Shadow too was swinging a gun, but his first stroke was of a warding sort. There was a clash of steel, a fly of sparks as The Shadow's weapon met Gregg's, above Brett's ducking head. The threefold tangle surged under the force of The Shadow's drive, carrying the whole group forward along the hall. Gregg was twisting now, whipping his own gun wildly, glancing blows that The Shadow was starting to deliver. In the middle, Brett was clutched by both until his strategy paid its dividends.

Futility more than craft was inspiring Gregg Tolland. Wanting more scope to avoid The Shadow's swings, Gregg dropped toward the stairs just as the group reached them. Vic Brett knew those stairs, even though he hadn't used them and he made a smart grab for the newel post at the top end of the banister.

At that moment, Gregg dropped away, taking The Shadow with him.

Gregg's dive was purposeful, and deep. Never expecting the fellow to go below floor level, The Shadow overlunged. He was pitching headlong down the stairs, clutching for Gregg and carrying him along, while Brett, entirely clear, sprang to his feet, raced through the hall and vaulted through the window, taking a bouncing bump from the back porch roof to the ground below.

Meanwhile, The Shadow and Gregg were double-somersaulting down the stairs. Heaving clear, Gregg made a long leap across the thudding figure that he heard but couldn't see and reached the front door. Grabbing the knob, he yanked the door open, and, in his mad desire to forestall pursuit, Gregg turned and fired a few wild shots in the direction of the stairs.

Instead of echoes, Gregg heard a laugh, a weird burst of mockery that a ghost would have envied. Whether it meant that his foe still lived, or had bounced back from another world to haunt him, Gregg didn't stop to reason. Out through the door, Gregg was loping diagonally across the street, to reach his home preserves.

Ghostly in style but human in frame, The Shadow renewed the pursuit with a quick sweep up from the floor where he had purposely sprawled to avoid Gregg's frantic shots. As he reached the street, he saw that Gregg was choosing the side alley in preference to the front door of the brownstone mansion, so The Shadow took the side route too.

Here was a chase wholly in The Shadow's favor with scarcely a chance for his prey to turn and fight at bay. Unique events had produced it and it was scarcely in the cards that a similar sequel should occur.

Yet such was to happen, more surprisingly than before!

CHAPTER VIII

IT was Shirley Malcolm who first heard the clatter of feet in the side alley. From the moment that she had entered the room, the girl hadn't left the window, though she had told Colonel Tolland that she was going right to bed to rest from the effects of her near-accident.

To Shirley, the signals had seemed more important and she was still standing by in case Vic Brett decided to send a return message. Then the sounds of muffled gunfire had startled her, followed by the clatter of the front door across the way.

Though Shirley hadn't seen Gregg enter, she saw him come out post-haste. He wasn't recognizable as the nephew to whom the colonel had briefly introduced her downstairs, for Gregg was muffled, huddled as he

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ran. Lost to view as he neared the house, Shirley saw him again when she leaned from the window, in response to the pound of his feet.

Stooping low beside the wall, Gregg wrenched at a cellar grating as though he knew the trick that would open it. He had almost succeeded, when a singular sort of blackness enveloped him and Shirley heard a muffled snarl as Gregg came up madly in the dim light.

There was a swirl of figures so fantastic that Shirley couldn't believe her amazed eyes. The girl was viewing a replica of the kaleidoscopic struggle that had occurred in the hallway of Debley's penthouse, two nights before. A strange fray, this, apparently a one-man struggle in which the solitary fighter vanished and reappeared at intervals. It could only mean that another combatant was present, a battler so singular that he would have been invisible if not in action.

The Shadow was literally eclipsing Gregg Tolland and the struggle would have been short-lived if a third man hadn't entered it. Who he was, Shirley hadn't an idea, but she spotted where he came from. He was a long, lean man in a dark suit who had been lurking in a corner of the alley, huddled in darkness away from the grating.

Even now this newcomer wouldn't have been in it, except that The Shadow and Gregg had reeled in his direction and plucked him from obscurity. Once in the deal, the third man's savagery was terrific. He was slashing with something that glimmered like a knife and Shirley saw a chunk of blackness cleave itself as it whirled away.

The knife had taken a huge slash from The Shadow's cloak and only his spinning dive had saved him from the blade. Again, Gregg Tolland was in the clear, thanks to the intervention of another unknown, and Gregg was making the most of it. With a sprawling roll he went through the open grating and after him dived the knife specialist.

Shirley didn't wait to see The Shadow follow. Already she could hear Sarge's hoarse voice bellowing from the front hall while the husky chauffeur pounded the door of the colonel's study to notify his master that there was trouble. Suddenly frantic, Shirley realized that she couldn't afford to be connected with this.

Reaching her suitcase on the chair where Sarge had parked it, Shirley tugged it open in the dark and began pawing with one hand for the night things while she peeled her dress with her other hand and kicked off her shoes.

Things were happening even faster in the cellar. As Gregg ducked in one direction, the other man tried a short cut. The Shadow landed through the grating just in time to catch a glimpse of both and chose the route that Gregg had taken. It looked broader and more likely to lead somewhere.

The man with the knife didn't travel far. Turning a corner he encountered the blackness of a half-empty coal bin and before he could halt himself, he was crashing head on into the upper half of a partition. It was an odd sort of a partition, for instead of being fixed at the sides, it dangled as if hinged. The thing flapped as the man struck it, and he plunged face forward into the coal pile as the hinged partition swung back.

The Shadow heard a clatter but didn't see what happened. He still had a score to settle with his original problem, who happened to be Gregg Tolland.

Out from an unexpected corner, Gregg dashed for a flight of stairs and reached the top as The Shadow arrived at the bottom. This time Gregg didn't turn to fire shots while wresting a door open. He slammed the door behind him, giving its key a twist. In the dimly lighted kitchen, he took a quick look about, then sidled into

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the dining room that led through to the living room on one side of the house.

Sarge was still pounding on the study door which lay across the hall from the living room. This had happened occasionally before, the old colonel falling into one of his so-called light sleeps from which nothing short of Gabriel's horn could rouse him. Probably the pounding was merely mingling into one of Jeremy's dreams, so Sarge gave up.

Up in her room, Shirley heard the hammering end just as she was sliding into nightgown and bed in a single action. Thinking that Sarge had finally roused old Jeremy and that they'd be shouting for her next, Shirley slipped into her dressing gown and grabbed her slippers; opening the door she took a few steps along the hall and looked downstairs.

Sarge was turning from the study door, rubbing one hand with the other. Instead of coming upstairs, the chauffeur went back toward the kitchen.

Shirley stole to the top of the stairs and paused to put on her slippers. Stooping, she saw Gregg Tolland come through the door from the living room. With a worried glance at the study door, Gregg sneaked into the vestibule and hung his hat and coat there.

Working back along the upstairs hall, Shirley waited until she heard Gregg return. He stopped at the study door, rapped twice and called:

"Uncle Jeremy! Are you there? What's happened? Where's Sarge?" Gregg knew where Sarge was, all right. Receiving no response from the study, he turned toward the kitchen. By then Shirley was thoroughly alarmed. It was bad enough to have invaders brawling into the place, let alone discovering that a member of the household was one of them. Gregg's business with the hat and coat was a complete give-away, but it did give Shirley some confidence concerning her own status.

Having been smart enough not to be caught with her clothes on, Shirley decided to establish the fact that she'd gone to bed by making an appearance in her present attire of dressing gown and slippers. She was worried about Sarge, now that Gregg had gone to join him in the kitchen, since Sarge couldn't know that the favored nephew was something of a traitor in the Tolland camp.

As for old Colonel Jeremy, his prolonged silence was another matter for concern, considering the kindness he had shown Shirley. So as she reached the bottom of the stairs, the girl halted, wondering if she ought to repeat the hammering on the study door.

As she raised her hand to knock, Shirley heard a sound from the vestibule; clutching her dressing gown, she recoiled as a young man stepped into sight. As startled as the girl, the man stepped back, bowing an apology and reaching for a hat that he was hanging on the rack.

"My mistake," he said, a trifle thickly. "Wrong house, I guess. No" – he stared at an object in his hand – "it can't be. This is my key, right enough."

Finding her voice, Shirley blurted:

"You're Dave Tolland?"

"That's right," the young man acknowledged, "but who are you? A missing cousin that Uncle Jeremy never mentioned?"

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"I'm Shirley Malcolm. I'll explain that later. Meanwhile we'd better find your uncle."

Dave nudged toward the study door.

"Isn't he in there?"

"If he is, something has happened to him," declared Shirley, seriously. "Sarge pounded the door but couldn't wake him."

"That's the way with uncle's light sleeps. Sarge ought to know better than to keep on hammering. But what was it all about?"

"Some excitement, down in the cellar, I think."

"Then Sarge has probably traced it by this time. Let's go to the kitchen and find out."

They reached the kitchen to find Sarge looking for the cellar key, with Gregg standing by, quite baffled. The door was locked, but the key wasn't in it, and Sarge, clutching Jeremy's big cane in one hand, was becoming more and more impatient over his inability to reach the cellar and start looking for trouble-makers down there.

Leaning against a door that opened into the hallway, Dave gave a light laugh. The excitement had sobered him.

"Better get some more weapons," decided Dave. "I know just what we want, the poker and tongs from the fireplace in the old back parlor."

The door of the parlor was behind the stairs, for the room was directly in back of the study. Dave was opening it as he spoke, for the door was almost in reach of the kitchen entrance. Dropping back as he heard a clatter, Dave thought his drinks were catching up on him, until he saw his uncle stepping from beside the fireplace, bringing the very objects in question.

"Here you are, Dave," announced old Jeremy, crisply. "Now let's hear about the trouble."

Sarge had stopped looking for the cellar key and was staring at Jeremy when he stepped from the parlor.

"How long were you in the parlor, Colonel?" inquired Sarge. "I was sure you were still in the study."

"So I was," returned Jeremy, "until you woke me up with all that pounding."

"But I knocked too," put in Gregg; he darted a sharp glance at Dave, then added: "I knocked right after I came in."

"I heard you," rejoined Jeremy drily. "I was still drowsy, but awake enough to leave the study. I thought of the poker and tongs so I stopped to pick them up."

It was all so very logical to everyone except Shirley, who had been watching from upstairs while both Sarge and Gregg had been at the study door. From then on, Shirley had taken over, so she couldn't quite believe her senses. From the way everyone spoke, there was no connecting route between the study and the parlor, and there certainly hadn't been time for the colonel to come around by the hall after Dave arrived home. Moreover, Dave had left the kitchen door wide open!

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As for Shirley's eyes, they were wide open now and she wasn't believing them. Everyone had come from the kitchen to the hallway and only Shirley was looking through the door. From a corner, she saw blackness emerge and sweep toward the cellar door like something alive.

This was just too much for Shirley's strained imagination. With a gasp, she put her hand to her forehead and tried to shake off her sudden dizzy spell. Poker and tongs clattered to the floor, while old Jeremy was outracing his nephew in the man's job of catching a fainting young lady before she fell.

"I'm all right," said Shirley, giving her head a shake. "I just saw – I mean I thought I saw – well, there – at the cellar door."

It was Sarge who turned, gave an amazed stare, and pounced into the kitchen. What he was pouncing for wasn't the figure that Shirley had seen, for it was gone. What Sarge saw was the door key, glimmering in the lock where it belonged!

Down in the cellar, The Shadow was pausing at the coal bin, on his way to the open grating that formed a convenient outlet. That bin was black and empty, as The Shadow made certain when he stepped straight forward and probed the coal heap with the flashlight.

Whoever the extra marauder, he had gone. The same applied to The Shadow, a few moments later. He was gone, with a whispered laugh, as he created darkness by extinguishing his flashlight.

Tonight The Shadow had found too many trials, but he had learned facts that he was confident would unravel them.

CHAPTER IX

JEREMY TOLLAND really liked friends that he had never met. Not that he was disinclined to meet them, should occasion allow; in fact, he rather preferred it. Many of the colonel's acquaintanceships had been formed through correspondence and he liked to see how they turned out.

So Jeremy was very pleased when Isaac Twambley called.

The correspondence with Twambley dated just a few years back, shortly before Jeremy's return from Mexico, so the colonel hadn't an idea whether this friend was young or old. When Twambley proved to be older than Jeremy himself, the colonel's enthusiasm was unbounded particularly when he saw that Twambley really needed the cane on which he hobbled.

White-haired, beaming of eye, cackly of tone, old Twambley made himself at home from the moment he stepped into the hallway. Immediately Jeremy began to link this visitor with his favorite theme of prophetic dreams. Turning to faithful Sarge, Jeremy questioned:

"What did I dream about last night, Sarge?"

"I'm not sure, colonel," returned Sarge. "You spoke rather vaguely at breakfast."

"Bah! You were watching the toast instead of listening to me."

"No, colonel. I was paying strict attention. I'm sure Miss Malcolm will tell you the same. You dreamed about a lot of things, but none very clearly."

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"Things from the past?"

"Yes, but you tried to connect them with the future."

"You see?" Triumphantly Jeremy gestured to Twambley. "Here is a man from the past who has arrived in the future." Turning to Twambley, the colonel added earnestly: "What made you decide on this visit, Twambley? I would like to check it with my recollections of last night's dreams."

Eccentric in his own right, Twambley accepted Jeremy's dream talk as something commonplace.

"I came to talk about a mutual friend," cackled Twambley, obligingly. "I refer to Rufus Debley."

"Ah! A link with that other dream of mine." Jeremy nodded satisfied. Then, drawing a large key from his pocket, he gestured toward the study door. "Suppose we go in here, Twambley."

