

TEMPLE OF CRIME

Maxwell Grant

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CHAPTER I. THE TEMPLE OF AMMON

STRANGE, solemn was the procession that moved beneath the trees. Figures clad in white, ghostly amid the darkness, the marchers were revealed as humans only when the glare of flaming torches threw wavering light upon their stern, fixed faces.

Above, the stirring leaves of the poplar grove rustled a weird greeting. Below, fantastic shapes withdrew among the tree trunks like slinking ghouls, affrighted by the torches. Perhaps they were nothing more than shadows of the trees themselves, rendered grotesque and given motion by the shifting light of the passing torches. But they had the look of real figures.

Robed members of the procession were darting sidelong glances, their own fears roused by the imaginary things amid the grove. It was as though a terror of their own creation had echoed back to them. A distinct shudder passed through the marching throng, carried by those most sensitive to imaginary impressions.

Margo Lane felt the shiver, but did not share it. Nor did she feel that her imagination had gained the upper hand. She believed that there was reality among the creatures of the grove; that one, at least, though shadowy, possessed actual substance.

She was thinking of The Shadow.

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If it hadn't been for The Shadow, Margo wouldn't have been in tonight's procession. As Lamont Cranston, New York clubman, The Shadow did not make a practice of joining bizarre organizations like the Cult of Ammon. He preferred to have other persons associate themselves with such groups, and tell him the details later.

In this case, he had delegated Margo Lane as proxy. However, Margo was confident upon one point: namely, that since Cranston wasn't a participant in this weird parade, he would be somewhere in the offing, as The Shadow.

Such thoughts curbed Margo's fear. Each time she spied a fantastic figure vanishing amid the poplars, she regarded it as friendly, not hostile. Still, she didn't like to people the grove with many shadows when she was thinking in terms of only one: The Shadow. So Margo set her eyes straight ahead and kept steady pace with the torch bearers who accompanied the procession.

Poplar leaves were whispering louder; with their welcome they seemed to lisp that there would be no turning back. New thoughts gripped Margo, and they didn't comfort her. She was worried, even though sure that The Shadow was near.

The Cult of Ammon!

It had all seemed quite silly, when Margo first joined it. Along with two dozen others, she had come to the great mansion owned by Amru Monak, the very wealthy and extremely modern Egyptian who claimed to be a direct descendant of the ancient pharaohs.

True, Monak liked to talk of the past and dwell upon the marvels of ancient Egypt, the land of his ancestors; but not until lately had he let such subjects take full control of him. It had all come about when Monak bought the Temple of Ammon, at a price of half a million dollars, and had set it up in this poplar grove, which was located on his large, high-walled estate.

A famous edifice, the Ammon temple. Unearthed from the Egyptian sand dunes, it had first been bought by Uriah Keldon, a business magnate whose profits from railways, steamships, mines, and oil, had gone into the purchase of fabulous art treasures, valued at many millions. Upon Keldon's death, the treasures had been placed on the auction block, the Ammon temple among them.

Long ago, the temple had been taken apart, block by block, and brought to America, there to languish in a warehouse, until Keldon would decide to erect it again, something that he had never done.

Having bought the temple from the Keldon estate, Amru Monak had promptly ordered it to be assembled, and while the artisans were at work, Monak had struck upon the idea of forming an Ammon Cult to revive the ancient rituals once held within the temple.

Quite intriguing, but very absurd, and it had reached its height tonight. Like the other members of the cult, Margo had retired early, to be wakened a half-hour before dawn. Then, for the first time, she had attired herself in the ancient Egyptian garb of sandals, skirt, and sleeveless tunic, all of white. She had joined the others, to find the women similarly arrayed, while the men were clad in long white robes.

THEY had begun their march, these faithful, with Amru Monak at their head, and now, within the grove of whispering poplars, the parade had lost all semblance of a farce. It had become something very solemn, gripping the participants with awe. Slow, steady steps along the tree-shrouded path were carrying Margo and her companions centuries into the past.

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No longer were they treading the ground of a modern estate not many miles from New York City. They were tramping the soil of a sacred grove near the ancient city of Elephantine, in Egypt, Land of the Nile. All that was needed to complete the illusion was sight of some landmark belonging to antiquity. It came as they reached a clearing in the grove.

There, the procession halted, the eyes of all the marchers riveted upon the building that awaited them. White as alabaster, the Temple of Ammon reared from the darkness, catching the glow of the dying moonlight that struggled through clouds overhead.

The temple was built in peristyle form, an oblong structure surrounded by pillars, each column a stalwart sentinel that seemed ready to crash itself upon any marauder who disturbed these sacred preserves. Like the rest, Margo felt herself drawn back to the shelter of the trees, unwilling to advance another step until someone gave the proper word.

That someone was ready.

Tall, imposing, firm of stride, Amru Monak advanced toward the temple, then turned to face his followers. Glaring torches threw their glow upon his olive face, gave it a ruddy touch that, for the moment, seemed satanic. But there was nothing of the demon in Monak's countenance, as the observers viewed it more closely.

Monak was handsome, his visage smooth and sculptured, as perfect, in its human way, as the pillared temple which made a background for his majestic pose. His eyes, black as coals, caught the glow of the torches and reflected a glitter that seemed fixed upon each member of the cult.

Those eyes were piercing the veil of the past, and when Monak raised one hand, with pointing finger, even the poplars seemed to cease their whispers, that they might listen.

Monak spoke. His words had the clear chime of a bell.

"Above us is the moon of Isis," declaimed Monak, "the great goddess who rules the realm of night. Soon her sway will end, and from the east" – he lowered his hand to an angle, so that the finger pointed above the trees – "will rise the sun, symbol of Ammon–Ra, to whom this temple is dedicated.

"Let us enter singing praise to Ammon. Let us be present at the moment when the rule of Isis ends and that of Ammon begins. Then, with the dawn itself, we shall hear the voice of Ammon proclaim the coming of the day!"

Imposingly, Monak turned toward the temple. His lips began a chant that the others took up. Margo knew the words, for she had learned them like the rest.

The chant was in the Egyptian tongue, a greeting to Ammon, sung almost in a monotone. For the first time, the chanters were hearing themselves in unison, and the effect was powerful.

Each voice imbued the others with its strength. Of one accord, the cult members moved forward behind Monak. Ahead, the great doors of the temple stood closed, but the marchers advanced, undeterred. Margo felt the curious sensation that no physical barrier could block this inspired procession; that the doors themselves would melt under the power of the chant.

What did happen was almost as amazing.

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AS Monak and his followers reached the doors, they opened, swinging inward on unseen hinges to let the procession through. The marchers crossed the marble floor of an atrium, or outer room, and as Monak ended the chant with a sweep of his arms, Margo looked back, to see the great doors closing as smoothly as they had opened.

She noticed, too, that there were gaps in the front wall, at the top, just below the roof. They were narrow apertures, no more than a foot square, through which the moonlight trickled and formed patches on the floor of the atrium. Those were the spaces through which the light of dawn would come.

Then, Margo was looking straight ahead again. They were through the atrium and into an inner room, called the cella. This was the heart of the temple, and the procession halted, its members spreading to form a double-ranked semicircle, which Monak joined.

Straight ahead was a stone pedestal, its front covered with curious hieroglyphs, and upon the pedestal sat the throned statue of Ammon, carved from stone, of slightly more than human size. But the carved head of Ammon was something other than human. It was the head of a ram, adorned with horns.

The torch bearers set their flaming brands in stone brackets on the tiled wall. The light did not reach the statue directly, for it sat in a domed niche called the apsis. Rather, the moonlight, carrying through from those distant apertures in the outer room, revealed the figure of Ammon to the full.

The ram's eyes were staring straight into the moonlight, as though watching for the dawn to replace the silvery glow. One of the statue's hands was resting on an arm of the stone throne; the other, half raised, clutched a long staff made of bronze. The staff was topped with a small ram's head, and the base was poised a foot above the pedestal which held the throned statue.

Glancing around the cella, Margo saw that the walls bore sculptured figures of other Egyptian deities, all about life-size. They were in bas-relief, and formed a grotesque assortment, for they had the heads of birds and animals, and one even resembled a crocodile. She noticed, too, that each corner contained a great stone brazier, where fires could be kindled.

These, however, were not in use. Monak had foregone all other rites upon this first visit to the temple. He and the cult were concentrated upon one thing only. They had come to hear the voice of Ammon greet the dawn.

The time was very close. Already, the feeble moonlight was fading. Only the torches illuminated the scene. Looking at the faces nearest her, Margo saw that they were tense, for they belonged to women members of the cult. She saw one man's face among them, and recognized its owner.

He was Hugh Calbot, a man past middle age. Formerly secretary to old Uriah Keldon, Calbot had arranged the final sale of the temple to Amru Monak, and for some reason had become interested enough in the Ammon Cult to join it.

But Calbot was still a skeptic. His thin, drying face wore a smirk which indicated plainly that he considered the present ceremony to be clap-trap. Still, Calbot was making a pretense of belief. When Monak spoke, calling upon his followers to draw closer to the statue, Calbot edged forward near the leader.

Other robed men were forming the front rank, for the women were more timid. Perhaps the thing that awed them was the trickle of dawn that began to illuminate the ram's head of Ammon, actually changing the expression of its stony eyes from a brooding look to one of triumph. The light was feeble, for the day was cloudy, but Amru Monak was pleased by the glow.

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"We are here, great Ammon!" he exclaimed. "We await your word, for the hour is at hand! Let us hear the voice of Ammon –"

Monak was bowing forward, and other robed men copied his action. A stir followed in the rear rank, as more heads began to bow, only to stop in frozen fashion. Margo could understand the horror that gripped the rest, for she was riveted, too.

IT was a voice that halted them.

A voice that spoke with anguished shriek, as though the great stone statue of Ammon had poured out all the stored fervor of the centuries that had passed while the temple stood idle.

Wild, high, prolonged, the screech reverberated through the stone room, as though the fanciful creatures carved on the walls were echoing it with their distorted tongues.

Bowing men raised their heads and turned, terror written on their faces. Even Monak's eyes looked glassy when Margo saw them. It was then that Margo realized that the statue had not spoken.

Turning with the others, Margo saw the woman next to her, a middle-aged woman whose hair bore traces of gray. It was she who had screamed, not waiting for the voice of Ammon.

The woman was pointing toward the pedestal that bore the statue. Slowly, all eyes followed the wavering finger. There was a sudden shift of robed figures, as every man, Monak included, recoiled from the thing toward which the woman pointed.

There lay a robed member of the cult who had bowed much farther than the others in the front rank, and with good reason.

He was sprawled, face downward, with extended arms, and from his back projected the object that had felled him – a knife, buried to the hilt. The light from a flickery torch gave a view of his profile, for his head had rolled to one side.

His was the face that had shown contempt for the rites of Ammon, but now its expression displayed the horror that came with sudden death. The man on the floor was Hugh Calbot, whose membership in the Ammon Cult had puzzled Margo Lane!

CHAPTER II. MURDER EXPLAINED

SILENT, the great statue of Ammon stared at the dim streaks of dawn. Stony lips remained frozen, as fixed as those of Calbot, the dead man on the floor. Persons who looked upward shrank, at first, when they viewed the ram's face of the idol.

Perhaps the fact that Ammon had not spoken was more terrible than if the statue had voiced a greeting to the dawn. Silence could mean that Ammon was offended by some mocker among the cult that owned him. It might be that this strange god of Egypt possessed a power from the past, and with it was able to deliver death when he so chose.

One man was prepared to broach that claim: Amru Monak. Stepping toward the statue, he turned and swept both arms high. He was more than a defender of Ammon; he was acting as human proxy for the ram god. While Ammon still stared stonily toward the feeble dawn, Monak hurled his wrath upon the members of the cult.

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"We have offended Ammon!" Monak stormed. "He has shown his anger by taking a human sacrifice from among us! Instead of speaking, he has acted –"

Monak's voice was drowned by a dozen others. This business of attributing all to Ammon did not appeal to them. True, they had been awed during their approach to the temple; they had felt that sensation of being in a far-away land in a remote century. But murder in their midst had jarred them from the illusion.

Had Calbot merely flattened from some unknown cause, they could have believed that Ammon was responsible. But the knife in the dead man's back was something that a human hand could have driven there. They wanted to find the killer, and Monak was hindering them with this foolish talk of the ancient Ammon's wrath.

They were coming closer to Monak as they argued, and he tried to motion them back. When they seized at his arms, he struck out furiously – so furiously, that some began to think he was the killer. They pinned Monak against the pedestal that supported the Ammon statue. There, Margo saw a face thrust up to Monak's.

Margo recognized the challenger. His name was Basil Gorth; he was an archaeologist, and had accompanied the Keldon expedition to Egypt when it unearthed the Ammon temple, a dozen years ago.

Gorth had a square-set, tawny face, the sort that marked a man of determination. Bronzed by desert suns, his complexion had never changed, nor had his nature.

While others choked back Monak's remarks, Gorth gave his own opinions in hard-voiced tone.

"You are a fool, Monak!" accused Gorth. "To think that we would fall for such a paltry fake! You knew that the Ammon statue could never speak, so you went the limit to provide us with some other mystery. A fanatic of your sort would stop at nothing, not even murder, to impress the members of your cult!"

Gorth was putting it too strongly. Some of the others turned to argue with him. Murder had been done; they could agree that far with Gorth. But to heap the charges upon Monak without studying the case, was rushing matters too heavily. Furthermore, Monak was in no position to answer.