With interested eyes, old Twambley watched the colonel unlock the door. Then, swiveling his clasped hands on the cane head, the visitor swung about and lifted his head painfully from his stooped shoulders to look at the stairway. Light footsteps were descending and when Twambley saw what they represented, his eyes ogled happily.

Shirley was coming downstairs and trying to appear quite casual about it. She was wearing her blue dress and carrying her hat and bag as though she hadn't quite made up her mind about going out this evening. Meeting Twambley's glance and considering the old gentleman harmless, Shirley smiled as a matter of policy.

Turning to Jeremy, Twambley queried:

"Your grand-daughter?"

For a moment the colonel looked annoyed; then clapping Twambley on the shoulder, he returned:

"This is Shirley Malcolm, the daughter of an old friend of mine. When I say old friend I mean in years of acquaintance, not in age. I'm not so very old myself, you know."

Twambley gave a nod as though acknowledging Jeremy's claim. Since Shirley was the basis of discussion, Jeremy looked her way and noted the hat which she purposely dangled. He inquired, a bit surprised:

"You are going out?"

"Not just yet." Shirley hesitated. "I wanted to speak to you first, Colonel, but since you're busy, I can wait."

"Indeed not!" It was old Twambley who furnished the indignant cackle. "Come right along, Miss Malcolm." He gestured toward Jeremy's study as though he owned it. Then: "Of course I can wait here in the hallway."

"No, no," protested Shirley. "In fact, since you are an old friend of the colonel's you might be interested in what I want to tell him. It's something that concerns my father."

Shirley entered the study and looked around while the two men followed. It was the first time that she had seen the room and since it was likewise Twambley's initial visit, Jeremy let them admire the place before proceeding with other discussion.

The study was really something to admire.

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The furniture was of rich walnut and looked two centuries old. There was a large secretary, combining desk and bookcase; antique chairs and couch to match. Old footstools added a comfortable touch and finest of all was the grand-daddy of grandfather's clocks standing in the corner.

Of course the clock won full attention, which pleased Colonel Jeremy, since he was proud of this family heirloom.

"It keeps perfect time," announced Jeremy. "It always has, and it never misses on the dates of the month. It's even set for leap year. They did things right in the old days."

Facing the clock, Jeremy stared as though enraptured by the steady, unhurried swing of the glass pendulum that showed behind the glass-fronted door.

"Most clocks tick seconds into hours," added Jeremy. "This one builds days into centuries. A monument to some master craftsman, this clock. Listen, it is about to chime."

The clock obliged with a soft and musical chiming of the three-quarter hour. It was the first time that Shirley had heard it, and now she realized that the melodious sound could not carry through the stout door of the study. The floor was covered with thick carpeting that pressed right to the bottom of the door that Jeremy had closed upon entering.

Remembering something else, Shirley turned around. The gray carpet not only formed a complete coverall, it ran beneath a pair of double doors at the rear of the room. Not only were those thick doors closed, they were linked with bars of ornamental brass, riveted through the woodwork.

Eyes half closed, Shirley pictured the rear parlor, which she had inspected this very day. Its floor was covered with a continuation of that same gray carpet, which formed an unbroken floor-piece. Similarly, there were brass bars on the parlor side, also riveted.

You couldn't think about a thing too long without having Colonel Jeremy guess it.

Startled by the hand that suddenly pressed her shoulder, Shirley heard the colonel give one of his nicest chuckles.

"You're wondering about those doors, my dear?" Jeremy's tone carried an indulgent query. "They have been closed, permanently. They were too ornamental to be replaced by a wall.

Shirley was noting riveted braces at the sides of the doors and remembered similar ones in the parlor. She knew that the two doors couldn't be slid as one, because she had tried it. What bothered her most was the wide crack underneath the double doors. A mouse might have crawled under it, but certainly nothing so substantial as the colonel could have managed the maneuver. But the crack proved something that Shirley had observed from the parlor side.

There wasn't the slightest trace of even a seam in the great gray rug. That fact banished Shirley's last speculation, now that she saw the door was properly riveted from the study side. What Shirley was trying to explain was how the colonel had so mysteriously arrived in the rear parlor, the night before.

This concerned Shirley only, because only she could have testified that Jeremy hadn't left the study by the regulation door that led into the hall. Now Shirley was willing to charge it off to bad memory or good imagination, for she felt herself afflicted with both, after having seen a mass of living blackness navigating the kitchen.

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Jeremy was telling Twambley why the parlor was walled off by those sealed doors, so Shirley snapped from her reverie to learn.

"A haunted place, that parlor," declared Jeremy, as though he meant it. "The man who built this house died there, the week after he moved in. There were other tragedies among later residents and the parlor became a funeral room.

"I couldn't stand it the first month I lived here. When the doors were open, my subconscious was disturbed by whispers. When they were shut, they used to rattle. I needed a strong room, so I had the doors riveted shut; at the time I installed those bars."

The bars were on the windows, and Jeremy indicated them with a gesture. Outside were steel shutters, open in the day time, but closed at present, an operation which Sarge probably handled by reaching through the narrow bars.

Old Twambley put a query:

"Any ghosts now, Colonel?"

"None belonging to the house," replied Jeremy, calmly. "Those who enter my dreams are not particular in which room I happen to be asleep. For instance, I was upstairs when I dreamed about poor Debley."

Interest showed in Twambley's lifted face and Jeremy caught the gleam in the visitor's eyes.

"You didn't hear about my dream?" queried Jeremy. "Well, Twambley, it was more than a dream. Literally, I saw Rufus Debley plunge to his death. Only I didn't picture it in terms of a penthouse" – Jeremy narrowed his brow in recollection – "No, my impression was that of Debley tumbling from a mountain cliff."

Sharply, old Twambley demanded:

"You mean like Lee Clavier?"

The question was electric and Shirley could feel its tingling shock, even though she'd never heard of a man called Clavier. As for Jeremy, he drew rigid, swayed upon a balanced point, and then relaxed.

"Sit down, Twambley," suggested Jeremy. His tone was tense, though he tried not to show it. "Tell me what you know about Clavier –"

He paused, as though hesitant regarding a necessary addendum; then decided to give it.

"About Clavier," repeated Colonel Jeremy, in a hushed tone, "and the Quetzal."

CHAPTER X

THAT one word "Quetzal" snapped Shirley to immediate alertness. She had heard some talk of the feathered image and its mysterious disappearance from Debley's penthouse. But the name Clavier was a new one and therefore promised a clue to the riddle.

Arms folded, Colonel Jeremy stood erect, his sharp eyes fixed upon the tottery figure of Isaac Twambley. Then, as if to wither the senile visitor Jeremy stormed:

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"Lee Clavier is dead!"

"Of course," agreed Twambley; then narrowly, he added: "But Carl Wyler isn't!"

There was a snort of contempt from Jeremy. Evidently he recognized this name, but regarded it as unimportant. Then, deciding that Twambley knew enough to be told more, Jeremy spread his hands for silence and began his story, quite unconcerned by the fact that Shirley was a listener.

"Carl Wyler was a shrewd promoter," stated Jeremy. "He made a specialty of selling silver mines, and good ones. So good that he kept clear of trouble, but the mines never paid off."

"Because they were inaccessible," inserted Twambley. "The ore rated high when it was assayed, but it cost too much to transport it."

"Exactly," agreed Jeremy, "and whenever a mine failed, Wyler bought it up and sold it again to another crop of suckers. He never thought that any of those mines could be turned into profit until I showed him how."

Twambley nodded, as though interested in hearing more, and Shirley's expression showed that she was similarly inclined, so Jeremy continued:

"Lee Clavier was the opposite of Carl Wyler. Where Wyler kept within the law, Clavier ignored it altogether. Smooth, slick deals were Wyler's methods, while Clavier used torture and murder, even fomenting revolutions when occasion demanded."

Twambley nodded his familiarity with these facts.

"At the time Wyler was selling the old Cortez Mine," chuckled Jeremy, "Clavier was holding up the Trans-Mexican Railway for a price on a right-of-way that he had stolen from an old ranchero. When he found they wouldn't deal with him, he looked for someone else.

"I bought out Clavier and sold to Trans-Mexican at a loss, but I stipulated that my right-of-way become part of their main line. That brought them a hundred miles through the mountains directly past the Cortez Mine. With the transportation problem solved, my silver showed a huge profit."

Smiling broadly, Jeremy looked from Twambley to Shirley. Realizing that she belonged in the conversation, Shirley inquired:

"How did Wyler and Clavier like it?"

"They didn't," chortled the colonel. "It made them both unhappy and it gave ideas to other people."

"To Debley for one," specified Twambley. "He told me all about it."

"He told a lot of people," added Jeremy. "Debley guessed what was happening and made a smart deal of his own. He bought some oil wells from Wyler and sold them to the railway to fuel their oil-burning locomotives, something that Clavier could have done instead."

"Only the wells were capped," reminded Twambley. "They had filled during the years they were forgotten."

"The years when Clavier had been stirring up trouble in that area," added Jeremy, "so naturally Clavier thought the profit should be his. The railway barely paid off its investment and Wyler went to jail."

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"Why Wyler?" asked Shirley in surprise. "It was Debley who made the final sale."

"But the deal dated back to Wyler," explained Jeremy, "and he was found responsible. He couldn't blame Debley, who had acted in good faith. It was Clavier who promised trouble, to both Debley and myself."

"And others?" queried Twambley.

"To several others," replied Jeremy. Shifting in his chair, he glanced nervously toward the shuttered windows. Then, rubbing his hands as though they controlled his own fate, the colonel became more cheery, "Clavier is dead," he added, "so why should anyone worry? Some government troops caught up with him and his guerrillas in the mountains. That was when Clavier tested the depths of a five-thousand-foot canyon, head-first."

Old Twambley gave a corroborating nod.

"Clavier made a mistake, sending that Quetzal image to the presidente of the town where the troops were stationed."

At mention of the Quetzal, Jeremy's hands strained tightly upon the arms of his chair. The sudden chiming of the grandfather's clock relieved him and he relaxed. Then, cool as ever, Jeremy stated:

"Yes, Clavier used the Quetzal image once too often. It was his form of threat, you know, a personal billet doux that meant doom to the person who received it. I've often wondered what I would have done, had I received one."

"Some people paid off," cackled Twambley, "or did they?"

"That was one way out," retorted Jeremy, "though they never talked about it. Of course Debley was lucky."

"You mean he received a Quetzal image?"

"I think he did, about the time of Clavier's death. That effigy must have burdened his mind, long after he disposed of it."

Without so stating, Jeremy Tolland was offering a theory regarding the suicide of Rufus Debley. He was intimating that Debley's frantic talk of a Quetzal referred not to an image he still owned, but to a token received years before, which for some reason had solidified itself in his fear-crazed imagination.

"Debley had reason to remember those days in Mexico," mused Jeremy. "A recent reason, I mean. Carl Wyler finished his prison term about a month ago, a broken man, I understand. Poor Wyler" – there was a touch of disdain in Jeremy's chuckle – "I might buy a few more mines from him if I could find a way to make them pay."

"There is a way you could, Colonel!"

It was Shirley who blurted the statement, quite to the surprise of the two men. Then, after a moment of embarrassment, the girl decided to continue, now that she had cracked the ice.

"There's a friend of mine," Shirley explained rapidly, "a friend of my father's, I mean, who has invented an electro-magnetic finder for locating precious metals in worked-out mines. Really, it's not a silly invention, I'm positive. If you'd only be willing to put it to the test –"

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Colonel Jeremy was more than willing; he was eager. Eyes sparkling, he was leaning forward in his chair as though already viewing the glitter of heaped pay-ore. His interruption was rapid.

"Who is this inventor?"

"A man named Victor Brett," returned Shirley. "I'm going to see – that is, I can see about reaching him, maybe a few days from now. If you're really interested, Colonel, it would mean a great deal to – well, to both of us."

It should have been obvious that Shirley meant herself and Brett, but Jeremy didn't take it that way. Rising, he clapped his hand on Shirley's shoulder and beamed with the delight of a partner in a new enterprise.

"To both of us, of course," declared Jeremy. "I knew our meeting would lead to something, Shirley. Once the first stage of a prophetic dream comes true" – hand raised, Jeremy wagged a forefinger, wisely – "more luck is sure to follow. So run along and enjoy yourself this evening" – he was escorting Shirley out to the hall – "and tomorrow we'll talk about meeting this inventor friend of your father's."

Shirley was smiling into Gregg's favorite mirror as she fixed her blue hat at a trick angle on her head. Jeremy was summoning Sarge to lock the front door after the girl went out, a precaution that he always took. Sarge arrived and gave the front door a dubious look, as though wondering what good a lock was in a house where keys could vanish and reappear at will.

Sarge hadn't forgotten last night's episode in the kitchen where he had found the key to the cellar door in the lock where it belonged, after searching for it everywhere else.

Outside the brownstone mansion, Shirley walked briskly to the corner, but not without a few quick looks over her shoulder, as though fearful that she might be followed. The fact that she saw no one merely proved that she looked in the wrong direction, for the figure that suddenly trailed the girl was not invisible like The Shadow.

It was a furtive figure, small and hunched that came from the doorway of the vacant house to which Shirley had flashed those signals to the man she had just mentioned to old Jeremy Tolland – Victor Brett!

Ten minutes after Shirley had left this neighborhood with the hunchy man holding the trail, but keeping well from sight, old Isaac Twambley appeared upon the front steps of the Tolland house, saying good-night to Colonel Jeremy.

"You must come again, Twambley," invited the colonel. "I should like you to meet my nephews."

"Nephews?" clucked Twambley. "How many have you?"