Clutched by a dozen hands, he was back against the pedestal, his head tilted at the feet of Ammon. Like the stone statue, Monak was staring at an upward angle, his own face lighted by the clouded rays of dawn. He couldn't speak, for an arm was tightened around his neck, but there was something in his stare that made men wonder.

One man turned, to stare in the same direction. From where she stood, Margo studied the man's canny face. He was elderly, but active; his eyes, sharp as gimlets, formed a distinct contrast to the withered face beneath his thin, gray hair. He was Jan Ravion, the most distinguished member of the Ammon Cult.

Ravion was a professor who spoke a dozen languages, ancient as well as modern. He had been many places and had seen many things, and his urge to go farther and see more had brought him into this strange group.

At present, Ravion was viewing something that intrigued him. He was looking out from the cella, through the atrium, to the high, thin apertures through which the dawn entered the temple.

Ravion began to gesture; watching him, men silenced. Stepping to Calbot's body, Ravion tilted it slightly upward and motioned for others to help him. He clutched the knife handle and tried to draw the blade from Calbot's back.

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Failing, he shook his head; then shrugged, deciding that it was not necessary. Calbot's body was coming upright, lifted by four pairs of hands. That was all that Ravion wanted.

As the dead form reached a position where it was nearly erect, Ravion said:

"Hold him there."

Then, as the others obeyed, the withered professor drew his hand along the line of the knife and ended with a bony finger pointing off through the outer room. Ravion was pointing to the very spot where Monak's eyes had fixed. He was indicating one of the distant openings above the temple doors.

"Look there," said Ravion. "That is where the knife came from. It was hurled by someone outside."

"You are right, Ravion." Released, Monak had found his breath, and was coming forward to extend his hand. "The very thought occurred to me as I stared from the foot of the statue."

Taking a long breath, Monak turned to the others and spoke in apologetic tone.

"You will excuse me," he said. "I have dreamed of this moment; of the time when Ammon would speak. Perhaps I have attributed more to Ammon than was plausible, for I have steeped myself in Egyptian lore. It was only naturally that I should first attribute Calbot's death to Ammon's wrath."

"Now, I realize the truth. Ravion's theory is correct. The knife came through that opening, and the eyes of Ammon saw its flight. Ammon is a passive god, who trusts his followers to guard his own temple. He would do nothing to halt the knife, but when it found its mark in a human victim, the temple was profaned. That is why Ammon did not speak."

Gorth pushed himself in front of Monak. However much Monak had impressed the others, Gorth did not find the words reasonable. His voice still carried accusation.

"We've taken you seriously, Monak," declared Gorth, "but in the wrong way. You slipped that knife into Calbot and tried to alibi it with a lot of talk about Ammon! Now you say that the knife came through the hole over the door. Next, you'll claim you saw it coming –"

"I would have seen it," interrupted Monak, "if I had been looking that way."

"You would have?" sneered Gorth. "Then tell me: how could anyone have thrown a knife to a hole twenty feet above the ground, sent it through, and made it carry to a mark forty feet inside this temple?"

"Only Ammon can answer," began Monak solemnly. "One morning, when Ammon speaks –"

Before Gorth could scoff an interruption, Ravion intervened. The sharp-eyed professor had drawn a pair of eyeglasses from a fold of his robe and was putting them on. The glasses had a ribbon, producing an incongruous contrast to Ravion's ancient attire, but there was nothing ludicrous about the professor's statement.

"Ammon does not need to speak," declared Ravion. "I can explain the case, Gorth. The knife was thrown through the aperture on almost a straight line."

"From the ground outside?"

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"Not from the ground," Ravion returned. "From one of the high poplar trees that encroach almost to the wall of the temple."

MEN looked toward the aperture as Ravion spoke. Beyond the opening, in the dim dawn, they could see a wave of green, indicating a poplar tree. Gorth's effort at new argument was drowned out by the excited shouts of others. Monak was taking charge, ordering them all outdoors, and they were eagerly accepting his leadership anew.

Margo saw Monak gesture to the torch bearers. They were two of Monak's servants, Hakim and Eltab. Monak had many servants, all stout and loyal, but only these two were members of the Ammon cult.

Hakim and Eltab plucked the torches from the stone brackets and started out with the throng of men. By the light of the flares, Margo saw a pleased leer fix itself on Monak's features.

Oddly, that leer seemed meant for Ravion, rather than Gorth, for Monak was glancing toward the professor. Still, Margo could understand it, knowing Monak. The Egyptian was more contemptuous of a man who would play into his hands, as Ravion had, than of a man who defied him, like Gorth.

Certain it was that Monak had obtained a better alibi through Ravion, than the absurd talk about Ammon that Monak, himself, had cooked up for a starter. But when Margo looked back at the statue and saw its stony face take on grimaces as the torch light changed, she wasn't so sure that Monak hadn't been right.

In fact, Margo wasn't at all anxious to stay within the temple with the rest of the women, huddling along the walls that bore strange images as ugly as Ammon. She decided to follow the torch bearers.

Men reached the big temple doors and drew them inward. Hakim and Eltab went out first, for their lights were needed. The struggling dawn was reflected against the temple, but it hadn't begun to penetrate the poplars. Hakim went one way, waving his torch, Eltab the other.

Margo didn't expect that they would find an assassin in a tree. Certainly such a knife thrower would be gone by this time. But when a loud cry came from Hakim, Margo looked and saw the servant gesturing upward with his torch, beckoning for other men to join him.

He was sweeping his flare toward the lower branches of a poplar, and all that Margo saw there was blackness. The sudden meaning of the thing filled her with alarm.

Such alarm was genuine. Before Margo could even gasp, the result came. Blackness took life and flung itself downward from the tree, squarely upon Hakim, bowling the servant to the ground. But Margo's gasp, when she uttered it a moment later, was no expression of concern for Hakim.

A hideous mistake had been made. Men, searching for an assassin, had come upon a personage who sought to curb crime, not to help it. Margo knew it the very instant that she saw the descending blackness from the tree, for the figure was the cloaked form of her friend, The Shadow!

Murder stood explained, through the theory that Monak had so aptly seized from Ravion – and now, a dozen men, lusty in their shouts, eager in their drive, were sure that they had found the killer. Once they had him in their clutches, they would pin full blame for Calbot's death upon The Shadow!

CHAPTER III. VANISHED FIGHTERS

WITH men converging from every side, The Shadow had seemingly flung himself into trouble. Actually, his hard surge from the tree ended his chief worry, which happened to be Hakim's torch. The brand struck the ground along with Hakim, and no longer did the flame illuminate the tree boughs.

Instead, darkness blanketed the space beneath the poplars, for the leaves were too thick to be penetrated by the cloudy dawn. Darkness as thick as blackest night, save at the one tree trunk where Hakim's torch flickered in dying fashion. Even that failing light did not last long.

Springing for the brand, The Shadow seized it and flung it off among the trees, so swiftly that no one caught further sight of him. The torch simply seemed to fly away of its own accord, leaving a mass of utter blackness.

So far, men had viewed The Shadow only as a swirl of blackness, and he remained as such. But he became a swirl of substance, too, as men clutched for him in the gloom. Whirling, he treated them to tornado-like tactics that sent them stumbling against one another, tripping over roots and bashing into tree trunks.

Amid that spin for freedom, The Shadow eluded eyes as well as hands. The white robes of the floundering attackers made a helpful contrast to his own black garb. It really seemed that the members of the Ammon Cult were struggling among themselves; that the ghostly shape from the tree was purely a figment of their own imagination.

Even to Margo, who had expected The Shadow and therefore identified him with a glimpse, the illusion seemed real. But her wits returned when she saw a new menace that threatened to disclose The Shadow in full.

Eltab was turning with the other torch, ready to dash toward the struggling men in white. If he arrived too soon, The Shadow would surely be revealed.

Spontaneously, Margo sprang forward to block off the second servant. Her mind was in tumult from conflicting thoughts. Most certainly, an assassin could have hurled a knife from that very tree, through the opening beneath the temple eaves.

If so, the man in black might be the killer, which was plausible enough, because, at times, men of crime had imitated The Shadow's garb. It wasn't always safe to accept any black-cloaked figure as The Shadow.

Still, those arguments didn't hold. Back in Margo's brain was the fact that no impostor could impersonate The Shadow in action. No other living fighter could be creating such chaos amid a dozen foemen. They were unarmed; hence he was handling them without the use of weapons, something that no assassin would be considerate enough to do.

Such was the logic that inspired Margo to halt Eltab's arrival, if only for ten seconds. Such a margin might be all that The Shadow required to dodge away among the trees. So Margo sprang with all the speed that she could muster, which happened to be better than Eltab's, considering that she wasn't handicapped by a trailing robe to trip her sandaled feet.

Midway to the white-clad strugglers, Margo intercepted the Egyptian servant and grabbed his arm. He had the torch in his other hand, and he turned about in savage style that threatened to reduce Margo's delaying efforts from ten seconds to two.

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Uttering a snarl that might have been an Egyptian oath, Eltab turned the torch into a cudgel and drew his hand back for a hard, fierce swing, without pausing to see who gripped him.

Before Margo could duck, a strange thing happened. Eltab's weapon was gone from his grasping hand. It scaled up through the tree branches so suddenly, that Margo thought the force of his hurried backswing had sent it, until she realized that it was flying far too high to have gone in such wise.

An unseen hand, sweeping up from darkness, had plucked the brand from the servant's clutch and given it that long toss. The proof was the startled way in which Eltab turned to grab frantically at a new assailant who had deprived him of his only weapon.

Then Eltab, himself, was plucked by hands from nowhere, and sent on a long, whirling dive that landed him squarely against the rising form of his fellow servant, Hakim.

FROM the darkness at Margo's elbow came a whispered laugh, more weird than any previous happening. It was The Shadow's token of identity, and an approval of Margo's well-meant aid. It told her that he had slipped the robed members of the Ammon Cult and doubled around to take care of Eltab's torch. The Shadow's swift tactics had saved Margo from sad results of overzeal.

Others heard The Shadow's sibilant tone. Hakim and Eltab, half on their feet, clutched each other as they rose. The sinister whisper brought a mutual gasp from their lips; a name that Margo heard repeated, but did not understand:

"Khaibet! Khaibet!"

Next, Margo was under the shelter of the poplars, guided by The Shadow's hand. She could hear his fading laugh as he left her, and knew that its peculiar evanescence must have impressed Hakim and Eltab, for they were still uttering that odd word: "Khaibet!"

Moreover, they were making no effort to pursue The Shadow, nor to hurry after Margo. As for the members of the Ammon Cult, they were tired of grappling each other and pummeling tree trunks.

It seemed that The Shadow's departure was assured, when a high, commanding voice resounded through the grove. Margo recognized the tone; it belonged to Amru Monak. He had hurried off toward the mansion and was summoning his other servants.

Quick to obey their master's call, they were arriving with flashlights, far better spotters than torches. Margo shrank back against a tree, wondering how The Shadow would fare.

A brilliant beam swept through the trees, and again, as during the march, Margo had the impression of fantastic figures dodging away to cover. As the light came closer and began another slice, she actually saw a shape close by, a form that huddled for the nearest tree trunk.

With a warning word, Margo cut over to block the flashlight's beam, motioning for The Shadow to dive away.

Instead, the figure lunged. Margo was gripped by a pair of sweated arms that almost strangled her. Hauled toward a tree, she was clutched by another shape that bobbed out suddenly. Her scream was brief, but it brought the flashlights.

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Staring at the faces of the men who were suppressing her, Margo saw that they were hard and ugly. But that wasn't the thing that frightened her most.

All past illusions were real! Those shapes that had dodged off to shelter when the procession passed were living occupants of the grove, as actual as The Shadow. Ghouls, they had seemed to Margo then; ghouls, they were at present. The Shadow was gone, and in his place these unknown creatures of evil had arrived.

The laugh that Margo heard seemed a mockery of The Shadow's mirth. She thought that her ugly captors uttered it as they flung her to the turf. Then the hard clash of metal, the sudden spurt of guns, jarred her back to reality. She was looking up, a witness to a new struggle.

That laugh hadn't been an imitation of The Shadow's; it was his own, given in taunting style, that these enemies would understand and fear.

Bobbing flashlights showed The Shadow wheeling toward the nearest tree, jabbing shots from an automatic. Other guns were answering, handled by sweated men whose caps were pulled well down over their eyes. They were using revolvers, firing at full blast. Having slugged them first, The Shadow was testing them at longer range.

Their only target was a laugh.

NO eyes could have found The Shadow. He was everywhere, yet nowhere. Swinging flashlights were at their old game of making tree trunks into living forms. Puzzled gunners were shooting at phantom shapes that didn't exist. Each one thought that he was spotting The Shadow, and all were wasting bullets, for the laugh still came, its gibes amplified by blasts from an automatic that made the sweated gunners hop for trees.

Cleverly, The Shadow took away their stings. They regretted their wasted shots, for their guns were empty when the flashlights reached them. Then a new clash was in progress, with men shouting, howling, scrambling in chaotic fashion. Margo could hear figures crashing off to flight amid new shots that sounded like blasts from shotguns.

Friendly hands clutched Margo from the tree trunk where she had slumped. By the glow of a flashlight, she saw the faces of Monak's servants; not the two Egyptians, Hakim and Eltab, but other men, fresh from the mansion. They were the men who carried shotguns, along with such outmoded weapons as javelins and spears.

They were straightening out the mixed-up members of the Ammon Cult, under Monak's direction, and they regarded Margo as just another who had run into trouble. When they asked her if she had recognized her assailants, Margo shook her head and looked bewildered.

She was continuing the gesture when she reached the clearing by the temple, where the dawn showed Monak rounding up the dazed members of his cult.

In fact, Margo was bewildered.

She couldn't imagine what had happened to The Shadow, or that crew of strange men who had risen like living tree trunks, to turn into sweated hoodlums and then disappear after a brief brawl with Monak's servants.

The answer lay on the far fringe of the grove, where The Shadow was finishing a circuit that he had taken to avoid Monak's servants. He had left the fray to them, since these were their own preserves, but they had been

too busy with their flashlights to do much fighting. Ahead, The Shadow could hear the scuffle and clatter of men climbing a wall followed by thumps from the other side, augmented by a few groans.

Quickening his pace, The Shadow came from beneath the trees into daylight. Here was the wall; it was a stone barrier, ten feet high, that surrounded Monak's large estate. From beyond it, The Shadow heard the rumble of motors; reaching a stone buttress in the wall, he used its inset corner for a rapid climb to the top.

Beyond the wall lay ladders that the fleeing men had dragged after them and dropped. Around the bend of a dirt road, The Shadow saw the dust from the last of the departing cars. A strange shape of blackness, poised beside a turret atop the wall, The Shadow laughed.

Strangely significant was the low toned mirth. It did not delve into the past, as did the rites of Ammon. The Shadow's tone presaged the future. Whatever the riddle of the recent conflict, The Shadow intended to solve it. Perhaps the past had bearing on the future.

If so, this cloaked fighter who had scattered unknown foemen would become the link between the forgotten part and the unrevealed future. He knew.

He was The Shadow!

CHAPTER IV. CRIME WITHOUT REASON

LATE in the afternoon, two men arrived from New York. One was Lamont Cranston, the well-known clubman; the other was a police inspector named Joe Cardona. Though they came together, they gave different reasons for their visit.

Cranston, it seemed, had come to persuade Margo Lane to forget the Ammon Cult and return to the more placid circle of New York cafe society. Cardona was on hand to furnish information to the local authorities. Neither managed to get very far with his purpose.

Still wearing the long robe that marked him as leader of the Ammon clan, Amru Monak stood with folded arms, a smile upon his darkish face, while Cranston presented arguments to Margo.

A tall man, indolent of manner, with a calm, masklike countenance, Cranston was typically modern. He was dressed in the latest fashion, and had no sympathy with the ancient styles that prevailed in Monak's mansion.

Cranston's attitude made no impression upon Margo. Like Monak, she was attired in Egyptian fashion, and when Cranston asked why she preferred to be a back number two thousand years old, she replied proudly that he had underestimated the case by about three thousand years. She belonged to antiquity, she declared, to a period five thousand years ago, when civilization had dawned.

Those were the happy times, Margo insisted. Then the world was right, and all its woes were the accumulations of later centuries. If all people would understand, and agree to accept civilization from its starting point, a new path could be found. Modern science, geared to the ideals of ancient philosophers, could become a power that would create a wonderful world based upon a universal principle.

It was little wonder that Monak smiled. Margo was merely giving Cranston a parrot's version of Monak's own pep talks to the members of his cult. He was glad to see that Margo had absorbed the story and was standing by it. What he didn't recognize was the fact that Cranston already knew the theme and was purposely putting arguments that Margo could refute.

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At last, Cranston's usually immobile face betrayed an expression of annoyance. He turned away and looked toward Cardona, who was chatting with the local sheriff. Monak's eyes gave one of their quick flashes. He overtook Cranston and placed a friendly hand upon his shoulder.

"Let me assure you," spoke Monak, in a purring tone, "that Miss Lane is remaining with us of her own volition. You are quite free to resume your discussion at any time, Mr. Cranston. Indeed, you are welcome to remain with us.

"The ways of ancient Egypt are deep and mysterious, like the waters of the Nile. One cannot penetrate those depths at a mere glance. Perhaps if you remain, you will understand. I might even venture the hope that you will become one of us, after you have looked further into these subjects of antiquity."

There was a certain challenge to Monak's tone that he did not attempt to veil, and it produced the result he wanted. Cranston accepted the challenge with a quiet nod, and gave a glance at Margo, whose face had taken on a solemn, stony expression that would have befitted a sphinx. Monak decided that the business of convincing Margo would keep Cranston quite occupied while Cardona was handling other matters.

Nevertheless, Monak followed along when Cranston approached the police inspector.

CARDONA was proceeding with his appointed task. He was telling the local authorities all that he knew about Hugh Calbot, victim of last night's murder. With arms folded, Monak stood by and listened attentively.

According to Cardona, Calbot had played an important part in disposing of the fabulous Keldon treasures; most notably, the Ammon temple. He had been pensioned by the Keldon Estate, with the understanding that he would assist in such matters. Calbot had handled all transactions in the most meticulous style; there wasn't a blemish on his record.

A stocky man, swarthy of face and blunt in style, Cardona came to the point quickly.

"There was one trouble with Calbot," he said abruptly. "He was too honest. He wouldn't let the Keldon Estate get gypped out of a penny coming to it. He had a duty, and he did it. Some times fellows like that aren't appreciated by certain people."

Amru Monak smiled blandly at Cardona's comments.

"From your remarks, inspector," declared Monak, "one might infer that I was dissatisfied with my purchase of the Ammon temple, at least from the standpoint of price."

"I mentioned no names, Mr. Monak –"

"Whereas quite the opposite is the case," continued Monak, riding right over Cardona's interruption. "Indeed, I am glad that Hugh Calbot was, as you described him, meticulous. Unquestionably, his records will show an exact account of the transaction.

"You will learn from them that my first meeting with Calbot was when I handed him a sealed bid, my offer of a half a million dollars for the temple, a price which was far in excess of all others. At no time did Calbot force or urge me to raise the initial amount.

"Later, he delivered the plan sheets from which the temple was reconstructed. I have them here" – smoothly, Monak drew an envelope from his robe and passed it to Cardona – "and I shall ask you to check it with the sheriff. Because" – Monak smiled broadly as he gestured toward two men with badges who stood behind the

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sheriff – "these deputies happen to be two of the local craftsmen who aided in the reconstruction. They will testify that everything tallies."

It all left Cardona very much at a loss. The swarthy inspector mistrusted Monak for a very definite reason. Cardona had dealt with cult leaders before, and had invariably found them phony. Generally, their organizations were a blind for undercover work. Having heard that Monak had first ascribed Calbot's death to the power of Ammon, Cardona considered it an outlandish alibi.

To pin crime on Monak, Cardona had to find a reason why the cult leader would have wanted Calbot dead. There just wasn't any such reason. Cardona happened to have some photostats of Calbot's records with him, and as he dug through them, he found that Monak had told the truth.

Meanwhile, the deputy sheriffs were carefully studying the plans of the temple, to find that they were just as represented. Looking them over, Cardona found that they were inscribed with Calbot's own handwriting and therefore must be genuine, since the recording of those plans had been Calbot's duty.

Obviously, Monak's purchase of the temple was on the up and up, while Calbot's joining of the cult had been quite voluntary. Finding no loophole in those factors, the inspector presented one last argument.

He wanted to know why Monak's chief servants, Hakim and Eltab, had allowed a mysterious assassin to escape from the tree outside the temple; also why, and how, the other servants had let a handful of unknown men slip right through them and disappear.

To both of those questions, Monak shrugged.

Though sure that the knife had been hurled from the tree, Monak wasn't certain that Hakim had uncovered the man who threw it. Hakim had raised his torch and shouted, only to fall, as though tripping over a tree trunk. Subsequent events, the struggle which proved that cult members were merely grappling among themselves, supported this notion. Even Eltab, like Hakim, wasn't at all sure that someone had grabbed him from the darkness.

The Egyptian servants were standing by, nodding solemnly at Monak's words. Classing them as fanatics, like their master, Cardona was inclined to believe that they had let their imaginations sway them. That point gave Joe a prompt idea.

"What about the guys in the grove?" he demanded. "Your other servants grabbed them, and lost them. Was that a lot of imagination, too?"

Monak shook his head.

"Unquestionably, marauders were in the grove," he insisted, "and one was certainly Calbot's murderer. The servants from the house were looking for one man, and found several. Thinking they had seized cult members by mistake, they let them go."

WATCHING Cardona, Cranston saw the inspector's sharp look and observed that Joe reverted to a poker-faced expression. He knew the thought that had sprung to Cardona's mind. It would have been very easy for Monak's numerous servants to fake that fight among themselves.

Perhaps the "marauders" had been extras, stationed among the trees, ready to scramble, take flight, and double back to the mansion later. A good theory, for it was one that Cranston, himself, had formed, and had not wholly rejected.

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As The Shadow, Cranston had taken part in the action mentioned, and was still weighing the situation. Monak could be either right, or wrong.

There were others, however, to be considered in the case. Having left the Monak question in the air, Cardona swung to the next man concerned: Basil Gorth.

"There's something I want to ask you, Mr. Gorth," asserted Cardona. "Didn't you put in a bid, too, for the Ammon temple?"

Gorth nodded. He had no other choice, for the fact was mentioned in Calbot's records.

"It was around two hundred thousand dollars," continued Cardona. "Where were you going to raise that kind of money, Gorth?"

Gorth's eyes took on a steely glitter as they peered from his bronzed face. He spoke, steadily, coldly, and his words made sense. Archaeology was his business; he had learned it under the famous Dr. Karl Sterber, chief of the Keldon expedition. Vast sums had been spent upon the work, Gorth reminded his listeners, but today such things were out of the question.

Not because money was lacking, but because world conditions made it impossible to carry on such expeditions. So Gorth had faithfully believed that he could induce certain wealthy parties to buy their archaeology treasures ready-made.

Had his bid been accepted, he was sure that he could have raised the needed money, since he had played a personal part in the discovery of the Ammon temple beneath the desert sands.

Gorth's harangue ended, Cardona shot a question.

"Dr. Sterber died in Egypt, didn't he?"

There was a nod from Gorth. Cardona observed that the tawny man was wearing an Egyptian robe, symbolizing membership in the Ammon Cult. So Joe followed one question with another.

"Did that have anything to do with your joining this outfit?"

"Frankly, it did have," returned Gorth, his tone as blunt as Joe's. "Sterber's death was attributed to the working of an Egyptian curse that hung over the Temple of Ammon. I felt bound through loyalty to Sterber to look into the case. It was one reason why I hoped to acquire the temple.

"When Monak bought the temple and had it erected, I saw a chance to continue my investigation of the matter by joining the cult. I did not join under false pretenses, because" – Gorth's eyes moved about the group, fixing emphatically on others they encountered, including Monak's – "because I already held the firm conviction that the mysteries of Egypt were more than mere myth."

Gorth's speech was impressive, but it had a flaw, which Cardona evidently noticed, though he reserved opinion, as did the keen Mr. Cranston, who was carefully masking his true identity. As The Shadow, Cranston had learned enough to know that certain of Gorth's remarks required further explanation. At present, however, it was better to let Cardona set the pace.

The inspector suddenly abandoned Gorth and swung to Jan Ravion, who so far had said nothing, though his tiny eyes had been making gimlet jabs at each speaker.

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"Calbot's records mention you, professor," announced Cardona. "Apparently you were also interested in buying the Ammon temple."

"Not precisely," replied Ravion. "I merely wanted to be certain that whoever did acquire it would grant me access to the temple. Since Calbot could not guarantee that privilege, I was considering the possibility of financing its purchase myself."

"So you made a bid for it –"

"No indeed," Ravion interrupted. "I was too late. The bids from Monak and Gorth came in the very day when I was asking Calbot what he thought would be the lowest possible price for which the temple might be sold."

CRANSTON could tell from Cardona's expression that Ravion's statement tallied with the record. The police inspector had evidently tried to catch the professor off guard, without success.

Monak sensed the same thing Cranston did. With folded arms, the Egyptian delivered a dark-lipped smile and inquired in oily tone:

"What now, inspector?"

Cardona was already asking himself the same question. Hunches were his habit, and he was playing one: namely, that the death of Hugh Calbot had some special connection with the Ammon temple, which, in turn, linked with three men: Amru Monak, Basil Gorth and Jan Ravion.

The purchaser of the temple, the unsuccessful bidder, and the man who would have liked to buy the ancient edifice – any, or all, might provide the answer to the Calbot riddle. But though Monak, Gorth and Ravion differed in many respects, they seemed definitely agreed that the Calbot murder was a mystery. Something had to be done to crack it, so Cardona took the most direct course.

"Suppose we visit the temple," he suggested. "I'd like to view the scene of Calbot's death."

Monak's eyes went dark, and Cardona was pleased. He thought, for the moment, that the Egyptian was going to refuse and thereby commit himself upon some point. Instead, Monak let his glare subside; his lips flexed into another smile. Turning, he motioned to his followers.

Cardona found himself, with the sheriff and the deputies, at the rear of a robed procession as it left Monak's mansion and started for the grove where the Temple of Ammon stood. With a side glance, the inspector noticed that Cranston was following, but he doubted that one more member of the group could aid in probing into the mysteries, ancient or modern, that lay within the temple.

Doubts would have dwindled in Cardona's mind, had he known that Lamont Cranston was The Shadow!

CHAPTER V. THE SHADOW'S THEORY

BY day, the Temple of Ammon was far less ominous than when viewed by trickly moonlight and the glow of wavering torches. Nevertheless, its very setting provided a hush that could be sensed when one approached.