"Two," replied Jeremy. "The elder, Gregg, is highly reliable, but I must confess that Dave is utterly irresponsible."

"A gay, young blade, perhaps?"

"They called them such in our time, Twambley. Nowadays I understand they term them stinkers."

With that parting comment, Jeremy stepped back into the house and let Sarge shut and lock the door. Finding the bottom step with his cane, old Twambley turned and began a painful, stoopish hobble along the street.

Only when he knew he was out of ear-shot did this human relic voice his opinion of his visit to Tolland's. From the leathery lips of Isaac Twambley crept the whispered laugh of The Shadow!

CHAPTER XI

THE smooth, steady hum of a motor came from beyond the old door where Shirley Malcolm knocked. Tapping a prearranged signal, the girl gained quick results. The motor was turned off, but in an odd way. Its hum increased in loudness instead of diminishing, then ended with a choppy clatter. After that, the door opened, and Victor Brett admitted the girl.

"Hello, Vic." Shirley smiled as she saw Brett peer sharply along the hall. "Don't worry. Nobody followed me, I made sure of that."

Shirley hadn't made as sure as she supposed. Brett had opened the door just too late to see a hunched figure bob from sight, below the level of some stairs. Shortly the figure reappeared outside this small, dilapidated office building and waved a signal to a cab across the way.

A man came from the cab and met the hunched trailer. They formed a sharp contrast in the light: the newcomer was handsome, youthful in appearance, despite the experienced expression that marked him a veteran in this sort of work; while the little man with the tight-drawn shoulders had a wizened face with sharp, darting eyes. Of course, they didn't bother to identify themselves as Harry Vincent, ace of The Shadow's agents and Hawkeye, the cleverest of spotters, who was serving the same cause.

Harry simply queried: "Where?"

"End door, second floor," acknowledged Hawkeye. "Transom open."

With that they parted, Harry going up to take over watch outside of Brett's. It was easy enough, for there was a turn in the hallway by the end door and Harry was skilled at stepping out of sight in such surroundings. Upon arrival, however, he preferred to benefit by the open transom and hear what was said inside the office with the unmarked door.

"So you told the colonel all about me," Brett was saying in an easy tone. "Good."

"Not all about you," corrected Shirley. "I said I hoped I would be able to reach you."

"That's all I wanted you to say."

"I know. Well, anyway, we were lucky."

"Lucky? How?"

"On account of the accident," explained Shirley. "It seemed so silly using that method to meet the colonel. Only it turned out that he had dreamed about it the night before!"

Brett chuckled as though he couldn't believe Shirley's story.

"Of course the colonel ties everything in with his dreams," admitted Shirley. "Maybe they are just a form of mental aberration or something else technical. Only he didn't dream what happened after you gave those signals, Vic."

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"What did happen?"

"Well," recalled Shirley, "a man dashed into the side alley and rolled through a grating, with one – or maybe two – coming after him."

"Who were they?"

"I think the first man was Gregg, the older nephew. He sneaked around through the dining room and parked his hat and coat. He must have locked the door down to the cellar" – Shirley paused, puzzled – "but still that doesn't explain what happened to the key."

"You mean it disappeared?"

"Wait now. I'm beginning to get it. Somebody followed Gregg up the cellar stairs and pushed the key out through the lock. He'd have to do that to use a skeleton key, wouldn't he, Vic?"

"It's the usual procedure."

"Then the man in black must have kept the regular key and put it back when he went down into the cellar again."

Shirley's description brought a half-snarl from Brett.

"What man in black?"

"I didn't really see him," admitted Shirley. "All I saw was something like a living shadow."

That term bothered Brett all the more.

"Look, Shirley," Brett's tone went so low that Harry could hardly hear it through the transom. "You've got to get back to the Tolland house, right away. Understand?"

"I – I think so. But how will I hear from you? The flashlight code isn't very safe."

"Tell the Colonel you wired me. I'll show up in due time, bringing the machine. You want me to sell it to him, don't you?"

"Of course, since my commission is to pay father's debts. But if it won't work, Vic –"

"It will work all right," Brett interrupted, sharply. "But keep on impressing the Colonel. We may have trouble with Gregg, though, so keep an eye on him."

"And the other nephew, Dave?"

"If you think he can help us, get him on our side. That ought to be easy. Dave won't mind the old man spending money, because Gregg is supposed to inherit most of it."

Footsteps toward the door caused Harry to sidle into the other passage. When Shirley had gone by and downstairs, Harry left her trail to Hawkeye and resumed his wait outside the office door. It was good policy, for shortly Harry heard the slight clatter of an inner door, then a suave tone that wasn't Brett's.

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"A good job, Vic," announced the oily voice. "The girl doesn't suspect a thing."

"Why should she?" queried Brett. "I didn't tell her that we knew about the Colonel's dream. All we have to do is follow his own leads."

"Provided they are good ones," said the other man. "If they aren't, we can play a few of our own."

"Whatever you say," returned Brett. "You're running this racket, Wyler."

The name Wyler brought Harry to sharp attention outside the door. This was a luckier stroke than he expected. The business of weaving Colonel Jeremy's dream-stuff into an actual fabric had impressed The Shadow as a build-up for a confidence game and that theory was now a certainty, since Carl Wyler, past master of con schemes, was now identified as the man behind it.

If only Wyler would say more, in that smooth purr of his! As the hope stirred Harry, Wyler became obliging without realizing that someone else was sharing his comments to Brett.

"I was lucky finding you, Brett," came Wyler's compliment. "Finding you, along with your treasure finder."

"Just say finding me," rejoined Brett, with a short laugh. "Whatever cash this apparatus finds won't be treasure."

"It looks imposing enough."

"But it won't stand a real test. You should know that, Wyler, and it won't take old Tolland long to learn the same."

"Long enough." There was something smoothly insidious in Wyler's easy purr. "Before we're through we'll have a real claim staked in the middle of the Colonel's millions."

"Maybe, if the main deal goes through. Still, I don't trust –"

"Never mind," Wyler's interruption was as swift as it was smooth. "I'll make sure of that part."

Voices went muffled as though drawing away into another room. After a few minutes, Harry moved to a stairway which he hoped would give him a view through the transom. It did, but he didn't find a proper angle to view Brett's machine. What Harry did see was in a sense more important.

Though this was the end room of the hallway, there was a door in the far wall, which meant it must be a connection into another building. That in turn told Harry that Wyler and Brett had walked right out on him, probably not to return tonight.

Going out by the front way, Harry Vincent reached the cab across the street and gave the driver an address. As they pulled away, the cabby inquired confidentially:

"Any luck, Vincent?"

"Good and bad, Shrevvy," rejoined Harry. "Mostly good, though. There'll be plenty for the chief to work on, beginning with tomorrow."

Harry spoke with certainty, for he was sure that Carl Wyler, master hand from Mexico, wouldn't be planning further moves tonight. Harry's only task would be to turn in his report to The Shadow.

How wrongly Harry had guessed about the ways of Wyler was something that he was personally to learn before this night was over. Much was still to be uncovered – by The Shadow!

CHAPTER XII

COLONEL JEREMY TOLLAND recognized the abrupt knocking at the study door, shook himself in his easy chair, and glanced at the grandfather's clock. Always he had a habit of checking the time and in this case, approximately an hour had passed since the departure of his visitor, Isaac Twambley.

The knock was Gregg's so Jeremy had no qualms about opening the door. Still a bit drowsy, he forgot that he had bolted it on the inside, so he had to fumble there a few minutes. When he did open the door, he found Gregg waiting impatiently, his eyes excited and his chin thrust out in its provoking style.

Not used to seeing his favorite nephew in such a mood, Jeremy tilted his head inquiringly.

"Listen, uncle." Gregg threw a suspicious glance along the hallway. "Who do you depend upon to manage your affairs – me or other people?"

"I rather thought I could manage them myself," returned Jeremy, dryly. Then, with a kindly touch, "Come into the study if you want to talk about it."

"I prefer to stay here, just in case anybody tries to snoop. Look, uncle, you've been badly worried lately."

"Worried about what?"

"About Debley, for instance, and that Quetzal business. If you weren't, you wouldn't have suggested that I go to the penthouse."

Whether or not Gregg had been to the penthouse that fateful night, he had certainly gathered and retained some of Debley's hunted mood. Gregg was fitful in the glances that he sent along the hall first toward the kitchen, then the front door. Jeremy's head was moving back and forth, his eyes following Gregg's face.

Neither noticed the darkened door of the living room across the hallway.

Gregg couldn't, because his back was toward that doorway. Jeremy's eyes, moving constantly, didn't fix long enough to study the darkness opposite. It was strange darkness, so solid that its depths could well have shrouded a human figure; or, in a sense, the darkness could itself have been a black-cloaked form merged with a natural setting.

Eyes from the darkness were watching Jeremy and Gregg – the eyes of The Shadow!

"You exaggerate matters, Gregg," spoke Jeremy, indulgently. "It was only the weather that prevented me from visiting Debley."

"I'm not so sure," returned Gregg. "You've gone out on much worse nights."

"But only for something more important."

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"Didn't you regard Debley as important?"

"Did you?"

Though challenging, Jeremy's query was as musically dispassionate as the chime from the old clock that at that moment wafted through the half-open door of the study. It was striking the hour and Jeremy, always proud of his precious clock, looked to another time-piece hanging on the hallway wall and saw that as usual, the grandfather's clock was right on the dot.

"You're right, Uncle Jeremy," declared Gregg, apologetically. "If I'd thought Debley really important, I wouldn't have forgotten to take along the key. By the way, did you mention the key to the police?"

Jeremy shook his head.

"They might have misunderstood," declared the Colonel. "After all, Debley mailed me the key of his own volition."

"And it was your idea to lend it to me."

"Of course. You are my representative, Gregg, as much as if you were my own son, but I am not responsible for your actions. I would prefer that you be independent."

Those words though spoken in Jeremy's most indulgent tones, were open to several interpretations. Before Gregg could raise that point, there was a clicking sound from the front door lock and Gregg said hastily:

"It may be Dave. Mind if I step into the study, Uncle? Dave has been acting jealously every time we talk together."

Jeremy was already gesturing Gregg into the study. Its door was closing when Dave arrived through the vestibule, bowing Shirley ahead of him.

"Hello, Uncle." Dave was in another of his convivial moods. "Shirley and I just happened to arrive at the same time in a couple of different cabs. Gregg home yet?"

Jeremy's eyes sharpened.

"Why do you ask, Dave?"

"Thought if he was, we'd better get out the poker and tongs. Everything seems to happen around here when Gregg is home. Except of course when things happen somewhere else."

"Somewhere else, Dave?"

"That's what I said, Uncle." Dave tossed his hat to the rack and closed the vestibule door behind him. "Like at Debley's penthouse for instance. I was home that evening, but Gregg wasn't."

Shirley expected an angry flash from Jeremy's eyes in response to Dave's slur of Gregg. But Jeremy remained quite calm; either he preferred to remain impartial in feuds between the nephews or he was giving weight to Dave's words, Shirley wasn't sure which.

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At any rate, Dave was smart enough to let the statement sink. Jovially he continued along the hallway, waving back to his uncle.

"See you later, if you're still up," said Dave. "I'm going in the kitchen to mix a few nightcaps. Want one, Shirley?"

The girl shook her head and started upstairs. Turning on his heel, Jeremy went back into the study and the hallway settled into silence. The darkness of the living room didn't stir, for The Shadow expected an immediate outbreak. It came, even though it was repressed.

Fuming, fists tight-clenched, Gregg stepped from the study, pushing aside Jeremy's hand when it tried to hold him back. His glare was toward the kitchen, where Dave had closed the door, and it was plain that Gregg wanted to go there and bash it out with his cousin.

Then, halting, Gregg spoke in savage undertone:

"The stinker! I ought to make him eat that talk. Still" – Gregg suddenly relaxed of his own accord – "it wouldn't really settle anything."

"Of course not," expressed Jeremy, blandly, "Judgment is one thing; challenge is another."

"You have both, Uncle Jeremy."

"But my brothers didn't. Your father was the conservative of the family, Dave's father the real adventurer. I was something of a hybrid."

His chin eased, Gregg gazed admiringly at his uncle.

"You made out all right, Uncle Jeremy."

"Through luck, my boy. I made a fortune but I might as easily have lost one. You understand, don't you?"

Gregg nodded, slowly. His face, less hardened, gained a more handsome expression than was present when he forced it to look rugged.

"Since I have wealth," summed Jeremy, "I favor you, Gregg, because I know you would make proper use of it. If I needed to gain more – or to fight to hold what I have – I would prefer Dave."

Accepting the impartial verdict, Gregg went upstairs. Watching from the door of the study, Jeremy waited until Gregg had reached the second floor, then glanced across the hall. It was chance or some slight illusion of the light that made him think he saw darkness stir. Reaching for his cane, Jeremy moved slowly but boldly into the darkness of the living room.

Darkness had stirred, but only in departure. The Shadow was gone through the dining room to the door of the kitchen. There, he was listening to a chat between Dave and Sarge, who were over by the ice box.

"Who said I was a stinker?" Dave was asking, "Gregg?"

"It was your uncle who said it," replied Sarge. "I thought you ought to know, Mr. Dave."

Dave gave an indulgent laugh.

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"Uncle probably picked up the term from Gregg. Some day, Sarge, when my dear cousin pokes his chin out, trying to look tough, he's going to get my knuckles on the point of it."

"Right enough, sir. I wish the Colonel could see your viewpoint. You're really his own sort, Mr. Dave."

"I'm what he used to be," corrected Dave, "but I suppose we all grow old. Maybe he'll begin to see my side of it. Trouble is, I can't act like anybody but myself."