Under the poplars, Cardona and his companions found themselves peering furtively from left to right, and when they came in sight of the temple, they halted abruptly when Amru Monak raised his arms.

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Only Cranston seemed unimpressed, as he joined the paused group. Extracting a cigarette from a case, he struck a match, and leaned against a poplar to enjoy a smoke. Monak, imposing in his Egyptian regalia, gave Cranston a reproving frown.

"Please step away from that tree," requested Monak tersely. "It happens to be the one from which the assassin hurled the knife. I would suggest" – he was turning to Cardona – "that you have someone ascend the tree and look into the temple."

Cardona glanced at the sheriff, who, in turn, assigned a deputy to the task. Obliging, Cranston stepped aside to let the fellow climb the poplar. That ceremony over, Monak announced another.

"We shall enter the temple," he declared. "Since dawn is long past, Ammon will have no objection to the presence of strangers. Therefore, inspector, you and your companions may follow the procession."

Before Cardona could remark that the tight-closed doors of the temple apparently forbade all entry, Monak settled that particular problem. He began a chant, and his followers picked up the words. Behind their leader, they stepped straight toward the temple doors.

Margo Lane was with the cult members. As the chant rose, she was startled, not by the approach to the temple, but by the words, or, to be more specific, by one particular word that came at the conclusion of the stanza.

The words of the chant were:

"Ammon meklet ran! Ammon meklet khat! Ammon meklet khaibet!"

Repeated in monotone, it caught a lilt from the final word; those two syllables seemed to sum the whole. To Margo, the other words faded; always, she was waiting for the voices to strike the double note.

"Khaibet!"

It was the word that Hakim and Eltab had uttered the night before when they had found themselves without their torches. Whatever its significance, khaibet took on added import on this occasion, for the chanters were pronouncing the strange word just as they reached the temple doors.

At "khaibet!" the doors swung inward as smoothly, as mysteriously, by daylight as they had under the glow of moon and torches. The marchers crossed the atrium and entered the cella, to halt before the throned statue of Ammon, which, though as ugly as before, seemed less grotesque than when viewed by torchlight.

Monak, his back to the statue, was looking beyond his followers, smiling as he watched Cardona and the others enter. They paused to peer behind the opened doors, expecting to find servants concealed there. They were quite disappointed. The spaces behind the doors were ample, but they concealed no secret doormen.

Meanwhile, Margo was tugging the sleeve of a robed man who stood beside her.

"That word in the chant," she questioned, in an undertone. "Khaibet. What does it mean?"

The man shook his head. He didn't know. He suggested that Margo put the question to their leader, Amru Monak, something which she did not intend to do. By then, Cardona had entered the cella and other matters were under discussion.

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IN behalf of the local sheriff, Cardona wanted to know the exact spot where Calbot had been standing when the knife took him. Obliging, Monak pressed the cult members aside and took his stand to represent Calbot. Cardona paced out through the atrium and studied the tree where the deputy roosted.

It wasn't distant from the gaps beneath the temple eaves. A knife tossed from that bough could certainly acquire sufficient velocity to carry to where Monak stood.

Since the deputy couldn't climb any higher, Cardona suggested that he poke his straw hat up among the thinner branches, which the fellow did. Marching back to the cella, Cardona did an about face and looked off through the spaces above the temple doors. Through one of them, he spied the straw hat.

"Right enough," declared Cardona. "That's where the knife came from. There's only one question in my mind right now: was it meant for Calbot, or someone else? Or, for that matter" – Cardona's tone was reflective – "was it meant for anyone in particular? The toss was tough enough; putting it right to its mark would be even tougher."

Promptly, Monak snatched opportunity from Cardona's words.

"You can understand why I was deceived," said Monak smoothly. "It happened so very suddenly, that I could class Calbot's death as nothing other than the wrath of Ammon."

Cardona nodded, bluntly. He'd heard that theory before. He turned to Ravion and queried:

"You saw the knife in flight?"

"No," replied the professor. "I merely happened to glimpse the moonlight, afterward, through those high gaps. It struck me that a knife could have come through one –"

"You mean did come through," Cardona interrupted. Then, with a sudden swing, the inspector faced Gorth. "I have a very special question for you.

"Last night, they say, you didn't think much of Monak's theory regarding Ammon. Now, it seems, you're sold on the idea of an ancient curse, after everyone else has dropped it, Monak included. What's your answer to that one, Gorth?"

Coolly, Gorth explained himself. He still believed that Dr. Sterber had died as the result of an ancient curse. But such curses didn't come in the form of knives; they smacked of human origin. When he saw the knife in Calbot's back, at dawn, Gorth had naturally assumed that someone in the temple had thrown it. His first guess, he insisted, was quite as good as Monak's.

"Of course, I was mistaken, too," concluded Gorth. He swung from Cardona to Monak. "I owe you an apology, Monak. My mind is now clear on every point. Ravion was right: the knife came from the tree outside.

"But the curse of Ammon may still prevail." Solemnly, Gorth raised his hand. "The death of my dear friend, Sterber, remains a riddle. As a true follower of Ammon, I shall delve into the past until I learn the truth."

Gorth's words pleased Monak. They indicated that in Gorth, the cult of Ammon possessed one ardent member. Cardona, however, was not so impressed. He felt that Gorth was giving him the run-around, and would continue to do so as long as the investigation lasted. So Cardona merely acknowledged Gorth's answer with a nod, and turned to Ravion.

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"You said you wanted access to the temple," reminded Cardona. "May I ask why, Ravion? Do you like to look at ram's heads?" Joe gestured toward the Ammon statue, then let his hand make a circuit to included the walls. "Or these birds and other things that are on parade?"

A cryptic smile upon his lips, Ravion shook his head; then, finding the ribbon that adorned his white robe, he plucked the glasses from the end of it and placed them on his nose. He was deigning to explain his interest in the temple, when he drew Cardona toward the pedestal that supported the Ammon statue.

"I have made a study of hieroglyphic writing," declared Ravion. "These characters that front the pedestal intrigue me. They are in a secret language known only to the priests of Ammon. Some day" – Ravion nodded wisely – "I shall manage to decipher them."

Ravion rapped his knuckles soundly against the small slabs that held the inscription. Cardona noticed that they sounded hollow, and stooped to examine them. They looked like large, oblong tiles, were fitted perfectly in place, and Cardona observed that the hieroglyphs continued from one tile to another, covering about two dozen of the oblongs.

Reading ancient inscriptions was hardly Cardona's line. Noticing an impatient stir about him, the inspector arose, deciding to go back to the mansion. He and the other visitors went outside, waiting there for Monak to dismiss the cult members, which the Egyptian did quite promptly.

SOBERLY, the wearers of robes and tunics marched out into the sunshine, with only one laggard in their group. Margo Lane was highly anxious to find Lamont Cranston. She wanted to talk to him about these matters. Whatever he would have to say would be more than mere guesswork.

It would be The Shadow's theory.

Noting that Cranston wasn't in the atrium, Margo decided that he had gone outside with Cardona. She turned toward the outer doors just in time to see them start to close. There was nothing mysterious in the action of the barriers, for two men in robes were swinging them shut. Those doors opened strangely, but never closed of their own accord.

Nonetheless, Margo wasn't anxious to remain alone within the temple of death. She hurried across the outer room, waving for the men to wait, but their backs were turned and they did not see her. Rather than make herself ridiculous by giving a scream, Margo made a spurt to gain the opening, quite sure that a few quick steps would get her there in time.

Those steps would have, if she had completed them. It happened that Margo halted five feet short of the closing doors. The thing that stopped her was a figure that swung out from behind one of the doors, so swiftly that Margo did not see it.

In the gloom brought by the narrowing of the door space, Margo was clutched and drawn from her goal by a pair of powerful, enveloping arms.

Right then, Margo wished that she had screamed, for she no longer had the chance. A hand was across her face, covering her mouth. Before she could twist away, the doors closed with a mighty clang, blocking all escape.

Frantically, Margo wrenched back toward the center of the atrium, to the splotches of sunlight that, coming from the openings beneath the temple roof, patch-worked the floor.

Light might help against the horror that had overwhelmed her, and the sunlit spaces gave Margo the added hope that a cry from within the temple could still be heard outside. Her captor still clutched her as she twisted, and Margo's terror was very real until she reached the nearest patch of light.

There, she saw the face above the gripping arms, and her attempt at a cry subsided into a relieved gasp. It was the face of Lamont Cranston. Quite anxious to confer with Margo, Cranston had blocked her from the exit as the simplest way to assure an immediate conference.

Her startlement banished, Margo smiled, and with good reason. Cranston was smiling, too, very slightly, but enough for Margo to know that he intended to make amends for the fright that he had given her. Others had formed their theories of murder, but The Shadow still retained his own.

Margo was to hear The Shadow's theory.

CHAPTER VI. THE LAW DECIDES

DESPITE the confidence that Cranston's presence gave her, Margo shuddered slightly when he led the way into the cella where the Ammon statue rested on its throne. She tried to attribute her shiver to the coolness of the place, for the doors, now closed, cut off the warmth of the outside air.

Such mental arguments failed. Margo knew the real cause of her returning fear. Lighted only by the streaky rays of sunshine from the openings atop the front wall, the temple had become a weird, foreboding place, where even Cranston's easy paces and the pad of Margo's sandaled feet were echoed in a terrifying style.

Amru Monak had talked of the voice of Ammon, that spoke only at dawn. The echoes couldn't be the tone of Ammon, but they were quite as sinister. They came from the walls at either side, where the life-sized sculptures of strange Egyptian deities stood on parade.

Vague, yet visible, those things with heads of birds and beasts seemed responsible for the whispery sounds that Margo tried to class as footfalls transformed into other tones. Her shudder did not pass unnoticed. Cranston's hand tightened slightly on Margo's arm, and its touch restored her confidence.

Squarely before the Ammon statue, Cranston halted. In the spotty light, he took the position where Calbot had been. He turned to Margo, and she moved to the place where she had been when the knife had done its work. Cranston shook his head:

"Not there," he said. "I want you to represent the woman who screamed when she saw Calbot fall."

Margo stepped to the proper position. Cranston bowed toward the Ammon statue, and Margo moved a half pace forward. Cranston turned his head across his shoulder, and Margo nodded, saying:

"This is the way they both were placed."

The low laugh that pervaded the temple came from Cranston's lips; but the walls gave it a sibilance that rendered it uncanny. But this time, Margo didn't trace the sound to the carved creatures on the walls.

The laugh was The Shadow's.

Cranston, too, seemed much The Shadow, though he wore no cloak of black. No longer did the patchy sunlight reach him. It was as if he had created a little sphere of darkness about him and was dwindling into its gloom.

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At least, such was the bizarre impression that came to Margo Lane, until she struck upon a simpler reason – one which accounted for The Shadow's comprehending laugh, as well as his shedding of the Cranston character.

Margo was responsible for the sudden transformation. She was cutting off the sunlight that came through the atrium. For the moment, she thought that a cloud had merely passed across the sun, but when she looked around, she saw that the rays of sunlight were as strong as ever, though they did not reach The Shadow.

He was Cranston again, at least in speech. Margo heard his calm voice close to her ear, steady in its monotone, though not without a trace of satire.

"The Moon of Isis eclipses the Sun of Ammon," spoke Cranston. "But remember, Miss Isis, you are not Margo Lane. You are the lady who screamed when she saw Calbot fall. Nor am I, Ammon, Lamont Cranston. I represent Hugh Calbot, slain by a knife that came" – his even voice gave just the slightest pause – "from where?"

FROM where!

Not from any loophole in the wall above the atrium. The whole theory was blasted, as Margo stared toward the outer room. For she, Margo Lane, who represented the excited lady who had given the scream at dawn, was standing between that distant opening and Lamont Cranston, who was at present impersonating a murder victim.

His hands on Margo's shoulders, Cranston gently pressed her to one side, so that he could step into the shaft of sunlight that could have marked the path of a thrown blade, but didn't.

"Amru Monak should be here," Cranston remarked. "His mind would leap to the super-impossible. Monak might claim that the influence of Ammon was upon the knife, enabling it to pass right through the screaming lady without touching her, to find its mark in Calbot.

"Perhaps it could have." Though Margo felt sure Lamont was jesting, his tone was very serious. "Strange things have happened in these temples. However, we must reject the theory of an assassin operating from the poplar tree.

"You see, Margo, I happened to be the only person in that tree at dawn. My purpose was merely to look into the temple, which I was about to do when the excitement started."

So that was it! Hearing a quiet laugh from Cranston's lips, Margo was able to interpret it. As The Shadow, Cranston had known all along that someone in the Ammon Cult had deliberately slipped the knife in Calbot's back. But to prove the fact, The Shadow would have been forced to admit that he was in the tree outside, which would automatically have made him Suspect No. 1 in Calbot's death!

A real dilemma, even for The Shadow. No wonder that he had sought other evidence that would eliminate the tree and its occupant entirely! As Cranston, The Shadow had probed the case sufficiently. He had demonstrated, to Margo's satisfaction, that the knife couldn't have come winging through the opening in the atrium. Others, particularly Joe Cardona, would accept that same evidence, once it was presented to them.

Margo hadn't an idea how soon that would happen. Cranston's face was cryptic in the splotchy sunlight as he conducted her toward the temple doors. Reaching them, Cranston took a grip on one, and Margo did the same with the other, at his nod. For the doors, though smooth on the outside, had ornamented filigrees on their inner surfaces.

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Though tightly shut, the doors pulled inward with surprising ease. Stepping through them, Cranston and Margo each gave a slight swing to a door and the barriers came shut. Smiling slightly as he glanced at the assassin's tree, Cranston gestured toward the path that led to Monak's mansion.

It was then that Margo remembered another question.

"That chant, Lamont!" she exclaimed. "The new one, that Monak made us sing when we marched toward the doors. There was a word in it –"

"There were several words in it," Cranston interposed. "It was simply a greeting to the believer about to enter the temple. To properly understand it, you must first know that the ancient Egyptians believed that every human being possessed three qualities, each of equal importance."

MARGO nodded. Monak had discussed such points of Egyptian philosophy, but hadn't amplified them, as most of his lectures had been a eulogy of Ammon. So Cranston took it upon himself to tell Margo what the three mortal possessions were.

"Ammon meklet ran," Cranston repeated. "It means: 'Ammon welcomes the Name.' The first of a mortal's possessions is his name, symbolized by the term 'ran.'"

They were walking through the grove, and Margo wished that Lamont would hurry with his interpretation. Sometimes, she felt, he liked to be deliberate just to test her patience.

"Ammon meklet khat," continued Cranston. "'Ammon welcomes the Body.' The second possession is the body. Khat means the Body –"

"You've told me that already," broke in Margo, as they came from the trees. "But what's the rest of it, Lamont? The last word – khaibet – must be the third mortal possession. It's the one I want to know about."

"Ammon meklet khaibet," spoke Cranston. "So it's khaibet that interests you, Margo. Very well. 'Ammon meklet khaibet' means: 'Ammon welcomes' –"

Cranston's brief pause was most tantalizing. His placid gaze toward Margo whetted her curiosity to the breaking point. She was just about to lose her patience utterly, when Cranston added:

"The Shadow."

Margo stopped short. They were within sight of Monak's mansion, which loomed stately in the sunlight, but Margo's mind had gone back hours. She was thinking of darkness beneath the trees that had masked the dawn, when two men, Hakim and Eltab, had exclaimed that one word: "Khaibet!"

Name, body and shadow, the three apportionments of mankind. But the Egyptian servants had forgotten all about ran and khat when they spoke of khaibet. Glimmers of understanding were ending Margo's frown, when she caught Lamont's nod.

"Quite right, Margo," observed Cranston quietly. "All that they said was The Shadow! But their use of the word 'khaibet' has a marked significance. It means that our two Egyptian friends thought that they had encountered a being who possessed neither name nor substance. Unwittingly, they named him, and thereby gave him actual form, when they called him Khaibet, The Shadow!"

TEMPLE OF CRIME

Margo was smiling when she entered the house with Cranston and saw Hakim and Eltab in the offing. She was glad that the servants had gone back to the vernacular of ancient Egypt when they spoke of The Shadow. She knew that Lamont was glad, too, because the term *khaibet* meant nothing to certain persons, particularly Joe Cardona.

When The Shadow entered into a case, Cardona's technique always altered. The police inspector usually expected miracles from the cloaked master, and therewith lessened his own campaign proportionately. Furthermore, Joe's faith in The Shadow was absolute. On those occasions where suspicion rested on The Shadow, Cardona had a tendency to drop all else until his cloaked friend was cleared.

Having cleared himself, The Shadow wasn't anxious to handicap Cardona's efforts. True, Joe was following the wrong track, but that made it all the better. With Inspector Cardona as the spearhead, traveling the wrong direction, the complacent Mr. Cranston would be able to conduct his own investigation in his own particular style.

The accepted theory of murder from outside the temple must certainly be pleasing to the man responsible for Calbot's death. So long as it existed, the killer would feel free to go through with any other deeds for which his plans might call. Always, the initial fallacy, that of death from outside, would be his foundation of safety.

In his turn, The Shadow would only need to pin the right facts on the killer, then knock the props from under him. But it wasn't going to be easy, not in a setting so bizarre as this, where ancient fanaticism dominated modern activities. For the present, The Shadow decided to keep himself quite in abeyance, until he saw how Cardona fared.

ENTERING the mansion, Cranston strolled to Monak's study, and found Cardona there, along with local officials, who were leaving everything to the New York inspector. Cardona was weighing the bronze knife that had given Calbot the fatal stab. The blade was unquestionably of ancient origin.

"Too smudged to show any prints," remarked Joe, sourly, as he inspected the knife handle. Then, turning to Monak: "You say this knife was taken from your weapon room?"

"I am not sure," returned Monak smoothly. "It resembles some of the ancient daggers in my collection, but I have never made a complete list. However" – Monak's eyes took on a new glint – "it is my belief that this knife did come from my collection."

Such a startling admission rather staggered Cardona, which was exactly what Monak wanted.

"The weapon room is always open," purred the Egyptian. "Its contents are regarded as curios; nothing more. I would suppose that the very clever killer who disposed of Calbot would also be shrewd enough to pilfer one of my weapons, not only to place me under suspicion, but to accomplish a more important object."

Cardona's eyes met Monak's quizzically. Joe was anxious to know about this "more important" thing that Monak mentioned.

"I am a victim of great prejudice," pronounced Monak solemnly. "There are persons who consider me a fanatic and would like to put an end to the Cult of Ammon. Through Calbot's death, they hope that the law will order the Temple of Ammon closed, thus ending the rites of Ammon."

"I hope, inspector" – Monak's tone was very earnest – "that you will not play into their hands. It would be quite unwise to let prejudice rule. Tonight, for example, I have planned a double ceremony – a ritual marking the departure of the moon goddess, Isis, to be followed by an appeal to Ammon–Ra, great master of the sun."

TEMPLE OF CRIME

Of course, should you decide that the ceremony cannot be held –"

Ending with a hopeless shrug, Monak left, the rest to Cardona. Cranston's casual eyes watched the shrug and recognized the clever thought that lay behind it. Monak was indicating that he would comply with Cardona's ruling, but he did not say so in words.

It was a neat trap for Cardona. Should the local authorities, at Joe's suggestion, close the temple without naming a specific cause, Monak would have an excellent court case against them, and could thereby shun all burden from himself.

Very cleverly, Monak hadn't committed himself beyond declaring that a ritual was scheduled; which would strengthen his case all the more.

"Very well," decided Cardona, rising. "We'll take the proper measures, Monak. Tonight, the temple will be –"

At that moment, Cardona caught Cranston's gaze. It wasn't turned Joe's way; it was fixed on Monak. Following that steady stare, Cardona looked toward Monak and caught a gleam of darkish triumph on the Egyptian's face. Logical, that gleam, since Monak was watching Cardona and didn't notice Cranston. In a flash, Cardona had it.

"Tonight," repeated Cardona, "the temple will be open. You can proceed with your double ceremony, Monak. Our job" – Joe swung to the deputies – "will be to patrol the grounds and see that no trouble makers get near the grove where the temple is located."

Lamont Cranston lighted a cigarette when he stepped from Monak's study. Behind Cranston's cupped hands, the match flame revealed lips that wore the trace of a smile. Slight though it was, the expression held significance.

It was The Shadow's approval of Joe Cardona, who, so far, was doing quite well in his investigation.

Quite well, in relation to the plans that The Shadow himself had formed!

CHAPTER VII. VOICE OF AMMON

IT was after midnight and a hush lay within Monak's mammoth mansion. All members of the Ammon Cult had retired early, for they were to be awakened a full hour before dawn, that they might have time to complete their ceremonies to the waning moon deity, Isis, before the Ammon ritual began.

All evening, Lamont Cranston had been strolling around the ground floor of the great mansion, finding much to interest him.

Monak's huge home was a veritable museum. His purchase of the Ammon temple had merely been the climax of his career as a collector. Hallways, reception rooms, were crowded with relics of Egyptian art, even to huge vases and large stone slabs that bore ancient inscriptions.

The library was large, filled with volumes of Egyptian lore. Cranston had stayed in there a while, until Hakim had arrived to close the room for the night. After strolling here and there, Cranston reached the weapon room and looked through the open door.

Three of Monak's servants were busily checking over the weapons that the room contained, while a court stenographer, hired for the occasion, was tabulating them, with notes. Both in numbers and variety, the

weapons mounted up.

Swords, spears, javelins, axes, even razors, were among the listing. As for daggers, they were found in all shapes and sizes.

Of course, the collection was by no means entirely ancient. Medieval implements of warfare were present, to be listed. But when it came to modern shotguns and rifles, a line needed to be drawn. The stenographer sent for Joe Cardona.

Arriving, the inspector looked over the modern portion of the arsenal. The servants had used the shotguns and rifles in driving marauders from the poplar grove. Whether such marauders were real or imaginary, Cardona wasn't sure, but he didn't feel it his privilege to deprive the house of its legitimate protection.

He told the servants to transfer the modern items to Monak's study, and they took him literally. Along with the shooting irons, they dug up a lot of things that weren't needed, such as an old trench mortar, some gas masks, a stack of cavalry sabers, and an assortment of bayonets.

"Leave those here," Cardona ordered. "Mark down the mortar, and count the sabers and bayonets. The gas masks don't matter. They aren't weapons."

Walking away with Cranston, Cardona remarked:

"I'm going to check those lists personally. What I'd like to find, though, is some revolvers. They say the guys in the grove used them during that fracas at dawn."

Cardona was implying that he hadn't dropped the theory that some of Monak's servants might have doubled as marauders. Then, with a parting wave, Cardona left the mansion in order to visit the local deputies who were posted around the great wall that circled the estate.

Strolling to another large room, Cranston entered. This room was a museum in itself, containing the treasures that Monak valued most highly. In the center stood a small stone sphinx, greeting all visitors with a placid, but stony, gaze. One corner contained models of the pyramids, which could be opened on hinges, to reveal that interior arrangements.

The sphinx room also contained ancient Egyptian costumes, and along one wall ranged a row of ceremonial masks representing the gods of the ancient Nile. Birds, beasts, and reptiles, the hollow heads resembled those of the strange carvings that adorned the walls of the Ammon temple.

A stone sarcophagus occupied another corner, and there were mummy cases standing beside it. Farther along, Cranston saw a solitary mummy case that was larger than the rest. It differed, too, in the fact that it was girded with a heavy band of metal that terminated in a huge padlock.

The padlock certainly was not of ancient origin. It was open, and Cranston lifted it from the loops of the band. The original lock must have been a chunk of metal driven through the loops like a wedge, and twisted to seal the mummy case.

The loops bore marks of having contained such a device, for they were bent. Whoever found the mummy case must have promptly pried it open, ruining the ancient equivalent of a lock.

OPENING the mummy case, Cranston found that it was set on heavy pin hinges that groaned like a protesting voice. The case, however, was empty. Closing it, Cranston hooked the padlock back on the

receiving loops.

Groaning hinges drowning other sounds, Cranston did not hear the slight footfalls that came from the hallway. Nor did he see the gliding figure that entered from that direction.

White in the dim-lighted room, the entering shape could well have been an Egyptian ka, or wandering spirit, for certainly this room was the proper abode for such strange creatures, if they existed.

Passing around the sphinx, the whitened shape advanced and stretched a hand toward Cranston's arm. Suddenly sensing its approach, he turned with surprising speed and clamped a hand upon the visitant's forearm. Momentarily, Cranston had become The Shadow, both in speed of action and with the burning gaze that his eyes supplied.

Then, quite as quickly, he relapsed into the Cranston role. His clutch relaxed, his eyes became complacent. Indolently, Cranston produced a cigarette case and flipped it open, as he addressed the white-clad ka:

"You're nervous, Margo. Have a cigarette and chat a while. Then go back and get some sleep. You only have a few hours, you know."

Margo was wearing the brief Egyptian costume that marked her as a member of the Ammon Cult. White tunic and skirt had given her a ghostly appearance when she entered, and her own pallor was also noticeable. Gradually, her color returned, and she perched herself upon the stone base that supported the silent sphinx.

"I'm worried a lot, Lamont," Margo confessed. "That's why I can't sleep. I'm thinking of that temple murder. It boils down to one of three."

"One of three?" queried Cranston idly. "Of course! I mentioned the three myself: ran, khat, khaibet –"

"Don't joke, Lamont," interrupted Margo, pleadingly. "I'm sick of all that Egyptian hokum. You know the three I mean: Monak, Gorth and Ravion. One is in this business up to the hilt!"

"Up to a knife hilt," amplified Cranston, with a nod. "Whoever it is, we'll find him out, in time."

"It could be Monak," spoke Margo reflectively. "The way he popped that silly alibi about Ammon's wrath! But it might be Gorth. Look how quickly he snatched his opportunity to accuse Monak."

"Of course, Ravion claimed that the knife was thrown from outside the temple, and we've found out it wasn't, Lamont. Still, with Gorth accusing Monak, Ravion was just a bystander, and it would have been foolish for him to push a theory which might be disproven later."

Cranston tamped his cigarette against a flank of the squatting sphinx. He was intrigued by Margo's anxiety to rush a solution of Calbot's death. Usually, she left such things to Cranston. Therefore, there must be something else on Margo's mind, and, with the perspicacity of The Shadow, Cranston promptly analyzed it.

"You're worried because of what's coming," he said calmly. "Another ceremony is scheduled, and you will be present in the Ammon temple with a murderer –"

Pausing, Cranston watched Margo's nod; then picked up the theme again:

"A murderer who slew Calbot because he knew too much. You are wondering if he would do the same to you, should he realize that your testimony would place a new aspect on the case. He might try, Margo" –

TEMPLE OF CRIME

Cranston's eyes had the steady burn of The Shadow's – "but he will not succeed."