"There is still hope, Mr. Dave. The other way about, you know."

"Yes, if uncle realizes that Gregg is a stinker in his own right, I'll become the white-haired boy. He's been showing himself up badly lately, Gregg has. For one thing, he's been suspicious of Shirley, which is a mistake, since our uncle likes her. That may help."

"I hope so, Mr. Dave. Meanwhile you can depend on me –"

The voices had drawn to a rear kitchen, along with the clank of soda bottles that Sarge was carrying, but the interruption came from the dining room. There, The Shadow heard the clatter of someone tripping over a chair, followed by angry words in Jeremy's tone. Without an instant's hesitation, The Shadow whipped into the kitchen, made a quick turn around the nearest corner, which was at an angle that Dave and Sarge could not view from the back room.

By the time those two came dashing through the kitchen to reach the dining room and learn the cause of the hubbub, another door was closing upon a vanishing blotch of black. It was a door with a single step below it, indicating a back stairs to the second floor.

Again, The Shadow was gone, his presence in the mansion still a shrouded mystery!

CHAPTER XIII

THE sounds of Jeremy's tumble hadn't been heard upstairs, otherwise Gregg would have gone down to learn what happened. As it was, Gregg was busy listening outside Shirley's door when The Shadow arrived in the upstairs hall.

Apparently Gregg was thinking in terms of flashlight signals from Shirley's window, for when he heard nothing, he tiptoed along the hall to stare from a window at the front. This gave The Shadow an easy opportunity to enter a half-opened door which he was quite sure must be Gregg's.

Gregg's coat and vest were hanging on a chair and from the pocket of the coat, The Shadow saw the butt-end of a gun. Lifting the weapon with gloved fingers, The Shadow promptly identified it as a reconditioned Luger, of eight millimeter size. Replacing the automatic in the coat pocket, The Shadow found a box of cartridges; opening it, he took along a sample.

By then, Gregg was returning. The Shadow stepped aside and let him enter, the room being dark except for the glow from the hall. Leaving the door ajar, Gregg removed the Luger from his coat and put it in a bureau drawer, which gave The Shadow time to sidle out to the hallway.

People were shunting around this mansion like box-cars in a freight yard.

It was Shirley's turn again. She must have heard Gregg outside her door, for she had just finished a glance in

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that direction when The Shadow emerged, unseen. Wearing a fluffy dark blue negligee, Shirley was carrying slippers that matched it. Tonight she waited until she was nearly at the bottom of the stairs before she sat down and put on the slippers. This precaution of course was to nullify Gregg's snooping tactics.

Throwing a glance upstairs, Shirley didn't see The Shadow watching from the background of dim light. Noting that the study door was open, Shirley dipped her hands into the deep sash of the negligee and strolled in through the door as though expecting to find Colonel Jeremy. By then, The Shadow was coming downstairs again and with a prompt glide he crossed the hallway to his favorite darkness of the living room, just as the kitchen door rattled open.

This door was the one leading directly from kitchen to the front hall and from it came Jeremy, Dave and Sarge in a group. Reaching the stairs, Dave and Sarge went up, after reminding the Colonel to be more careful when he made side trips around through the dining room. In his habitual style, Jeremy watched the pair reach the stair-top, his forehead furrowing speculatively, almost cunningly.

Before that forehead had time to unfurrow, Jeremy had cause to keep it as it was.

Turning to the door of his own study, the Colonel bumped right into Shirley, coming out. Before the gray-haired man could say a word, the girl in blue gestured for silence. Whatever her game, Shirley was learning to play it in this house of crossing paths.

"I thought you were in here," undertoned Shirley. "There was something I wanted to tell you, Colonel."

"About the inventor?"

"Yes." Shirley gave a simple nod. "I found out where to reach him, so I sent him a telegram."

"You told him to come here?"

Another nod from Shirley, then:

"It won't be more than a few days at most," the girl said apologetically. "I hate to take advantage of your hospitality, Colonel, but since Victor Brett is really a friend of my father's, I –"

Old Jeremy interrupted by flattening Shirley's fluffy shoulder pleats with a warmly encircling arm.

"You'll stay right here, little girl," he assured. "Now don't dispute me. I wouldn't have you going back to that shabby hotel."

"But really, Colonel –"

"You'll really stay. Now that that's settled, let's take a better look at you."

His hand shifting back to Shirley's near shoulder, the Colonel planted his other paw on the far one; thrusting his fluffy prize at arm's length, he tilted his head so the light reached Shirley's face. After a pause, the Colonel said:

"Humph."

During the placement process, Shirley had begun a starry-eyed stare which was meant to show surprise, but now she presumed that the Colonel was expecting her to weep with gratitude because of the extended

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invitation. Maybe that was the method used by the belles of the Colonel's palmy days when they didn't want to be told to undarken a door and go out into the cruel world, stormy night or otherwise.

But before Shirley could manage to shape up a few tears, she found that the Colonel's comment wasn't a criticism of her weepless mood.

"My nephew Gregg!" exclaimed Jeremy. "What ails the young fool that he ignores a charmer like you? Why, in my rollicking youth, I'd have been all agog over such beauty."

Jeremy chuckled as though he still knew how to be agog.

"Dave is different," the Colonel admitted. "He certainly hasn't ignored you, though I can't say that he has played the gallant." Jeremy paused, remembering that Dave had come in with Shirley that very evening. "Or has he?"

"Your nephews are both all right." Crossing her arms, Shirley neatly managed to reach the Colonel's hands and apply a few soft pats. "So are you, Colonel. Gregg is just too occupied, I suppose, while Dave –"

"Dave still has other engagements," interposed Jeremy. Gently, he moved Shirley aside from the doorway. "But he'll come around in time, only beware when he does! He's a heart crusher, that young rake, like I was! Now wait right here while I close the hot-air register. I don't like the study too stuffy in the morning."

Going into the study, Jeremy rattled the chain of the register, then came out and locked the door. He bowed toward the stairs and Shirley started up, while The Shadow circled toward the kitchen, through the darkness of the dining room. The kitchen now was dark, too, but as The Shadow reached it, he heard footsteps coming sneakily across the floor.

Then, as The Shadow listened, there was a sudden pound from the back stairs. A door was flung open and there was a sudden shout in Gregg's voice:

"Here he is! I've got him!"

There was a scuffle, the fling of a chair and a snarl. Then, to the tune of other heavy footsteps, The Shadow, half way across the kitchen and bound for the cellar door, was caught in the beam of a strong flashlight, aimed from the backstairs from which Gregg had surged.

This time it was Sarge's roar:

"There he goes – for the cellar!"

Only The Shadow wasn't going for the cellar. He was playing his trick of blanking light with blackness. Meeting Sarge and his flashlight, The Shadow precipitated the big chauffeur squarely into the struggle between Gregg and some other fighter.

The Shadow of course was carried in the whirl that bashed open the door to the lower hall, where Jeremy had just turned off the lights. As the strugglers broke apart, under the swings of each other's fists, Dave's voice suddenly joined the bedlam with the triumphant cry:

"I've got him!"

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Where Dave had come from was one question; whom he had grabbed was another. At least The Shadow wasn't the person, for he managed to work free during the next two minutes of the general melee that raged back and forth along the hall. At last, lights came on, and there stood old Jeremy by the switch at the foot of the stairs, with Shirley peering across the banister above.

The fighters who had managed to snare each other were Gregg and Dave, with Sarge standing by as a bewildered umpire. Before the two nephews could begin to blame each other, Jeremy waved his cane toward the open door of the rear parlor, and ordered:

"Take a look in there!"

Sarge entered the parlor and pressed a switch that illuminated a crystal chandelier. In the dim light, the parlor showed entirely empty. Not only did Sarge say so, but the nephews agreed as they crowded the doorway and looked over Sarge's shoulders. So Sarge turned off the lights, gruffing that it had all been a big mistake.

Those old-fashioned bulbs among the crystal pendants weren't too strong with light.

From a corner at the back of the parlor, The Shadow emerged, having picked the one deep spot in the room. The searchers had looked right past him while the lights were on. Now, completely unobserved, The Shadow was crossing the rear hall to the kitchen, while Jeremy and Sarge were hearing arguments between Gregg and Dave.

Shirley had been in bed when the new tumult began, and she suddenly realized that she was now clad in filmy nightie instead of fluffy negligee. Quickly scampering up the stairs and into her room, Shirley closed the door and hurried to the window that overlooked the side passage.

Should there be an intruder in the house, Shirley was sure that his mode of exit would be through the loose grating in the cellar. At first, she couldn't see the grating, but the darkness cleared, more rapidly than the girl expected. Odd, how her eyes became used to the dark so suddenly!

It didn't strike Shirley that what she had seen was an actual figure emerging from the cellar opening. In shifting from deep gloom, The Shadow, if seen at all, could be best compared with a clearing cloud of black smoke. Moving through the passage, his gliding figure escaped Shirley's eyes entirely.

Voices were coming upstairs; from their laughter it sounded as though the mad hunt had all been a mistake. So Shirley went back to bed and tried to forget the excitement. Other recollections drifted to mind; she was picturing old Jeremy, smiling as he stooped to turn off the register in the study. She could almost hear his chuckle along with other recollective sounds.

One of those imaginary noises bothered Shirley a few minutes later, jarring her wide awake. She thought she heard a muffled clang, the cellar grating in operation. Hearing nothing more, Shirley didn't bother about another trip to the chilly open window.

Thereby Shirley missed the sequel to the recent commotion. A lanky man was sneaking out from beside the mansion, keeping his footsteps silent and huddling well in darkness. But he couldn't escape the keen eyes of the black-clad watcher across the street. As the lanky man kept on toward the corner, blackness stirred. With the grotesque manner of a man-sized bat, it took up the trail of the long, lean party who had just emerged from Tolland's.

After a full block, the lanky man felt no more urge from caution. Halting near a street lamp he glanced at his watch and his thin, tanned face showed plainly in the glow. Narrow lips, narrow eyes, above them an

oddly-wrinkled forehead that showed slight traces of an old scar.

Those features were viewed by The Shadow who had reached the shelter of a projecting wall, less than a dozen feet from where the lean man stood. In one look The Shadow no longer needed the report that he had not yet received from his agent, Harry Vincent.

The Shadow knew that thin, narrow face from photographs among his files. It belonged to Carl Wyler, ex-convict from Mexico.

CHAPTER XIV

PITCH-BLACK during daylight.

Such was a terse description of the room The Shadow called his sanctum, except when its owner was in it.

Then the room was illuminated, but never by sunshine. The glow came from a bluish light which cast its artificial rays upon the surface of a polished table. Beyond was a switchboard, where a tiny bulb occasionally gleamed, announcing a call from Burbank, the contact man who kept in touch with agents like Harry, Hawkeye and Shrevvy.

Above the table hung a pair of hands.

Long, thin-fingered hands, velvet in their touch but steely in their grip. Occasionally their hidden sinews revealed a small idea of the power with which they could clutch. The hands of The Shadow, stretching from surrounding darkness, busy with their work.

The table was strewn with typewritten reports, photographs, shares of old mining stock, yellowed newspaper clippings, and other items belonging to this case. Of special importance were pictures of bullets taken through a magnifying apparatus.

These included photos of the Luger slugs that the police had found at Debley's, others of bullets that The Shadow had personally picked up in the vacant house across from Tolland's, and finally, the cartridge that The Shadow had taken from the box in Gregg's pocket.

All tallied, proving that if Gregg hadn't been at Debley's as well as the old house, his gun certainly had. But if anyone had borrowed that gun for the earlier mission, Gregg Tolland wouldn't have used it later.

Another photograph served as a lucky find. It was a night-club shot, taken by one of those professional photographers who made it their business to go around snapping people and selling them the result. From one of The Shadow's numerous sources, this group picture listed the names of several people who had been at the same corner of the bar.

One was Dave Tolland, quite recognizable, along with his name. Near him was a darkish but rather handsome chap listed as Victor Brett. How well they knew each other, if at all, was something quite unspecified, but the picture went a good way to prove that Brett's process of moving into Tolland territory included some contact with the happy-go-lucky member of the family.

It happened, however, that Dave was not so irresponsible as might be supposed. The Shadow had acquired data on the younger nephew, covering his activities outside the homestead, and judged by modern standards, Dave was reasonably sober and reliable. In fact, but for Colonel Jeremy's antiquated notions and Gregg's

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persistent efforts to hold the old man's favor, Dave could have rated very high.

Indeed, Dave Tolland was nobody's dupe. If Victor Brett had found him such, Brett wouldn't be needing Shirley Malcolm as a stooge.

From The Shadow's table leered a big-toothed face, representing the best of his collection of Wyler pictures. One thing: Wyler wasn't photogenic. Usually, he had managed to face a camera so his profile entered matters; seen full face, he was particularly unhandsome. Yet there was a sharpness of eye, a wisdom of expression that went along with that smooth purr which Wyler affected.

With Wyler behind whatever swindle or crime that might be committed against Colonel Tolland, the present whereabouts of the crooked promoter were most important. The Shadow had personally supplied that data by trailing Wyler to his hotel. The ex-con from Mexico was living at the Hotel Revelon, a middle-class but high-priced establishment. Despite the current room shortage in Manhattan, Harry Vincent had acquired a room on the same floor.

The switchboard bulb gleamed as The Shadow took a pair of earphones from the wall. A methodical voice came over the wire:

"Burbank speaking."

"Instructions –"

The order was in the whispered tone of The Shadow and from then on, Burbank was busy listing the future moves of agents. Those given, the bluish light went off. Black walls echoed with a departing laugh as The Shadow left the sanctum.

Not long afterward, Lamont Cranston found himself blinking into morning sunlight. It wasn't often that Cranston rode about town in the morning, except when he'd been up all the night before, but today he had an appointment. His limousine, wheeling through side streets, brought the club man in front of an old mansion that looked much different by day.

The house was Colonel Tolland's.

It was Sarge who answered the door and ushered Cranston through the living room into the dining room where the colonel was having breakfast alone. Propping his elbows on the table, Cranston shook his head when a pair of boiled eggs were offered but nodded at mention of a cup of coffee.

With only the slightest of smiles Cranston queried:

"Any dreams last night, Colonel?"

"Why, yes, Cranston," nodded Jeremy. "Here" – he gestured to Sarge, who was bringing in the coffee – "suppose we let Sarge tell it."

Sarge gave a doubtful stare.

"Tell what, Colonel?"

"About my dream and who was in it. Cranston would like to know, just to check on what may happen."

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Setting down the coffee, Sarge shook his head.

"I never remember those dreams of yours, Colonel."

"You'll remember this one when I remind you, Sarge. It was about a man who wanted too much, who probably will always want too much, and never is satisfied with what he gets, no matter how heartfelt. Now go on, Sarge –"

"The toast, Colonel!"

Smoke was coming from the toaster and in handling it, Sarge spilled the electric gadget to the floor, burning himself in the process. Clutching one hand clumsily with the other, Sarge started out to the kitchen, muttering something about lard being good for burns.

"We'll talk about my dream later," the colonel told Cranston. "At least it links to something that was on my mind, an unusual sort of investment."

"Another mine?"

"Perhaps." The colonel smiled wisely. "I've heard about a treasure-finder that could be used as a machine for locating pay-ore. I'm arranging for a test and would like you to witness it."

Cranston nodded as though interested.

"I might invite old Twambley," mused Jeremy. "Do you know him, Cranston?"

"Isaac Twambley?" Cranston's smile broadened. "If the machine locates fossils as well as metals, it will start working as soon as Twambley walks in."

"Apparently you don't like Twambley."

"The old codger is a bore, that's all, but otherwise there's nothing wrong with him. I'd appreciate it, though, if we could be spared his company."

Jeremy's nod meant that Twambley was off the list. Rising from the table, Jeremy laid aside his napkin and suggested that the study would be more comfortable. They crossed the hall and while the colonel was unlocking the door, Shirley appeared on the stairs, wearing a light house frock. Recognizing Cranston, she nodded, and Jeremy invited her into the study.

"The treasure finder was Shirley's find," explained Jeremy. "At least she was the one who told me about its inventor. Now getting back to that dream of mine, it concerns somebody you have heard about. I may be able to find some of his old correspondence, right in here."

The colonel was opening the secretary desk. He was so occupied that he didn't notice that the grandfather's clock was about to chime. Nor did he hear that music when it began, for Jeremy was fixing himself for quite a shock. Pawing through papers in the open desk, Jeremy felt something among them and brought it out, only to let the thing drop as if it had been a deadly scorpion.

The object that Colonel Jeremy had flung so hastily was the feathered image of a wood-carved Aztec god, a mate of the insidious Quetzal that had driven Rufus Debley to his doom!

CHAPTER XV

Dave Tolland planted a straight stare in the middle of Shirley Malcolm's lovely brown eyes and demanded:

"Did you put that Quetzal in my uncle's desk?"

About to return an indignant denial, Shirley found herself sliding from the cab seat as they swung a corner sharply. By the time Dave had brought her back to level, the girl decided that a calm response would be better.

"I never even saw a Quetzal before," avowed Shirley. "Take it or leave it, Dave. It's still the truth."

"Then it was Gregg who put it there," Dave decided. "He was the only other person who could have been in the study."

"What about Sarge?"

"Sarge? Impossible. He knows too well what it might do to Uncle Jeremy's nerves."

"So does Gregg," reminded Shirley, "and considering that he's to be your uncle's heir –"

Shirley's monetary pause was all that Dave wanted. With a knowing nod, Dave asserted:

"That's right. Consider it."

Driven home, the significance of that statement startled Shirley. It meant in just so many words that Gregg could speed his heritage by hastening his uncle's death. Such things might happen; in fact, they probably had happened in even the best of families.

"If Uncle Jeremy finds out how yellow Gregg really is," added Dave, contemptuously, "he won't have any further truck with him. What's more, Gregg knows it."

"If your uncle did find out," expressed Shirley, "he'd transfer the legacy to you, Dave –"

"Of course," interposed Dave, "and the longer Gregg waits, the more risk he takes. Particularly" – Dave laughed grimly – "the way Uncle Jeremy has tested him lately."

"Tested him?"

"Yes. Don't you remember how he sent Gregg to see Debley? No, that was before you met us, wasn't it? Anyway, Gregg welsed and didn't go. Debley might not have committed suicide if Gregg had been there to talk him out of it."

The cab was swinging a corner and slowing to a halt, but Shirley didn't notice it.

"The colonel may be planning another test tonight," stated Shirley, slowly. "He had another dream, but he didn't say who was involved."

"He probably told Sarge," observed Dave, "but Sarge never tells anyone else. Is this the place where we are due?"

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Looking out, Shirley saw Brett's office building. Dave paid the cabby, who happened to be Shrevvy and the cab rolled around the corner. Going upstairs, Shirley knocked at Brett's office and the door was promptly opened, Dave was immediately intrigued by Brett's machine, which had the appearance of a fair-sized dynamo, teeming with wires and odd-looking aerials. Next, Dave was turning to see the inventor himself.

Brett gave a sallow smile of recognition and Dave suddenly recalled him.

"So you're Brett!" exclaimed Dave. "I've seen you around some of the night spots!"

"That's right," nodded Brett, "but I didn't have the nerve to start talking my machine to Colonel Tolland's nephew."

"You'd have picked the wrong nephew if you had," returned Dave, wryly. "Cousin Gregg is the one who influences our uncle's deals, though I must say Shirley is winning him around. Say, though – this contrivance won't pack in any cab. We'd better phone Sarge to bring the big car."

Shirley volunteered to go downstairs and make the call from a pay-booth while Dave and Brett were packing the machine. When she came back, the job was nearly done, with the two men chatting like old friends. Then, Brett became a bit stuffy when he suggested that both Dave and Shirley step outside.

"Sorry," said Brett, "I'll have to add a few special gadgets to the crate. The invention would no longer be secret if you saw them."

Stepping out to the hall, Shirley resumed the earlier conversation to mollify Dave, who seemed a trifle irked at Brett.

"Can't Sarge influence your uncle?" Shirley asked. "I mean by boosting your stock in comparison to Gregg's?"

"He does," affirmed Dave. "Sarge tells me so, every day. He talked that way this morning. Said I should have clipped Gregg's jaw last night, so uncle could have seen him wilt. Now I wish I'd thought about it then."

"Why won't the colonel listen to Sarge?"

"He does, but not on more subtle subjects. If it comes to life and death, though, Sarge's word will count. He's saved Uncle Jeremy's life at least three times, so he's one man who wouldn't be party to a murder plot."

"It was a bad mistake then, for Gregg to leave the Quetzal. Unless" – Shirley paused, her tone a bit horrified – "unless he thinks he can blame it on me!"

"He'll probably try," argued Dave, sourly. "I wonder though, where he got the thing in the first place. Say –"

Stopping short, Dave let his own eyes duplicate one of Shirley's speculative stares. Then:

"Debley's!"

"You can't mean that Gregg really went to Debley's?" queried Shirley. "Why, then he couldn't be so yellow!"

"He could be worse," rejoined Dave. "He might be a murderer. Maybe Debley had some claim on Uncle Jeremy."

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"How would that affect him?"

"It would mean a claim on Gregg, when he came into the money. Besides, it would be smart for Gregg to knock off one of Uncle Jeremy's old friends."

"You mean it would then look like someone else, when – when –" The word was a hard one for Shirley to get past, but she finally steeled herself – "when the time came to kill your uncle?"

"Smart girl," acknowledged Dave. "That's just what I did mean. But let's talk about this later. We don't want Brett to overhear. Maybe you know him well enough, but I don't."

At that moment, Brett was saying a few things that he didn't want overheard. He had stepped to the office in the other building and was speaking to a man who was waiting in the darkness of a little windowless ante room.

"Six o'clock, Wyler," announced Brett. "That's when Gregg is due to see Lloyd Jaggert."

"You're sure about the time?"

"Absolutely," replied Brett. "The clock was striking six in the colonel's dream. Besides, dinner is to be at six thirty and the old man probably won't want Gregg to be too late."

"You're going over there now?"

"Right away. I'm sure everything will work."

"Better phone me. I want to be sure about my end of it."

"All right, Wyler."

Beyond the door of the ante room, the hunched figure of Hawkeye did a quick sneak down the hallway to the stairs then out to a side street. Though he hadn't yet seen Wyler, Hawkeye had recognized the man's smooth tone, and he knew what the crooked promoter looked like, from pictures that The Shadow had sent via Burbank.

It was about lunch hour and soon numerous people would be coming from the building, which was all the better in Hawkeye's opinion. The first to arrive was a stocky man with a blunt face, who certainly couldn't be Wyler; then came a pair of elderly men who were equally distant from the proper description.

After that, there was a thin parade, and Wyler definitely wasn't in it. Sliding around the corner. Hawkeye saw the Tolland limousine pulling away with Dave, Shirley and Brett as passengers among the boxes that held the machine. Sarge was at the wheel and Wyler certainly couldn't be in the car, So Hawkeye sneaked up the regular stairs, poked his head into Brett's office, which was now unlocked, and saw it empty. Going through the adjoining office in the next building, he found no trace of Wyler.

Down the stairs in the other building, Hawkeye came out and contacted Shrevvy. He found that the cabby had been watching, but hadn't seen Wyler. So there was nothing else to do but ride to the Hotel Revelon and report from there that Wyler had maneuvered a slip.

When Hawkeye met Harry in the latter's room at the Revelon, it was Harry's turn to show surprise.

"A smart apple, Wyler," defined Harry. "I was positive he hadn't left his room. Sneak over there and find out if he's back. I'll report to Burbank."

Hawkeye returned after having managed a look through Wyler's transom.

"Back all right," declared Hawkeye. "Pretending to be asleep on his bed. Maybe he came in and out by the fire tower."

"I should have spotted him," said Harry. "This means the chief will need us to do double watch. Anyway, you found out something worthwhile."

"You mean about Jaggert?"

"Yes. He's another promoter, but not as shady as Wyler. Operated in Mexico, too, which is probably why the colonel wants to contact him. We'll find him if we keep track of Wyler, unless the chief locates him first."

The phone was buzzing, for Harry had muffled it so the bell wouldn't ring. It was another call from Burbank, with instructions from The Shadow. Hanging up, Harry repeated them to Hawkeye.

"I'm due at Tolland's at five," stated Harry. "Going there instead of Cranston, who has some other engagement. Cliff Marsland will be over here to team with you, Hawkeye."

There was more to that order than met the ear. The fact that Lamont Cranston couldn't be at Tolland's meant what Harry had suggested earlier, that The Shadow would be acting on his own in the quest for Lloyd Jaggert, the new personality who had bobbed up in one of Colonel Tolland's strangely prophetic dreams.

CHAPTER XVI

THE grandfather's clock was chiming five when Colonel Jeremy swung impatiently from his desk and flung the Quetzal image in the waste-basket. As if timed, a knock sounded at the door and Jeremy opened it to admit his nephew Gregg.

"Go to the Marland Building," ordered Jeremy. "Use the back door which is still open after five thirty. Take the stairs to the mezzanine and enter the last office on the right."

"Very well," returned Gregg. "Who will be there?"

"Lloyd Jaggert. Ever hear of him?"

Gregg's eyes gave a sudden flash at Jeremy's query.

"Yes, Lloyd Jaggert," laughed Jeremy. "The man who knows as much about the Quetzal business as anybody living – including Carl Wyler."

"What about the girl?" snapped Gregg. "She may know about the Quetzal, too. She's the only person who could have parked that feather image in your desk."

"The only person, Gregg?"

"Unless you put it there yourself," retorted Gregg. Then, becoming his more reserved self: "But if you did, it's

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not for me to ask an explanation, Uncle Jeremy."

"Good boy, Gregg." The old man clapped his hand upon his nephew's back. "That's what I like about you. Spirit when you need it, and obedience when demanded. Those are the marks of honesty, the thing that counts most."

Opening the door, Jeremy came out with Gregg and motioned his nephew to the living room. There, a group was busy putting together the intricate parts of Brett's machine. Harry Vincent had just arrived as Cranston's proxy and had removed his coat and vest to lend a hand with Brett and Dave. Contempt of the whole process showed in Gregg's demeanor but he smothered the look, when Shirley came away. Then, with a flash of the spirit that his uncle had recently commended, Gregg halted the girl in the hallway, near the stairs.

"There's something I want to tell you, Shirley."

Startled by Gregg's sudden show of interest, Shirley didn't know what to make of it, so she simply stared.

"My uncle just named the thing that counts most," declared Gregg. "He said I had it: honesty, That's why I'm saying this right now."

"You mean" – Shirley took a breath – "you're being honest with me?"

"Yes. I haven't talked before, because you knocked words right out of me, the first time I saw you."

"You didn't show it."

"Maybe not. I'm not the type. Besides, it's my business to suspect every stranger who walks into this house."

"Your business?"

"Yes. Uncle Jeremy is growing old. Occasionally he loses his sense of values. If it wasn't for my advice, he'd fall for all the schemes he used to dodge in the old days."

Shirley gave a winsome smile.

"Do I look like a schemer, Gregg?"