IT was all that Margo needed to know. Lamont had given her the assurance of The Shadow. His next suggestion was that she return to her room and get some sleep, which she did.

Indeed, it seemed a very short while until Margo heard a knock at her door from one of Monak's servants, summoning her to the ceremony.

The night was clear and the moonlight brilliant. Under the disk of Isis, figures, white-clad in robes and tunics, formed a clearly visible procession as they marched from the mansion, with Amru Monak at their head.

Looking back, Margo saw sleepy-eyed servants standing on the porch. Cranston was not among them. Ostensibly, he had retired for the night, and not being a member of the Ammon Cult, there was no reason why he should have risen at this early hour.

Nor were Cardona and the local deputies in sight. That, too, was understandable. They were on duty outside the great wall that surrounded the estate.

When the procession reached the grove, Margo noticed that the moonlight was strong enough to filter through the poplar boughs; but, if anything, that rendered the setting more uncanny. The very ground was blurred with silver, giving it a camouflage pattern that could be helpful to persons lurking among the trees.

Hakim and Eltab were with the procession, robed like the other Ammon cultists. They were carrying their torches, and flanking the column more widely than before. Each flambeau spread its glare in lurid, but wavery, fashion.

Hence, though it was plain that no intruders were close by, the phantom effect of the passing tree trunks was even more noticeable than on the preceding visit to the Ammon temple.

Margo's qualms faded when they reached the clearing. There, the moonlight rendered the setting so distinct that worry seemed preposterous. Then a new factor entered Margo's mind. Too much light wouldn't be helpful for The Shadow, should he be about.

Anxiously, Margo looked at faces of the other cult members, all plain in the moonlight, hoping to see Cranston's among them. It would be just like Lamont to acquire a robe and slide himself into the procession. But none of the faces was his.

Turning toward the temple, Monak began the very chant that he had used by daylight, as he strode toward the tight-shut doors. Other voices raised the words:

"Ammon meklet ran! Ammon meklet khat! Ammon meklet khaibet! Ammon meklet ran –"

It was like a roundelay, the same words oft repeated. Each time the chant came to "khaibet," Margo recalled the impression that the word had made upon her earlier. It would have intrigued her again, had she glanced behind her the third time the chant reached "khaibet."

From the very tree that had supposedly once held an assassin, a cloaked figure dropped lightly to the ground. No more than a swirl of blackness in the moonlight, it moved swiftly to the rear of the white-clad procession, arriving just as the marchers entered the opening temple doors.

TEMPLE OF CRIME

There, when the cloaked shape followed through the doorway, the darkness of the temple itself formed an engulfing factor. Literally, the black-clad figure was swallowed in a gloom that even the flickering torches could not dispel.

As if by design, the chant at that moment reached its climax, voices echoing loudly from the walls and roof of the atrium with their final theme:

"Amman meklet khaibet!"

Ammon was welcoming The Shadow. Hakim and Eltab had turned to close the temple doors, and the space between the glow of their torches made a narrow, blackened alley through which The Shadow flitted like a living ghost. The parade had reached the cella, and The Shadow was still with it.

When the Egyptian servants came in to place their torches in the stone wall brackets, they gained no sight of the cloaked intruder.

Close behind the half circle of cult members, The Shadow was lost in the shadows cast by the white-clad clan. A shadow in a shadow; life amid nothingness. An interpretation of the term khaibet that went beyond the traditions of ancient Egypt!

THERE was to be a preliminary ceremony upon this occasion, a tribute to the moon goddess, Isis. Hakim and Eltab were lighting fires in the great braziers that stood in the inner corners of the cells. A ruddy glow began to grow, until Monak, carrying an ancient urn, approached each brazier and flung a powdery substance upon the flames.

The odor of an exotic incense filled the cells. Flames were transformed to a whitish smoke, that spread throughout the inner room. An incense found in some ancient pyramid, the lapse of centuries had not impaired it. The fragrance was intoxicating, and when Monak spread his arms toward the moonlight that sliced through the cella, he seemed enveloped in a garb of clinging smoke.

He was speaking the praise of Isis, that listeners took for a new chant. Their voices joined it and the strange song swelled. They were turning, looking toward the moonlight, never noticing the black-clad figure of The Shadow as it faded toward a corner by a brazier, where thickened smoke had entirely replaced the flames.

Abruptly, Monak ended his chant with the name, "Isis!" which he repeated thrice. As if by magic, the swirling smoke began to lessen. The fading of the perfume gave the sharp tang of ozone to the fresh air that replaced it. Then Monak's arms spread wide; his voice, alone, was speaking, in a high-keyed pitch, as he proclaimed the names of other deities in the Egyptian pantheon:

"Sobk! Khum! Pakht! Set! Thoth!"

Monak's voice had the sharpness of stabs, with each name he uttered. Monosyllables, all, until his voice rose louder, in still greater appeal. Names echoed from the walls as though carved figures were pronouncing them.

"Hathor! Anubis!" Wild came the shrieks that responded. "Horus! Harpocrates!"

Somehow, all the names were echoing in many-tongued tumult. Like the other cult members, Margo followed the sweep of Monak's arms and looked from wall to wall. Mere wisps of vapor were clinging along them; the moonlight was clear again, but it was taking on a faint tinge of rosiness. Strange light, and in it, strange things happened.

TEMPLE OF CRIME

The figures on the walls began to move. Sobk, Khum, and all the rest, including Harpocrates, were turning their carved heads toward the amazed persons who watched them. Faces of birds and beasts were grimacing, and below them human arms were rising, as though these prodigies of living stone were about to step from the walls that held them and join the horrified company in their midst!

Shrieks came from cult members as they huddled. The screams were caught and amplified into the cries of birds, while basso voices became the bellows of beasts. Like Monak, the cultists were adding life to the grotesque monstrosities that surrounded them, increasing the illusion which had already taken on the full semblance of reality.

Never had Margo been so terrified, and her alarm was more than shared by others as they cringed to the floor of the temple, unable to shut their eyes against the horrendous advance of the fable throng. The light from the atrium was brighter; no longer mere moon glow, it showed streaks of dawn, which only added to the fearfulness of the scene.

Then Monak, triumphant, put an end to the horrifying medley. His tone was commanding, bringing eyes his way despite the fascination that the walls provided.

"Farewell to Isis!" pronounced Monak. "Her tribute has been given. The hour of Ammon is at hand!"

His sweeping arms were like gestures to the gods, and when Margo, like others, threw a fearful glance across her shoulder, she saw to her new astonishment that the graven figures had receded to the walls, to stand in simple bas-relief, stony under the growing light of dawn.

So shaky that she still had to crouch upon the floor, Margo looked toward Monak again. He was turning toward the throned figure of Ammon, whose ram's face wore a sculptured gloat, its eyes lighting under the touch of dawn.

"Let us hear the glorious voice of Ammon –"

Those words, from Monak, were a plea for the impossible. Ammon couldn't speak; of that, the sagging cult members were sure. Monak had pleaded once before and Ammon hadn't answered. At least, shattered nerves were to be saved from further fright. Such was the thought in every shaken mind, until –

It came. The voice of Ammon. A tone of timbre and proportions that no human tongue could match!

CHAPTER VIII. REIGN OF TUMULT

FEARFUL, powerful, the voice of Ammon was a mighty sigh that came from the statue itself. Gauged to the first flickers of dawn, it was the greeting to the dawn that Monak's teachings promised.

But such a greeting!

Though it could not have lasted more than a minute, the voice seemed endless. In that great sigh were mingled the elements of a wail, a groan, and finally a shout; yet all were so elusive as to pass exact description.

Certain it was that Ammon spoke with a mightiness that filled the temple, so that the voice, swelling beyond its confines, issued its tremendous tone out through the spaces that topped the atrium.

TEMPLE OF CRIME

Gaps that received the dawn for Ammon's stony eyes to see were also the apertures through which his hail of welcome could rise to the sun itself!

Such was the impression that the vast voice gave, and with the finish of its huge paean, the temple seemed to shudder from its own effort in transmitting the call to the world and sky beyond. Ammon had spoken, and the hush that followed was an outlandish aftermath to the incredible!

Then human tongues were loosed.

At first, the women were too frightened to scream. The voices that broke out belonged to men, and Margo, daring a frightened look, saw the tense faces of Basil Gorth and Jan Ravion. She couldn't choose between them; hence she was sure that both had yielded to the strain, though independently, for they were quite apart amid the throng. Gorth, who claimed belief in the existence of an ancient curse; Ravion, who declared that old inscriptions could hold the secrets of wonders unknown to the modern world. It was logical that they, more than any others, should have an overwhelming fear at hearing Ammon's voice.

To the rest, a strange unaccountable thing had happened, as weird as thunder from a dear blue sky. But to those two, it might hold a deeper meaning. They might have reason, one or both, to feel that the phenomenon was directed upon them; that they were creatures who had defied Ammon's wrath too far.

Whatever the case, each wanted to flee the temple. Separately, they spread their arms, trying to clear a path ahead – a path which, in each case, was directed Margo's way, for she was near the rear of the throng.

The efforts of Gorth and Ravion started a stampede. Other men were shouting wildly, and the women felt free to scream. The howls and shrieks that swept through the inner room were crazed enough to terrify still further the persons who delivered them.

Rooted in the mad throng's path, Margo saw Amru Monak springing from in front of the Ammon statue. His face was savage, but he seemed bent upon stopping the stampede, rather than becoming part of it. His glaring eyes met Margo's, the only eyes turned toward him. Margo felt that the fury registered on his face could be meant for her.

Perhaps Monak suspected that she had learned the basic fact of Calbot's murder. It might be that he mistakenly supposed that Margo was holding her ground through boldness, and not because she was actually in dread.

Others beside Monak could be similarly mistaken. His face, coming straight at Margo as he lunged into the stampeding herd of humans, was suddenly flanked by those of Gorth and Ravion.

Three men of conflicting interests, their features distorted by their own emotions, or by the streaks of dawn that flickered with the torchlight. The sense of menace overwhelmed Margo. One man was the menace – but which one?

She tried to turn, hoping that the stampede would carry her along. At that moment, in answer to the terrorized tumult within the temple, came sounds from outdoors: the burst of gunfire, issuing from the poplar grove!

THE human panic changed from a driving force to one that twisted like a writhing creature. Some of its component parts still preferred the outdoor air; others, alarmed by the shots, wanted to stay in the temple. Margo was caught in the center of the living maelstrom.

TEMPLE OF CRIME

Gasping, flinging her arms as the vortex swallowed her, she was between those three faces that formed the points of a revolving triangle: the faces of Monak, Gorth and Ravion!

All this while, the maddened horde of cultists had failed utterly to see a thing that should ordinarily have caused the greatest of wonder. Their oversight, however, was not surprising, considering that they had been watching sculptured figures come to life, and hearing a statue lift its great voice in proportion to the bulk of the mammoth stone from which it was hewn.

The thing that no one saw was a moving shape of blackness that had twisted from an obscure corner beside an extinguished brazier, the moment that the voice of Ammon ended its trumpeted sigh. That figure was The Shadow, an immobile form come truly to life. Foreseeing the riot that was due, he was on his way to stop it.

Skirting the stampede, The Shadow was lunging in from the connecting arch between the cella and the atrium, prepared to break the onrush by scattering its participants hit or miss. Otherwise, The Shadow was sure, there would be disaster when the maddened crowd piled up against the closed doors of the temple.

The gunfire outdoors averted the catastrophe before The Shadow could take a hand. Changing its path from a straight line to an eccentric circle, the mass of panic-stricken people was no longer in danger of a head-on crash.

But there was fresh danger for one member of that throng. One glimpse of Margo's horrified face was all The Shadow had; then she was gone. The lone glimpse was enough. The Shadow knew that Margo had betrayed herself to some deadly human foe.

The girl's frightened face disappeared in a sea of white robes; her hands gave their despairing wave and were gone, too. Other faces were out of sight, and bodies blocked what light the torches gave.

To tear through to the core of that human whirlpool was impossible at mere moment's notice. Nor was the coming menace the sort that would wait. Halted, his hand beneath his cloak, The Shadow saw a murder threat rear itself amid the gyrating mass of white.

Glittering bronze reflected the flicker of the torches. The bronze of a burnished blade that matched the knife that had delivered death to Calbot. A clutching hand accompanied the broad-bladed weapon, and with it, The Shadow saw the white sleeve of a robe that gave a sideward swing.

A black sleeve was whipping sideward, too. It belonged to The Shadow's cloak. His hand accompanied it, and in his fist The Shadow clutched a weapon as potent as the bronze blade. His weapon was an automatic, suited for long-range stabs, whereas the knife was limited to short.

Stopping as if jolted, The Shadow's .45 blasted out under the squeeze of his trained trigger finger.

The jab from the gun muzzle wasn't intended for the arm within the white sleeve, nor even for the hand that emerged from the robe folds. Such targets were tricky, considering that the assassin was caught in the human swirl. The Shadow aimed for the real instrument of death, the knife itself, for he knew that its position would not waver.

The gun spurt tongued straight for its mark, ringing the bullet home. There was a clang as the poised knife wrenched itself from its owner's hand. The power of the bullet's impact, squarely against the broad side of the blade, was too much for a human grip to counteract.

TEMPLE OF CRIME

SOUND of a gunshot so close by broke the whirl of humanity. People flung themselves toward the walls; others, suddenly untangled, thought of the temple doors.