"Your friend Brett might be one," returned Gregg, frankly, "and still you might not know it. Look, Shirley. There are certain people to be trusted at their word. I'm one and I take it you're another. Let's discard appearances and suspicions. Whatever I've done or intend to do, my reasons are honest. Can you say the same?"

Shirley's eyes were very close to Gregg's, looking right up into them. Simply the girl said:

"I can."

Gregg's hands had a different technique. Coming upwards, they took Shirley's chin before she knew they were there. Adding the proper pressure, they set Shirley's lips just right for the kiss that Gregg promptly planted on them. By the time the girl opened her eyes and turned around, Gregg was waving back as he gathered his hat and coat from the vestibule rack. His wave meant: "See you later."

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A bit dazed, Shirley wandered back into the living room to find everyone perfectly oblivious to her brief but palpating experience. When it came to inserting sentiments between a feud with a cousin and a mission for an uncle, Gregg Tolland was tops. He'd done it without missing a beat.

Brett's machine was beginning its loud buzz while he stretched its antennas like the tentacles of an octopus. He took Harry's coat and vest out into the hall, so he could plant a gadget on the living room chair. Dave carried another long wire out to the kitchen and told Sarge to peel his potatoes in the back room. Another wire went straight up to the second floor and was parked in the upper hallway. Colonel Jeremy consented to running one into the study, since the wire was so thin that it could go under the door from the hall, allowing the colonel to lock the door after Brett came out.

Coming down from the second floor, Dave handed Shirley her wrist watch and a finger ring, having found them on a table just inside her room. He advised her to lay them on the mantel, so they wouldn't interfere with the coming test. Brett had already explained that a special detector, in the heart of the machine, would register whenever metals were brought near it. So the tests began, as Brett raised the speed to a rhythmic purr.

Coins, bracelets, candlesticks, even the silverware in the dining room, all produced varying responses in these preliminary tests. Even Colonel Jeremy was having enough fun to forget about Gregg and the mission on which he had gone.

The Shadow hadn't.

As Cranston, The Shadow was trailing Gregg in Shrevvy's cab. What this trip would bring was speculative – as much so as Brett's treasure hunting contraption – because Hawkeye had reported that no call had been received by Wyler, despite Brett's promise.

The day was heavily clouded, which increased the gathering dusk, putting matters in The Shadow's favor. After half an hour of Shrevvy's artful trailing, which consisted in almost losing Gregg's cab time after time, the trip ended in the financial district, near the Marland Building.

Among the vast skyscrapers of this area, night had practically set in. Most of the buildings had closed at half past five, but The Shadow saw Gregg go in the back of the Marland Building and promptly followed.

There was a large, front lobby with a watchman sitting by the only elevator that was operating, requesting people to sign a register before going up to offices. But the rule didn't apply to an obscure stairway, leading to a small mezzanine at the rear.

Too late to trail Gregg along that route, The Shadow waited in the lower darkness. After a short while, he saw Gregg come out, with a large envelope in his pocket. Knowing that Gregg was going home, The Shadow simply let him pass and watched the door of the office that Gregg had left.

It probably would be long before Jaggert appeared and when he did, The Shadow intended to take up his trail. A man of very crafty methods, Lloyd Jaggert. Mentally, The Shadow was reviewing Colonel Jeremy's description:

"A man who wanted too much, who probably will always want too much, and never is satisfied with what he gets, no matter how heartfelt –"

As a foil for Wyler, Jaggert would be perfect, provided the colonel knew that Wyler was in the game. How the Quetzal figured was still a question, considering that it had been the fetish used by a defunct murderer named Clavier and belonged neither to Wyler nor Jaggert.

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This was what The Shadow hoped to learn by trailing Jaggert, now that the promoter's brief conference with Gregg was over. Only one person promised interference with The Shadow's plans, namely Wyler. But The Shadow was set in case Wyler moved. Cliff and Hawkeye were really covering Wyler's hotel room and they had an open line to Burbank. Outside the Marland Building, Shrevvy was parked in a lunch room, ready for a ring from a phone booth. Any word from Wyler's quarter would be relayed promptly to The Shadow.

Minutes dragged after Gregg's departure. Before ten of them were gone, The Shadow had moved up the mezzanine stairs and was gliding toward Jaggert's door. Listening there, he heard the faint ringing of a telephone bell, followed by what seemed a muffled voice.

Trying the door, The Shadow found it locked and went to work with a special pick. The door yielded and in a darkened office, The Shadow saw an inner door beyond. No sounds were coming from the inner office, so Jaggert had probably finished the phone call, if it happened to be his. The sounds of bell and voice could have come from another office on this floor.

Twenty minutes now, by The Shadow's calculation. A phone bell rang again; this time definitely from the inner office, but no one answered it. Instead, there was a sudden clatter, followed by a crash, as a phone tumbled from the desk. Springing to the door, The Shadow turned the knob; the door opened, for it wasn't locked.

Sprawled on the floor beside a large desk, was a man in shirt sleeves. His face was staring straight up, its pointed features strained with gasping lips and bulging eyes. The man was recognizable as Lloyd Jaggert, for The Shadow had checked an old picture of the promoter.

Probably Jaggert had wanted too much; he was certainly not satisfied with what he had received, though it was definitely heartfelt.

Heartfelt in the form of a long knife-blade of which a few remaining inches glistened in the light from the office window. The rest of the dirk was buried between Jaggert's ribs.

Stooping beside the dying man, The Shadow saw one of Jaggert's hands clutch the air like the claw of a helpless bird. What produced the bird simile in The Shadow's mind was the thing that Jaggert held in his other fist.

That object was another of the fateful feathered Quetzals, symbol of doom for those who could not pay!

Death was closing in on Jaggert. Perhaps the blackness of The Shadow's blocking form hastened his realization of it. With a spasmodic effort, Jaggert tried to prop himself upon his elbows; at the same time he fairly shrieked the name:

"Gregg! Gregg Tolland!"

It was too much. Jaggert floundered, dead, at the finish of the cry. In the tiny office, the death shriek echoed, as though hurled back from some strange sphere of space. But those echoes weren't enough to cover the other sound that came from the very threshold of the room.

Hearing the thud of halting footsteps finishing a sudden run, The Shadow twisted about and looked up from Jaggert's body. It wasn't a very nice spot for The Shadow, considering who had arrived.

In the doorway stood Inspector Joe Cardona.

CHAPTER XVII

No tighter spot could be imagined, if judged by ordinary standards, which weren't The Shadow's mode of judgment. Cooped in a tiny office beside a dead body; blocked off from the door, with the only outlet an open window that made a perfect background for police target practice, The Shadow seemed badly off.

It looked as though he would have to do the long-expected; that of declaring his identity and trying to explain things. Simple enough, if anyone would believe him, which probably they wouldn't.

The Shadow didn't favor the notion for another and more important reason.

The great secret of The Shadow's success in smashing crime was his amazing personality. Never if he could help it would he spoil a setting that offered a chance at proper crime detection. False or true, the scene should remain as was, that every flaw might later reveal itself.

In a sense, The Shadow on this occasion was one of the existing flaws, a fact which allowed him certain leeway, which he promptly took.

Either The Shadow had the instinct of a chameleon where darkness was concerned, or he had profited heavily from his sojourns in Tibet, where he had studied deeply into the metaphysical philosophy which declares that invisibility is basically a mental state on the part of the person who desires it.

In brief: if you think you are seen, you will be. If you think you aren't, you won't be.

The rule worked under certain conditions, of which darkness was the best. If The Shadow had taken it for granted that Cardona saw him, he would have spoiled everything. Thinking the opposite, The Shadow used just the right procedure.

Literally drifting away from Jaggert's body, The Shadow carried himself around the corner of the big desk without coming from his crouched position. All this he did in slow-motion style that showed no variance in its painful pace. He was dream stuff, The Shadow, and he didn't belong in a wide-awake mind like Cardona's.

Cardona didn't see that receding, swerving blackness. Just as The Shadow's first attention had been focused on Jaggert's face, so was Cardona's. Moreover, the inspector had been riveted by Jaggert's death scream, and the victim's back-tilted face, with its wide mouth and eyes, was something that could really glue an observer.

Forward came Cardona, step by step. Around the desk went The Shadow, now completely blocked from view. His speed was geared to Cardona's, like the rim of a wheel to a hub. As Joe was bending over the body, The Shadow was circling past the front of the desk. When the inspector turned to look around, The Shadow moved ahead of him, but not fast enough to betray a sound that would cause Cardona to speed his glance.

The blackness that filled the doorway was gone when Cardona's eyes reached it. The Shadow had simply filtered out of circulation where the law was concerned.

Men were coming up the stairway to the mezzanine, members of a squad that Cardona had expected to find on arrival. So The Shadow found an upward stairway, went a few floors higher, and summoned an elevator. By the time the car arrived, The Shadow was Cranston, his cloak and hat parked over his arm like ordinary garments.

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Reaching the street floor, the casual Mr. Cranston scrawled something on the register and walked out, while the watchman, more interested in the mezzanine activity, never noticed that a double signature had been made on both sides of the ledger "in" and "out."

They'd have a lot of trouble figuring out that name tomorrow – if ever. About the nearest thing it looked like was "Love and Kisses."

Outside the Marland Building, The Shadow, in Cranston's casual style, unriddled a little problem. He studied what looked like Jaggert's side street window and noted that it was above a deep downgrade. Dropping to the sidewalk would have been conspicuous, and the only way to avoid it would be to scale a sheer wall a distance of two stories to the first ledge above.

Remembering those dying words of Jaggert's: "Gregg Tolland!" Cranston went to find Shrevvy and put the cab back into business.

Everybody was still having fun at Tolland's except old Jeremy. He'd gone upstairs to nap, leaving word to call him when dinner was ready. Playing parlor games with Brett's buzzing apparatus didn't interest the colonel.

Convinced that the device would work within certain limitations, Jeremy preferred to try the great outdoors, particularly in a mining section, to find out just how great the limitations were.

Looking at his watch, Dave Tolland suddenly exclaimed: "Seven o'clock!"

That was definitely a call to dinner, which should have been ready at six thirty. The group went into the dining room, and Dave informed Sarge of his oversight. Dinner was practically ready, but Sarge had been spending time in the living room, watching the treasure finder at work. Before joining the others, Victor Brett shoved the switch, so that the buzz became nothing more than a faint murmur.

Shirley called Jeremy and the colonel arrived grumbling because he should have been summoned a half hour ago and showing annoyance because Gregg hadn't returned. Sarge was serving the soup when the front door opened and the missing nephew put in his appearance. Taking his place at the table, Gregg nodded to his uncle and tapped the envelope in his pocket.

Colonel Jeremy wasn't mollified.

"You took a long time getting home, Gregg."

"No longer than going there," returned Gregg, drolly. "About a half hour each way."

"You must have stayed there a long while then."

"Not so very long. Jaggert was reasonable enough."

The colonel glared at the mention of Jaggert as though the name should be kept secret, but Gregg didn't care. He was looking across the table at Shirley, who returned his gaze. Neither smiled; their glances were enough.

"All right, then, you went to see Jaggert," announced Jeremy. "He probably gave you a history of the Quetzal outrages that formed the chief career of one Lee Clavier, the blackest blackguard below the border. I'll tell you what I know about Clavier, and we can check Jaggert's data later."

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Jeremy's harangue carried right through soup, fish, and salad. He was still mouthing stories of torture, extortion, mayhem and murder through the crust of the very special apple pie that Sarge had cooked because the colonel considered it a delicacy.

It wasn't the best of table talk, but everybody took it, coming from the colonel.

As guests with other matters on their mind, Harry Vincent and Victor Brett managed to put up with it, though twice when the colonel became too gory, Brett excused himself saying he had to make a phone call. The second time, he fussed around the living room with his treasure finder, but finally came back to share the ordeal.

Gregg and Shirley just didn't pay attention to the colonel. They were talking without words, wondering with glances where each had been during all the other's life. As for Dave, his attention was divided between the pair of newly discovered love birds and Sarge, whenever the brawny master of all trades loomed in from the kitchen.

It simply amazed Dave to see his cousin Gregg in a new mood and Sarge was sharing the bewilderment. Gregg's interest in Shirley was confounding enough, but to have him by-pass his Uncle Jeremy was truly terrific.

Maybe old Jeremy understood.

Finishing his pie with an appropriate snort, the colonel leaned back in his chair and said indulgently:

"I hope my talk has been instructive. If you'd listened, Gregg, you would agree. I suppose I've been lecturing for at least an hour."

Pulling a big old-fashioned watch from his pocket, the colonel snapped it open and gave a shrug.

"No, only a half hour. We made up for starting late by eating fast. Well, since it's only half past seven, we may as well resume our test of the treasure finder."

The front door bell was ringing as the group reached the living room. Sarge answered and a stocky, swarthy man pressed past him, flashing a badge in progress. Heading right into the living room, Inspector Cardona demanded:

"Which one of you is Gregg Tolland?"

With a puzzled glance, Gregg stepped forward.

"Where were you at six thirty?"

"Why" – Gregg fumbled at his pocket, then remembered that his watch was being repaired – "why I guess I was on my way home."

"From where?"

"From the Marland Building, where I saw a man named Jaggert."

"What time did you arrive here?"

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Gregg didn't know, but the others did. They said seven o'clock. Cannily, old Jeremy cocked his head and remarked that the clock might have been a bit fast. Brett reminded him that others had checked the time by their watches, so Cardona suggested that they check them again.

Every time—piece said seven thirty, or close to it, and seven—thirty was the right time. Harry's watch was right, so was Shirley's, when she took it from the mantel and looked at it. The living room clock, like the one in the kitchen tallied at half past seven. Dave was suggesting that they look at the clocks up stairs, when Cardona announced:

"That's enough."

Wheeling to Gregg, the inspector added:

"You're coming along."

"Where?" demanded Gregg. "And for what?"

"To headquarters to answer for the murder of Lloyd Jaggert. He was stabbed to death at exactly quarter past six."

Gregg's denials were useless. He'd committed himself to what the time element proved. Six thirty to seven would have brought him from the Marland Building to the Tolland mansion, perhaps with a few extra minutes, but no more.

So fast that Shirley hadn't a chance to gasp goodbye, Gregg was marched from the house in Cardona's custody, still carrying the envelope that might incriminate him further. When Shirley ran to the door to call after Gregg, she was met by an old man hobbling up the steps on his cane.

Sight of Isaac Twambley didn't pacify Shirley Malcolm. With one unhappy wail, she broke into tears and dashed upstairs. Colonel Jeremy watched her to the top, then took his keys from his pocket and unlocked the study door. Inviting Twambley into the room, the colonel picked up a gadget that looked like a microphone and tossed it through the doorway to his nephew Dave, wire and all.

"Tell Brett to come again," ordered Jeremy. "His treasure finder can wait."

Closing the door, Jeremy bolted it and gestured Twambley to a chair. Then, one hand raised, the colonel said:

"Listen! The chimes! You must hear them, Twambley."

The colonel was right. His grandfather's clock was striking the hour. The two men listened to its music and sat silent during the eight melodious strokes that followed. Then, turning to Twambley, Jeremy inquired:

"And now?"

CHAPTER XVIII

THE case against Gregg Tolland was complete.

He'd stood a grilling, Gregg had, and a long one, but finally he'd cracked.

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Only he hadn't cracked entirely as Commissioner Weston wanted. Gregg still argued that he wasn't a murderer.

What Gregg admitted was that he'd been to Debley's penthouse, the night of the crazed man's alleged suicide. The bullets that had hopped all around the penthouse hallway came from Gregg's gun. Since the police had found the Lugar in Gregg's pocket, there wasn't much use in denying the point.

But according to Gregg, if Debley had been murdered, somebody else deserved the blame. Gregg hadn't fired his gun at Debley. He'd fought it out with an intruder who answered the specifications of a ghost, having dropped into the penthouse practically from nowhere and left by the same route.

As for Jaggert, Gregg had simply paid him an honest visit, picked up some Quetzal data and had gone his way. Only the police didn't believe it. The time element proved otherwise.

If Debley had gone mad and jumped out of a penthouse window, maybe Jaggert, lacking the proper altitude, had stabbed himself under the urge of similar madness.

That was the theory propounded by Shirley Malcolm who personally felt just about insane enough to consider it rational. In fact, Shirley would have turned the Tolland mansion into a one woman madhouse, if two kindly old gentlemen hadn't calmed her.

Isaac Twambley and Jeremy Tolland.

It was evening, but Shirley couldn't realize it. How many days, how many nights had passed since Gregg was dragged away, she couldn't remember. Shirley must have been in bed all this afternoon, except for those times she'd been racing through the hall, with a trained nurse grabbing her when she wanted to jump out penthouse windows. But now she was wearing her fluffy negligee and sitting very calmly in this calmest of all rooms, Jeremy's study with its chiming grandfather's clock.

As the clock struck nine, old Twambley looked at his watch and said:

"Half past eight."

When Jeremy nodded, Shirley was sure that both were crazy, which made her feel much better. As further evidence that they belonged in the mad-time league, both these venerable gentlemen were admiring a Quetzal image that had been redeemed from the study waste-basket and given a place of honor atop the grandfather's clock.

Now they were beginning double-talk that somehow made sense to Shirley.

"Somebody handed me that Quetzal," observed Jeremy. "But why?"

"As a threat," returned Twambley. "It means death."

"But I'm alive, Twambley."

"Then your friend – or enemy – wants something else."

"Cash, very probably," decided Jeremy. "But why hadn't he come to demand it?"

"He probably will – and soon."

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There was a lull, during which Jeremy gave a few chuckles. Then:

"I really dreamed about Debley," declared Jeremy, seriously. "I do believe in such things, Twambley."

Old Twambley nodded as though he fully agreed.

"And I dreamed about Shirley," added Jeremy. "I saw a girl in blue, being run down by a car."

Twambley turned to admire Shirley's blue fluffs.

"Blue is most becoming," cackled Twambley. "Particularly with brown eyes, though the combination is unusual."

Those brown eyes broke out suddenly with tears.

"I shouldn't have done it," wept Shirley, "but Vic Brett said it was the only way to meet you, Colonel Tolland. I thought your dreams were silly, but you believed in them and that one dream in particular came in very handy."

"Because you were handy, my dear," agreed Jeremy with a nod. "Well, Twambley, you cracked one phase of it." The colonel added a chuckle. "And Cranston said you were nothing but an old bore."

Shirley mopped her eyes and looked up.

"You mean Brett tricked me into it, Colonel? So he could sell you that treasure finder?"

"So Gregg could be charged with murder," put in Twambley, his cackle absent. "Don't worry, he'll be out when we supply the evidence that ruined a scheme to break his alibi."

"Sarge will help," agreed Jeremy. "Faithful Sarge! He didn't realize what my dreams could do, if he mentioned them at the wrong time. I finally tested him."

"By faking that dream about Jaggert," agreed Twambley. "The trouble was, you tried to test Gregg, too."

"A bad mistake," acknowledged Jeremy. "But tell me, where does Wyler fit into this?"

In characteristic fashion, Isaac Twambley folded his arms across his cane.

"Wyler was covered when Jaggert was murdered," declared Twambley, "and that's the odd part about it. Only it isn't entirely odd. I think you will hear from Wyler tonight."

"You mean he has left the Hotel Revelon?"

"He has. He may even be on his way here. Therefore I suggest that you have Shirley call Brett and tell him that you are ready to buy his machine outright."

"But that will only bring Brett here."

"Not if the word comes from Shirley, if she can maintain her worried mood. I think she can."

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Shirley knew she could. Why this was needed, she didn't understand, but having cleared the one fact which impaired her honesty, she wanted to prove that she hadn't realized how serious it was. If this could lead to clearing Gregg, Shirley would be willing to tell a thousand lies to establish the one truth that counted.

Unbolting the door, Jeremy ushered Shirley to the telephone. She made the call and did it beautifully. The colonel bowed and gestured to the stairs.

"Good work," he said. "Now back to bed."

Shirley was glad for the polite dismissal. Somehow she felt she could sleep without worrying about Gregg. A guilty conscience was bad enough, but when it had to be uprooted to learn what made it tick, it was like an ailment that hadn't been properly diagnosed.

As soon as Shirley had reached the stair-top, Jeremy turned to Twambley and asked:

"Dave?"

"Don't worry," returned Twambley. "He'll show up."

"And Sarge?"

"Let him find out for himself. He'll be all the more valuable when he does."

Colonel Jeremy shook his head.

"You know everything," he declared. "Everything, Twambley, except one thing: how I was handed that Quetzal image. There's only one way it could have happened."

Twambley gave a slow nod. He knew.

"You really know?" exclaimed Jeremy. "But how did you find out?"

"Perhaps The Shadow told me," chortled Twambley, "and maybe I read a book about Houdini."

Old Jeremy stared, agape.

"Now that we both know everything, colonel." Twambley's chuckle was very dry. "Suppose you become careless about the study door, while I make a few plans of my own."

Bowing his consent, Jeremy turned toward the kitchen, calling for Sarge. He was informing the chauffeur that he was going upstairs to take a nap, but wished to be awakened if any visitors arrived. Meanwhile, while Jeremy's back was turned, Twambley was getting some wearing apparel from the vestibule.

The slight laugh that came from Twambley's lips wasn't The Shadow's. It was more like Cranston's. This was the sort of thing that Cranston would have liked, but old Isaac Twambley could manage it quite as well.

Black garments over his arm, Isaac Twambley wobbled toward the study door. Hand on the knob, he listened and gave a happy smile when he heard a sound he recognized. Waiting a full minute, Twambley finally opened the door, tottered to a corner chair and sat down.

The burden from the old man's arm dropped unnoticed to the floor as Twambley closed his eyes and nodded his head until it dropped into a doze.

CHAPTER XIX

An odd room, Jeremy's study. It had nooks between bookcases and other antiques to say nothing of the spaces beside the grandfather's clock. It would have been a perfect lurking spot for The Shadow; but Isaac Twambley slept right out where anyone could see him.

Sounds couldn't reach the study because of the heavy door to the hallway, where the gray carpet clogged the space beneath so closely that there had been trouble running Brett's wiring under the door.

Of course the space below the double doors to the rear parlor was different. It was wide enough to admit a mouse.

Or a rat – on occasion.

Sarge was admitting arrivals to the mansion. Victor Brett was bringing his treasure finder, still packed, and Dave Tolland was helping him. Brett had called Dave at the latter's favorite beer hall after hearing from Shirley.

It was Dave who suggested that they leave the front door unlocked, since one cab hadn't been enough to bring all of Brett's gadgets and more were expected. The treasure finder was being set up in the dining room again and old Jeremy, his nap broken at his own order, was just sleepy enough to insist that Dave take full control.

"I was dreaming," declared Jeremy, moodily. "Dreaming about Gregg when Sarge disturbed me. A bad dream" – he gave his head a disdainful shake – "but I hope to pick it up again. And by the way, Dave –"

Jeremy paused while Dave's lips began to question: "Yes?"

"It can wait until tomorrow," decided Jeremy, in a tired tone. "I have disinherited Gregg, that's all. The new will is drawn up, and I left it on the secretary in the study. There are a few clauses we should discuss, but they can wait."

The colonel was fumbling in his pocket for the keys, as though intending to lock the study door.

"Wait, Uncle Jeremy," suggested Dave. "We may want to run a wire into the study again, It's unlocked, isn't it?"

Another nod from Jeremy.

"Wake me later, Dave," suggested the colonel, starting slowly for the stairs. "Ask me about my dream. It's the sort that may complete itself. Goodnight."

Dave had another question.

"How is Shirley, uncle?"

"Much better," affirmed Jeremy. "She seems reconciled to the fact that Gregg is a proven criminal. That was why I trusted her judgment about the treasure finder."

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As soon as Jeremy had gone upstairs, Dave and Brett put Sarge to work on assembling the machine. In the midst of such paraphernalia with other parts clattering as they were passed his way, Sarge couldn't possibly have heard the front door open when it did.

The man who entered was blocky and blunt-faced. He paused just past the vestibule and received a double signal from the living room. As he waited, he saw fingers spell out letters behind Sarge's back. With an understanding nod, the blunt-faced man stole to the study door, opened it, and stepped inside.

As he closed the door, this new visitor saw Twambley. Momentarily he mistook the old gentleman for the colonel, and there was a short snarl from the thick lips that did anything but adorn the blunt face. Hand to his pocket, the blocky man let a gun slide back; then moved in the direction of the big desk.

Despite his heavy build, this unknown intruder was smooth of action. Hawkeye would have recognized him instantly as someone who had come from a building where Hawkeye expected Wyler to appear.

Maybe the blocky man's wide ugly smile included thoughts of Wyler. If so, they were premature.

From between the bookcase and the big desk stepped a lean man, whose thin face glared above his crouched shoulders. Faced by this living scarecrow, the blocky man halted and snarled:

"Carl Wyler!"

"Why not?" queried Wyler. "You expected me here, didn't you?"

"Not in Tolland's house!"

"Again" – Wyler grinned behind the revolver that poked from his thin fist – "again, why not?"

The blocky man was retreating toward the door, with Wyler making gun prods at a distance.

"Tolland is my game," Wyler sneered. "Find some other victim for yourself. If you don't, I may let the world know that Lee Clavier is still alive!"

This time the blocky man didn't sneer. His face became momentarily pale, then reddened angrily.

"It won't help you, Wyler!" he argued. "Anyway, you're right. You can have Tolland, if you let me go my way."

This blocky man who admitted himself to be Lee Clavier was fumbling for the door knob. With a toothy smile, Carl Wyler relaxed his gun hand and regretted it.

Instead of clutching the door knob, Clavier whipped an automatic from his coat pocket and brought it up as fast as Wyler's revolver. Then, in a tone that was a mockery of Wyler's, so closely did it resemble the latter's purr, Clavier suggested:

"Now let's talk sense."

Gun point to gun point, the pair faced each other, unwilling to allow an inch of leeway. The stalemate was broken by a crackly voice that said:

"Excellent. Let's talk sense."

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Two faces turned to see Isaac Twambley awakened from his imitation drowse, his keen eyes gazing up from the cane head on which he rested hands and chin.

"You first, Wyler," suggested Twambley. "I mean the real Wyler, of course."

"Why not?" sneered Wyler, overlooking the point of Twambley's remark. "Why shouldn't I cash in on a few millions that I might have gotten? I figured old Tolland would get shaky if I shipped him a Quetzal, so I brought one along.

"Doing it neatly was the problem. I wanted him to think that Clavier was still alive. The first night I sneaked around here, I was lucky to find the best way into this room. A way Jeremy Tolland had reserved for himself as an exit – in case he needed it."

Twambley's chin lifted so that his head could nod.

"So you came again," he chuckled, "and left the Quetzal image. Very nice indeed. Jeremy would either regard it as a mystery or know that somebody had guessed that this was a two-way room. Of course he would credit Clavier – at first."

"And if he didn't," retorted Wyler, "I was going to bring him to terms tonight. After his nephew got into trouble with the Quetzal business, Jeremy was ripe. I think I could have convinced him that I might help hold off Clavier. After all, Clavier couldn't afford to be alive."