Springing through that broken field, The Shadow caught a slumping form that almost toppled into his arms, and brought Margo Lane to her feet.

In kaleidoscopic flashes, Margo had seen the knife arrive and disappear while she was helplessly wedged in the jamming crowd. Suddenly released, she'd gone limp from the strain. Faces had vanished, too, gone with the throng, by the time Margo found herself in The Shadow's rescuing clasp.

There were more shots from outdoors, a louder volley than the first. Hearing them, Margo stiffened and found her footing. Releasing her, The Shadow swung about; gun still in hand, he darted after the scattered, white-robed men who were nearing the temple doors.

Those shots outside were delivered by a crew of half a dozen men who had issued from the poplars in a rush. They were firing in air, demanding entry into the temple, and it was given them as they approached.

Untouched by a single human hand, the temple doors swung inward, as they had at Monak's chant. Parting, the barriers flung themselves into the faces of the astonished cult members, who fell back in new commotion.

Two of the robed men held their ground as the others drew back. Those two were Gorth and Ravion, but they did not retain their stance. Jarred apart by a man who drove between them, they saw Monak hurl himself out through the doorway, brandishing a weapon of bronze.

A bronze weapon, but not a knife. Monak was carrying the urn from which he had sprinkled incense on the braziers. It had a rounded pedestal that just fitted his gripping fist, and he swung it for the head of the front man in the ranks of armed invaders. At the same moment, Monak shouted for his followers to attack the others.

Two factions surged, to make a battleground of the space where Monak sought to bash the head of an antagonist who was making efforts to use a revolver. Before the rival groups could lock, The Shadow came sweeping from the temple and launched himself upon Monak and the man with the gun.

Cult members must have mistaken The Shadow for a creature from the temple wall; his laugh, weird in tone, was like an echo of Ammon's great-voiced greeting to the dawn. For they saw him, heard him, and no more. By the swiftness of his fling, the spin of flaying arms that accompanied it, The Shadow sent two stragglers sprawling.

Amru Monak, the urn gone from his hand, was seated on the ground looking at Joe Cardona, whose fingers were clutching for a gun that they no longer held.

The supposed invaders of the temple were actually representatives of the law. Cardona and the local deputies had moved into the grove after the procession passed that way. The tumult within the temple had brought them on the run, but their misguided attempt at rescue had threatened a catastrophe when Monak mistook them for marauders.

Swift efforts by The Shadow were the factor that prevented slaughter that would surely have resulted, had Cardona's crew tangled with Monak's fanatics. With the leaders no longer tussling, the danger of strife was past.

A streak of blackness blending into the gloom of the poplar grove; such was The Shadow.

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Two men glimpsed his speedy departure. Coming from the temple doorway, bringing the extinguished torches, Hakim and Eltab raised their former battle cry:

"Khaibet! Khaibet!"

Cardona didn't realize that the Egyptians were shouting something about The Shadow. In fact, Joe hadn't seen The Shadow; he was still wondering how Monak had managed to sock him with the urn without him feeling it.

Cardona recognized that people were out of the temple, still alive, and that something had gone into the trees, with Hakim and Eltab in pursuit. To join the chase was logical, particularly as it would forestall any chance of ill feeling between the deputies and the cult members.

Finding his gun, Cardona made for the grove, beckoning the deputies along. Immediately, the expected chase changed into something quite the opposite.

Guns spoke from deep in the grove, and Cardona heard the hail of slugs against tree trunks and amid branches. Coming into the grove's gloom from the clearing, Cardona and his men were making targets of themselves; but fortunately, the first barrage was distant. Taking to shelter, the deputies were shooting back at unknown foemen, when the laugh came.

With the laugh, bullets.

FOR the first time, Cardona realized that The Shadow must be in it. But why was he opening fire? For only one reason: to draw shots in a new direction – and the deputies were taking that bait.

Cardona couldn't understand The Shadow's policy, for, from the flank, those unknown foemen were advancing through the trees, while the deputies were attracted elsewhere.

Then the evasive laugh was gone. A tumult rose from the other flank. The Shadow had skirted around and was dispersing the men who had started the first fusillade!

Again, the laugh. It told what was happening. With deputies at his heels, Cardona led a charge, telling his men to hold their fire, which was scarcely necessary, for they'd peppered away all the bullets they had left in their guns.

Again, The Shadow's wisdom prevailed.

Reaching the men who scattered, Cardona found them to be Monak's servants; not marauders from outside the grounds. They'd come with rifles and shotguns when they heard shooting at the temple.

It all sounded very nice, but Cardona wasn't so sure that it really was. He gave Monak a suspicious look when the robed Egyptian showed up, a flock of cult members with him.

If it hadn't been for The Shadow, who was gone again, Monak's servants might have made mincemeat of the deputies, though those same servants had proved themselves rather weak when it came to dealing with real marauders during a previous encounter in the grove.

Still, Cardona had to admit that mistakes could happen. He'd made one himself, back by the temple.

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Under the full dawn, the Ammon temple at that moment appeared quite deserted, until a lone figure stole from it. Warily, Margo Lane was leaving the portals, wondering if some new menace lurked outside. She looked toward the whispering poplars; then turned at sound of a different whisper beside her.

The Shadow's whisper.

He had come from a corner of the temple, to tell her that all was well. Men were coming from the grove and The Shadow could hear Cardona's voice among them. Margo's game was to forget the knife thrust that had missed her; to act as though she had not seen what happened.

A murderer had almost revealed his hand; not quite. Hidden in the sleeve of a white robe, the hand had been invisible; its actions, its purposes, had not been, however. Whose hand it was, The Shadow would learn, along with the riddles surrounding the Temple of Ammon.

Such at least, was Margo's full belief, as she saw her black-cloaked friend merge with the gloom of the grove and heard the rustle of the poplars absorb the fading traces of his low-toned parting laugh.

When The Shadow uttered that significant mirth, men of crime had cause to tremble, like the poplar leaves. Though mystery surrounded Ammon and his temple, that same mystery shrouded The Shadow.

Like the voice of Ammon, the laugh of The Shadow would fling terror among those who heard it, when the right time came.

CHAPTER IX. THE BOOK OF THOTH

THE bronze knife lay on the desk in Monak's study, alongside its twin. Cardona studied both blades with a glower; then turned to Monak, who was watching him narrowly. Gorth and Ravion, staunch members of the Ammon Cult, were also standing by, while Cranston and Margo were added witnesses to the scene.

"I want to look at those temple plans," declared Cardona. "I still think they can answer something we want to know."

Obligingly, Monak produced the plans. In them, each stone that formed the temple was numbered, even to the tiles that formed the front slab of the Ammon pedestal. The great stone statue itself was sectional, each portion marked on the chart.

The only thing odd about the diagram was the irregularity of its numbering. A dozen or more blocks, all on the same wall, would run in strict rotation; then there might be a leap of fifty numbers before the next progression began. The missing numbers, however, were always found in some other portion of the plan.

Pointing out that feature to Monak, Cardona demanded:

"How do you account for it?"

Monak shrugged. He had purchased the temple, plan and all, and had assigned workmen to reconstruct it. Every part had gone perfectly into place, with no complaints. Therefore, the irregularity of the numbering was nothing of consequence, in Monak's estimate.

Cardona turned to Ravion.

"Maybe it's in your line, professor. You like to puzzle out inscriptions."

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"Only when they involve ancient languages," returned Ravion. He eyed the chart through his beribboned spectacles. "This is a matter of architecture, inspector. I have no explanation for it."

All the while, Gorth had been attentive, a whimsical smile upon his usually stern lips.

"I can solve it for you," Gorth volunteered. "It concerns an archaeologist, not an architect. I was present, in Egypt, when Dr. Sterber, leader of the Keldon expedition, demolished the Ammon temple. His process was quite simple.

"Sterber merely drew a rough outline of each wall, the floor, and the ceiling. He marked in every block, and, as each was removed, it was tabbed with a number, which was also registered on the chart. At times, he numbered the blocks before they were removed, because there were many workmen on the job."

Approaching the desk, Gorth demonstrated the system by reference to the chart itself.

"For instance," he said, "Sterber would order two men to remove this batch of blocks; then he would step over here" – he moved his hand across the chart – "and assign a similar job to two other workers. If Sterber happened to be called away, he would leave the numbering to someone else."

Cardona grunted that it was a funny way to do things. Gorth gave him a cold stare.

"Take a temple apart for yourself," suggested Gorth. "You'll find it isn't so easy. Too many blocks couldn't be taken in one group, or the rest of the wall, and perhaps the ceiling, would come down of its own accord."

"Answer this, then," snapped Cardona. "Some of these numbers run from bottom to top. What did Sterber do – have the bottom blocks taken out first?"

Gorth laughed.

"The men who did the numbering were of various nationalities," he said. "Egyptians, Arabs, even some Chinese. Some races, inspector, do their writing from right to left; others from bottom to top. It didn't matter to Sterber, so long as every block was properly located."

ABOUT the only portion of the chart that showed any inclination toward regularity was the base of the pedestal that supported the Ammon throne. It had twenty-four slabs of tiles, six wide and four deep, and they were arranged in little groups of four squares. One and two were top left; beneath them, three and four. Next came five and six, top center, with seven and eight underneath. The four-square rule applied throughout.

Cardona stepped to the study door and called in a pair of sleepy deputies who were lounging outside. They had helped assemble the temple, and they nodded when they saw the chart. It hadn't given them the slightest trouble.

"I'll say those blocks fitted," announced one. "They're fitted with stone dowel pins that go into holes in the blocks below. They went together like a jigsaw puzzle, only there wasn't any puzzle to it."

"I worked on the floor," the other man declared. "Its stones are tongued and grooved. That's something, I'll say. Big flat slabs that had to be slid into place from the ends, they fitted so clean."

Cardona folded the chart and laid it aside. He studied a general-plan sheet of the temple, and his eyes lighted.

"What's this, Monak?"

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Cardona was pointing to a hollow chamber, set half below the temple floor, half above. The reason that it came above was because it lay under the pedestal that supported the Ammon throne. The front of the pedestal made one wall of the small room; the back of the temple, another. The side walls of the little chamber were the foundations of the niche called the apsis.

"They call that the adytum," explained Monak. "Most ancient temples had them."

"Why?"

"Because they couldn't help it, I suppose," returned Monak. "The statues had to be elevated, and there wasn't any use filling the space beneath with a lot of extra stone."

"This goes below the level of the temple floor," argued Cardona. "Why was that, Monak?"

"I suppose because the floor was elevated, too," replied Monak wearily. "Ask Gorth, or Ravion. I'm not interested in the construction of temples. My specialty is ancient rituals. Besides, you've been asking questions all day and I'm tired of trying to answer them."

It was Gorth, again, who had an answer for Cardona's query.

"This particular adytum," stated Gorth, "had a special purpose. It was the tomb of Mathrax, the keeper of the temple. We found his mummy in the adytum."

Cardona's interest was roused. He wanted to hear more about Mathrax.

"Monak has the mummy case," continued Gorth. "It's in the sphinx room. But it contains no mummy. The body of Mathrax was stolen."

"Before you opened the temple?" Cardona queried.

"No," replied Gorth. "Afterward. We shipped the mummy case separately, and when it reached New York, it was empty."

"And who took the mummy?" Gorth didn't know, and said so. Sterber had opened the mummy case, Gorth declared, and had therewith ruined the ancient clamp that sealed it. His action hadn't pleased some of the natives who were with the expedition. It might have been they who had stolen the mummy, either to put the blame on Sterber, or to confound him by its disappearance.

In any event, the disappearance of the mummy had been connected with the ancient curse, if curse there was. The fact was that Sterber had died soon after delivering his precious temple to its new owner, wealthy Uriah Keldon.

CARDONA decided to look at the mummy case later. For the present, his interest centered on the bronze knives. He picked up each in turn.

"This one," declared Cardona, "was tossed into the temple so neatly that it picked off Calbot. We found its mate lying by the Ammon statue, after everyone stampeded from the temple. Maybe someone chucked it from the tree outside." He gave a sharp look at Monak. "But there's a chance that someone didn't. A good chance, I'd say."

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"Whoever smuggled this dirk along with him was out to kill, and probably thought the old alibi would serve him. This knife isn't listed in your collection, Monak, but you can't deny that it might belong there. Whoever stole the first knife might have taken the second, too."

Monak made no effort to dispute Cardona's charge. He had already insisted that he knew nothing about the mysterious blade. So Cardona took advantage of Monak's silence.

"I'm not going to close the temple," asserted Cardona bluntly. "I'm asking you to do it, Monak, for your own protection. One knife found its mark; the second missed. Maybe a third would land again, like the first did. If you'd prefer to take the risk –"

It was totally unnecessary to carry the argument further. Monak's whole pose told that he was completely resigned to the closing of the temple. But he made it plain that it was not the interests of public safety that urged him to accept Cardona's edict.

Monak was simply disappointed in the members of the Ammon Cult.

"They are mere neophytes," he declared. "Unable to appreciate the mysteries of the temple, they cowered when Sobk, Anubis, and the rest came to life during the rites of Isis. Picture it, those powers of ancient Egypt rising from stone after many centuries, to show their appreciation of people who could not understand!"

"Then, greatest of all, Ammon spoke! Better it would have been had eyes been blind and ears deaf! Then no one would have cowered at sight of the lesser gods, nor fled at the call of Ammon–Ra!"