Before Clavier could dispute that point, Twambley supplied the proper argument.

"Of course Clavier couldn't," declared Twambley. "No more than you could operate openly, Wyler, with a prison record hanging over you. You both had the same problem in reverse."

Wyler's ugly eyes went puzzled, but Clavier's hard stare showed that he understood. Nevertheless, Twambley addressed Clavier, if only for Wyler's benefit.

"You had to be somebody else," Twambley told Clavier, "and who could be better than Wyler? So you found Victor Brett and told him how you could make his machine pay – and pay. Of course you told him you were Carl Wyler –"

A sharp snarl interrupted. It came from the real Carl Wyler who for the first time was understanding what Twambley had meant when he used the term 'real' a short while before. Again, Wyler was glaring at Clavier and getting the same medicine in return.

Even Twambley's wisdom hadn't yet given away the fact that he was The Shadow. As Cranston he might have been suspected, but the senile gentleman in the chair was too crotchety a type to be identified with the famous fighter in black.

"Certainly I passed as you, Wyler," declared Clavier, keeping his tone smooth to prove it. "How else could I have operated?"

"Particularly when one man knew you were alive." This was from Twambley, his tone wavery, but his eyes sharp. "Specifically, Rufus Debley."

"I should have known!" broke in Wyler. "So you did murder Debley! One of your old raids, Clavier, all over again. Dropping down mountain cliffs –"

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"Or skyscrapers," inserted Clavier, "Simple enough when you know how."

"A looped rope was all you needed," agreed Twambley with a nod. "A pendulum swing from the ends and there you were. Then you hauled one end and brought in the other. The rope was ready once again."

The glare from Clavier's eyes was fixed on Twambley and served in place of the gun muzzle that he still felt must be trained on Wyler. To Twambley, Clavier snarled:

"You know too much."

"Like Debley," nodded Twambley. "But didn't you run into a little trouble there, Clavier?"

"You mean with The Shadow?" returned Clavier. "None at all. I was sliding the hallway window shut and looping my rope over a gargoyle while The Shadow was battling it out with Tolland's nephew. I mean the stupid nephew, Gregg."

"Loyalty and stupidity are much alike," agreed The Shadow, in Twambley's cracked tone. "Gregg should have told his uncle all that happened. Unfortunately he said he never went to Debley's."

"Which was all the better," said Clavier, suavely. "I don't know why I'm telling you all this, whoever you are, except that you won't be alive long enough to repeat it. Anyway, it gave me a great idea."

"Of course," came Twambley's agreement. "Instead of merely swindling Colonel Jeremy with the assistance of his nephew Dave, you decided to throw the whole fortune into Dave's lap and take your slice of it."

"By framing Gregg," agreed Clavier, warming to his theme. "He showed the way at Debley's. All we needed was another victim. When the colonel was fool enough to bring in Jaggert, just because he wanted to make sure that Gregg wasn't yellow –"

"You murdered Jaggert," picked up The Shadow, still in Twambley's style, "and did a rope climb from the office window."

Wyler was totally out of the discussion. His lean face was wagging back and forth between Clavier and the disguised Shadow, as he learned to his amazement how deep one man's schemes could go, only to have another penetrate them.

"A nice analysis," complimented Clavier. "Only it wouldn't stand in court, Mr. –"

"Twambley is the name. Isaac Twambley."

"It wouldn't stand in court, Twambley," continued Clavier, "because Gregg has no alibi."

The chuckle that came from Twambley's ancient lips carried all the significance of The Shadow's laugh, though in no wise did one resemble the other. Clavier must have realized that a knock-out blow was coming, for he showed his first trace of worry.

The blow came.

"You only think Gregg Tolland lacks an alibi," announced The Shadow, holding carefully to a Twambley chortle. "Look at the grandfather's clock, Clavier. It is still a half an hour fast!"

Then, to drive home the point of that statement, The Shadow added:

"Gregg Tolland had no time for murder!"

CHAPTER XX

More mystified than ever, Carl Wyler wondered at the sweeping changes that came over Lee Clavier. At first the notorious murderer trembled, then stiffening, he almost gave way to complete rage. Finally he steadied, and with one hand behind him, threw the big bolt of the door, at the same time shifting his gun from Wyler to Twambley.

Coldly, Clavier announced:

"You have signed your death warrant, Twambley."

"Not necessarily." The reply was high-pitched but calm. "Colonel Tolland hasn't signed his new will yet."

Though he was speaking to Clavier, The Shadow's eyes were fixed on Wyler, reminding him that he too had a cause, even though it was a wrong one. Not that The Shadow needed Wyler's cooperation; he merely wanted to warn him that Clavier couldn't afford to let him live.

Unwillingly, Wyler was finding himself reduced to the status of Debley who stood as an example of what happened to those who knew of Clavier's survival.

Then, as suddenly as he had changed it, The Shadow switched the subject back to the clock.

"A useful machine, Brett's treasure finder," came Twambley's voice. "All that Brett and Dave had to do between them was set all clocks and watches half an hour ahead. Thus it was seven o'clock in this house when Gregg arrived home, proving conclusively that he had been in Jaggert's office as late as six fifteen."

Pausing, The Shadow waited until Clavier snarled:

"Go on."

"Dinner actually began at six thirty," continued The Shadow, Twambley style. "At that time – seven by the clocks and watches – Brett set his machine at full speed. Its electro-magnetic force was supposed to stop all the time-pieces for half an hour. It did, with one exception."

Keeping up the part of Twambley, The Shadow gave a clawlike gesture toward Jeremy's favorite clock.

"While time was catching up to the others," he chuckled, "this clock kept right ahead. There's no magnetic metal in it, Clavier. These old grandfather's clocks have wooden cogs, sprockets and wheels throughout, forming the parts that Brett's machine should have stopped."

"Of course there are weights in the clock – but they are made of lead. The pendulum is metal, only you can see that it is brass. They aren't magnetic, but even if they were, they weren't the sort of smaller parts that would respond to Brett's treatment."

His tone still cold, Clavier demanded:

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"Who knows about this clock?"

"Two persons," was Twambley's reply. "Colonel Jeremy and myself. Of course Wyler knows now. And your two helpers, Dave and Brett, know about it. Maybe they will tell when they learn that you aren't Wyler."

"They'll never know." Forgetting Wyler, Clavier was moving toward The Shadow, gun first. "I'll show you why, with this!"

Clavier meant the gun. His finger was tightening on its trigger and it gave him ugly joy to see that Twambley's hands were simultaneously loosening on the cane. A brute by nature, Clavier couldn't murder a victim without providing preliminary mental torture as he had demonstrated both with Debley and Jaggert.

An old fool like Twambley was the sort that Clavier preferred. They'd lived long enough to regret more, and it was viciously humorous to watch their frantic efforts to stave off sure death. Old Twambley was wobbling so badly that his chin was joggling his cane, making it slip along the floor.

It really slipped.

Like the whip of a snake, that cane slithered forward between Clavier's ankles and lashed with all the power that a mighty hand could give it. Those sinews that had shown under the blue light in the sanctum proved their speed along with their force. Like a huge whirligig, the cane spun Clavier right off his feet, as his gun spurted a message that wasn't helpful to Jeremy's antiques, but certainly did no damage to The Shadow.

That terrific thrust told everything, to Wyler as well as Clavier. The part of Twambley was disproven as thoroughly as the myth of Clavier's death. Since there was no further need for pretence, The Shadow added to the surprise he had created by delivering a laugh that befitted his more active self.

Above the chance chimes of the tell-tale clock came a peal of strident mockery that spelled disaster for all men of crime and two in particular. It was meant for Lee Clavier, murderer, but Carl Wyler, swindler, took it as a personal issue, too. That didn't matter to The Shadow. It only varied the climax.

With Clavier trying to aim from a floundering pose, Wyler charged The Shadow only to receive the big end of Twambley's cane right in his equally bulgy teeth. Wyler managed two upward shots that took their toll in ceiling plaster; then lunged from that position, hoping to clout The Shadow with a downswing of the revolver.

Only The Shadow wasn't right where Wyler wanted. He was spinning in a style that was utterly fantastic for a man of Twambley's appearance. His cane, twirling like a baton, came up from a side-angle to jar Wyler's gun hand and at the same time, The Shadow gripped Wyler's shoulder to fling him bodily at Clavier.

The shots from Clavier's gun were faster than The Shadow anticipated, but still too late to effect their desired purpose. The man they clipped was Wyler. As the swindler toppled, Twambley's cane came flipping over his descending shoulder and met Clavier's head on the rise.

Sprawling senseless, Clavier lost his gun as Wyler's dropped beside him. Recoiling, Wyler rolled over and gasped wheezily as he looked for Twambley. Only there wasn't any Twambley any longer. The rejuvenated fighter had reached for his other garb, black cloak and slouch hat, and was putting on his more appropriate attire.

Hands clamped to his chest, Wyler watched The Shadow pick up the guns and unload them; then toss them back beside the figures on the floor. There was a heavy pounding at the door from the hallway, accompanied

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by a voice that was loud enough to be heard, though muffled.

The voice belonged to Inspector Joe Cardona, called here for a conference by Jeremy Tolland at the advice of Isaac Twambley.

Carrying Twambley's cane, The Shadow stopped at the hot-air register in the side wall of the study and calmly knocked its chain loose. Wyler's dying eyes glowed with momentary hope, then changed to a vindictive leer toward Clavier, who was just beginning to stir.

Moving to the double doors at the rear of the study, The Shadow did a singular thing. Dropping flat, he rolled along the floor. Instead of being stopped by the doors, his figure dipped and went beneath them.

The rug, all of a single piece, simply sagged enough to allow the cloaked form to squirm through. The Shadow was right when he said that Jeremy had borrowed this trick from the annals of Houdini. It was the famous mystifier's method of going through a brick wall constructed on a stage.

There was a broad trap door underneath the rug. Houdini's stage had a trap door too, with a huge rug covering it. What good would be a trap door covered by a rug? None, apparently, at least not for a total vanish, but it served for going through a wall.

In this case, the brick wall was represented by a pair of solid doors. Having gone under them, The Shadow came up the other side, in the rear parlor. There, he hauled the chain in another register and the trap door came up in place, smoothing the stretched rug above it.

The Shadow's knowledge of illusionary methods had enabled him to detect the secret of Jeremy's emergency exit that was planned to leave enemies baffled. Wyler had struck upon it by accident and struck upon it was the term.

On his first trip into the cellar of this mansion Wyler had crashed into what looked like the top half of a coal bin except that it was hinged. Actually, he had run into Jeremy's trap door, lowered for emergency use. Recuperating in the coal bin, Wyler had seen the carpet sag when Jeremy had made a hurried trip to the safety of the rear parlor.

Piecing the rest of the secret, Wyler had used it for himself in order to place the Quetzal image in Jeremy's desk. That had happened on another night, the time of the melee beginning in the kitchen and ending in the hall. Wyler had been in that mix-up but had been the first to break free after being spotted by Gregg. Into the parlor, Wyler had let down the trap and squirmed through to the study. Later, he had reversed the route at leisure.

Wyler was remembering it now and gloating over his knowledge. Clavier had recovered but not in time to witness The Shadow's remarkable departure. The door from the hallway was bashing under heavy strokes; frantically, Clavier gripped Wyler's throat and howled that he wanted to know the other way out.

Wyler didn't tell.

Why should he? Wyler was gaining a quicker death from Clavier's clutch, at a time when vengeance was a bonus. Shaken like the rat that he was, Wyler kept his broken teeth clamped shut and coughed his last breath through them. He was sagging through sheer, dead weight when Clavier suddenly let him fall and snatched a pair of guns from the floor.

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Aiming at the crashing door, Lee Clavier, the master hand in this game of criss-crossed crime, was beaten to the shot by Inspector Joe Cardona. Guns unloaded, thanks to The Shadow's foresight, Clavier hadn't a chance to win. Cardona's bullets fairly riddled him.

Old Jeremy Tolland was standing in the hall and now, with a wave toward the clock, he swung about to tell the story that it stood for. At the first words regarding that reclaimed half hour, two men made a break toward the kitchen. Dave Tolland, the faithless nephew; Victor Brett, accomplice in murder – both were partners in a guilt they knew they could no longer deny.

They never reached the kitchen. Two guns stopped them, big automatics gripped in the gloved hands of a cloaked challenger who stepped from the parlor. The Shadow didn't have to open fire on this pair; they fell back pleading for mercy. Then Sarge overtook them and caught each man with a huge hand that went half-around each culprit's neck.

Loyal to Colonel Jeremy was Sarge, but he had been duped by Dave in the latter's secret campaign against his cousin Gregg. Sarge had passed along Jeremy's dreams and helped to fulfill the one regarding Shirley, but he had done it only because he thought that Gregg was unfairly holding the Colonel's favor.

Blackness vanished from the rear hall, dwindling into the kitchen. Silently, The Shadow took the cellar route from the mansion leaving the case to the capable hands of Joe Cardona. With The Shadow vanished Isaac Twambley, his cane, cracked in the recent conflict, landing in the coal bin as a souvenir, like the trap door above.

Out front, The Shadow glided off through darkness, but not in the direction of Shrevvy's cab. It had been on hand, that cab, but it was no longer waiting. Instead, it was speeding off with a single passenger, a girl dressed in blue, who had commandeered it for a trip to police headquarters.

Shirley Malcolm wanted to be the first to tell Gregg Tolland of his vindication and she was on her way to complete that happy ending.

From somewhere, out of the night's own heart it seemed, came the parting laugh of The Shadow, wishing the girl good speed!

THE END