Monak's eyes, staring far away as though shredding the veil of the past, became suddenly mild as he added: "Certainly I shall close the temple, at least until my followers have become more tutored in the mysteries of the past."

The group left for the sphinx room so that Cardona could see the mummy case that had once been in the adytum of the Ammon temple. On the way, Margo Lane felt the grip of a hand that stole out from nowhere and drew her back.

She wasn't startled; she was getting used to such occurrences. Drawn into an alcove behind a huge vase, she expected to see Lamont Cranston, and did.

"We're going to the library," said Cranston. "The evening is early, and we may have time to look into some vital matters."

Margo couldn't understand how a visit to the library would help. When they reached the room and sat down at a table near one of the many book-lined alcoves, Margo began to undertone something that had been worrying her all day.

"I don't know who drew the knife," she asserted. "It was all so rapid, so blurred, and – so terrible! I can't understand why Inspector Cardona was unable to find fingerprints upon either that knife or the one that killed Calbot."

Cranston returned a knowing gaze.

"Our man is ingenious," he stated. "He used his white robe to good advantage. He clutched the knife handle through the sleeve. A simple process that eliminated fingerprints."

"Then Monak is our man!" exclaimed Margo. "The robes were his idea!"

"For ceremonies, yes; but not necessarily for murder. We shall need stronger evidence to pin the blame on Monak."

Margo's mind flashed back to something.

"When Calbot died," she recalled, "Ravion started to draw the knife from his body, to illustrate how it could have come from beyond the atrium. It occurred to me, a while ago, that Ravion might have done that to smudge the handprints, or at least to explain his own, if they were found there. But it wouldn't have been necessary, would it, Lamont?"

"I mean this: from what you have learned, Ravion's action points against him being the murderer, instead of incriminating him. If Ravion had killed Calbot, he could have left the knife untouched, and probably would have!"

CRANSTON'S eyes showed admiration. Margo was progressing nicely in the field of criminal investigation, even though her study of Egyptian ceremonies was not up to par. However, Cranston's tone, unlike his eyes, carried a note of disapproval.

"You should have remembered this earlier, Margo," he said. "Had I studied this theory of elimination, as it concerned Ravion, it might have given us less persons to watch. However, I think we can include Ravion in our analysis."

The crux, of course, was Calbot's death. The dead man had known too much about the Ammon temple and the plan that some person – or persons – held concerning it. The thrust at Margo was merely a follow-up to Calbot's murder. The killer had decided that Margo's testimony, once given, should stand; and had suspected that she might intend to change it.

"If Monak killed Calbot," stated Cranston, "he was depending on a very bizarre alibi. He was ready to lay it to the wrath of Ammon. A very flimsy alibi, at the time, because Ammon did not speak, as Monak expected. Suppose, Margo, that you had heard the voice of Ammon, instead of a woman's shriek –"

Margo interrupted with a shudder. Mere mention of Ammon's great cry worried her. However, she finished with a nod. As Cranston, The Shadow had struck home a vital point. Had the first dawn's ritual been as phenomenal as the one that occurred on the second visit to the temple, people would probably have sworn that Ammon, himself, produced the knife and drove it into Calbot's back.

"Of course, this brings us to another matter," added Cranston. "The fight in the grove. We would have to presume that Monak's servants played both parts, of hunter and hunted. Or that marauders, whoever they were, had been secretly hired by Monak."

Briefly, Cranston seemed to ponder. Then:

"Consider Gorth," he suggested. "He was prompt to pin the blame of Calbot's death on Monak. Why? I think I have an answer. Gorth might have known that there were intruders in the grove, and therefore wished to keep all suspicion centered in the temple."

Margo's eyes went very large.

"You mean that those men were actual invaders, Lamont? That they were working for Gorth?"

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A slow nod from Cranston.

"Such could have been the case," he declared. "Monak may have suspected such invaders, for his servants were close. Still, Monak couldn't have been too sure of it, for his servants were too surprised to prevent the flight of the invading crew."

The thing was shaping in Margo's mind. Monak and Gorth, a rivalry between them, with Calbot somehow involved and therefore a bone of contention. It began to sound quite plausible, allowing for further development. But Margo didn't expect the amplification that Cranston promptly gave it.

"Neat work on Gorth's part," mused Cranston. "Only one thing spoiled it. Ravion sprang his idea that the knife had come through a hole near the roof of the atrium."

"I thought we'd eliminated Ravion," said Margo, with a puzzled frown. "But even if we haven't, he didn't need an alibi; not while Gorth was so soundly accusing Monak."

"Ravion wasn't concerned with an alibi, Margo. He might have been thinking of the men in the grove."

"You mean –"

"I mean that Ravion could have known that Gorth had men at hand, and also known why they had come. By starting a rush outside to look for an imaginary assassin, Ravion had his chance to scatter Gorth's crew. They did scatter, Margo – as I remember it."

There was a whimsical touch to the final words: Cranston's reference to the part he had played as The Shadow. But Margo didn't notice it. She had another query, a very serious one:

"Where does this all lead us, Lamont?"

The answer was as prompt as the query.

"To the temple," Cranston declared. "It is the source of all the trouble. We must delve into its mysteries and the details of its past. There is no need, however, to visit the temple at present. We shall begin our investigation right here."

HE stepped into an alcove, reached to a high shelf, and brought down a book that lay there. It was bound in heavy leather, and its pages, when Cranston opened them, proved to be parchment, much like vellum. But Margo was chiefly intrigued by the leather cover and the gold decorations that adorned it.

The huge book was bordered with the pattern of an Egyptian frieze; stamped in its very center was the figure of a creature human of body, but with the long-billed face of a bird.

Recalling the happenings in the temple, Margo felt a bit of horror when she recognized the man-bird as one of the very gods that had turned from stone to life. She was wondering who the creature was, when Cranston named him in mentioning the volume.

"This is the Book of Thoth," Cranston declared calmly. "It contains the hidden secrets of the past. It is death for anyone uninitiated in the ancient rituals to read its esoteric pages. Therein lie keys to things unknown, provided one has the knowledge to use them. Horrible things have happened to those who violate the Book of Thoth."

So solemn, so impressive, was Cranston's speech, that Margo felt new perturbation. Then, in the same tone, he added:

"Close the door. Margo. I am about to take the risk. I should like to have something horrible come my way."

It was as though Cranston had defied all the powers of the past, yet Margo's fear vanished when he spoke. Not because of his words, but the tone that followed them.

Cranston's final sentence ended with the whispered laugh of The Shadow!

CHAPTER X. WITHOUT A TRACE

AS Margo Lane closed the library door, she took a look along the hall and saw that it was quite empty. Then, the door shut, she turned toward the table at the entrance to the corner alcove. Looking past her friend, Lamont Cranston, she realized how he had discovered the Book of Thoth.

From this angle, one was able to look at the higher shelves of the alcove. Though Margo couldn't quite see the spot where the leather-bound book had been lying on its side, she realized that Cranston, taller than she was, had been able to spy the volume. Placed carefully where people would not be apt to find it, the Book of Thoth had naturally roused his curiosity.

Margo felt very tense. She wasn't worried about unseen forces, for the present. She was wondering what would happen if Monak came to the library and found Cranston poring over the secret volume.

She could still picture Monak as a murderer, though she had transferred much of her suspicion to Gorth. Monak's servants were quite as formidable a crew as Gorth's men of the grove – if the latter band really belonged to Gorth.

It could readily be that Gorth feared Monak, and had therefore ordered men to be on hand in case of trouble. Perhaps Gorth had foreseen murder and feared that he, not Calbot, would be the victim. Margo was just beginning to think of Ravion's possible reactions to such a setup, when Cranston's quiet tone ended her reflections.

"Sit here, Margo." He gestured to the chair beside him. "Be ready to take over if anyone comes."

"To take over?"

"Yes." Cranston spoke with the slightest of smiles. "You see, you are a member of the Ammon Cult, whereas I am not. You, at least, have a right to open the Book of Thoth. Should the door open, I can step into the alcove and leave you with the book."

Margo looked at the alcove. Its depths were dark, though she could make out the forms of tall books along its high two-foot shelves. The only trouble with the alcove was that there was no way out of it. The same was true of the other alcoves; they were like cells, with books for walls, each with an opening that served as doorway.

A curious prison, with its rooms of books! A prison, indeed, considering that all the volumes of this library dealt with occult and metaphysical subjects. Whoever entered any of those alcoves and began to delve, would become a captive of his own intense imagination, under the stimulation of the literature at hand.

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Watching Cranston turn the pages of the Book of Thoth, Margo saw that they were inscribed in Greek. Probably this was a translation of the earlier Egyptian. Whatever the case, Cranston was having no trouble with the text. However, he was referring quite frequently to illustrations which showed pictures of temples. He pointed one out to Margo.

"Interesting, this," he stated. "A temple that opens its doors when a fire is kindled on a pedestal in front of it."

Margo asked if the book explained the mystery.

"It gives a few hints," replied Cranston. "I happen to know the real secret. Hero of Alexandria explained it in his treatise on pneumatics. The fire heats the air within the pedestal, exerting pressure on a sphere of water, which siphons off its contents and operates hidden pulleys."

"Then, the doors of the Ammon temple –"

"Do not come into this category," Cranston interposed. "No fire was kindled in front of them, nor do the plans of the temple allow for pipes and pulleys."

He turned to another page.

"A simpler adaptation of the pneumatic principle," he stated, "also explained by Hero. Statues pour libations upon a fire kindled on an altar. The pedestal is hollow; the heated air, expanding, pushes wine up through tubes within the statues and the liquid pours from vases in their hands."

"They seem to go in for hollow pedestals," remarked Margo, "and there is one on the Ammon temple."

Cranston gave a casual nod. He was more interested in a page that showed a vast statue, some sixty feet in height, that sat alone, with a small temple in the background.

"The statue of Memnon," he said. "Situated near Thebes, It greeted the dawn, as Ammon does. The Emperor Hadrian heard its voice on a visit to Egypt. We are getting somewhere, Margo. There are several explanations of the Memnon story, and I believe I can choose the right one by applying the case to Ammon–Ra, the ram–faced dweller in the temple that Monak reconstructed."

LIFTING his head slightly, Cranston looked toward the door and took on a listening expression. Gesturing for Margo to keep on the alert, he reverted to the Book of Thoth. It was quite a while before he spoke again. Then:

"This is interesting," he said. "A temple where the worshipers approach singing, and their leader struck the ground with his staff. Whereupon –"

"The doors opened!" exclaimed Margo. "Wasn't that it?"

"Not in this case," smiled Cranston. "When the ground was struck, it quaked. I've read elsewhere of the same thing. The Greeks had such a temple in Cappadocia. They must have borrowed the idea from the Egyptians."

Cranston sat a while in reflection.

"We're getting nearer home," he declared. "I've looked into these subjects before, but I'm getting new highlights from the Book of Thoth. For example: I'd read of a temple that contained a stone from which the gods rose. A very sketchy statement, which the author did not clarify. This book, however" – he turned back

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several pages – "shows a picture of such a stone. You will notice that it is engraved with figures."

"Like the wall in the Ammon temple!" exclaimed Margo. "Where the carvings came to life!"

"Yes, and there are braziers in this illustration, too. Now, for the next link –"

He was whipping through the pages rapidly. He stopped upon one that showed the entrance to a grotto.

"An ancient oracle," said Cranston. "Like the one the Greeks had at Delphos. Each oracle had a woman called the 'pythoness,' who saw strange things and babbled of them."

"Fakery, of course –"

"Not all fakery, Margo. I think it was Salverte who told of the time when skeptics entered the grotto with torches, and were blasted from the place. You see, the grotto dribbled a natural gas that made the pythoness woozy, which is why she saw things. When the men went in with torches, they ignited the gas and blew themselves right out of existence.

"Of course, the wrath of the gods was accepted as the proper explanation. It always was, in those times. But while we're on oracles, Margo, here is a neat one. It was in the floating temple on the Nile, an edifice that Herodotus mentions. Of course, the temple didn't float. It was on a little island that submerged a few feet when the river flooded.

"However, in the floating temple, as we shall call it, the pythoness gave utterances whenever incense burned. She called on Sobk, Pakht, Hathor, and the rest of them, like we heard Monak do. Sometimes" – Cranston was referring to a paragraph in the book – "those allowed within the temple saw the gods respond."

Before Margo could express an opinion, Cranston indicated the door, reminding her that she was still on guard duty. He went through the Book of Thoth again, and finally gave a satisfied chuckle. He called Margo's attention to another illustration.

"The last link," Cranston declared. "The statue of Isis, that revealed itself from within a temple wall when a gong was struck at twilight. Notice the wall, how it hinges inward."

Cranston closed the Book of Thoth and gave way to a final reflection.

"I thought at first," he said, "that the space beneath the Ammon statue might have a secret entrance through the rear of the temple. The Greeks and Romans always used the adytum as a clever way in and out. But the fact that the mummy of Mathrax was placed there would mean that it was permanently closed.

"The men who put the temple together spoke of dowels in the stones, which proves the wall is solid, for they would have noted any blocks that differed. The Temple of Ammon is remarkable in that it reveals no trickery; yet strange things happen within its walls. I have an idea that the Greeks and Romans misunderstood the methods of the Egyptians, by suspecting fakery, and copying it, though it did not exist."

RISING, Cranston took a single step toward the door of the library; then wheeled so suddenly that Margo blinked. With a single swoop, he turned her to the Book of Thoth and opened it to a random page. Twisting past the table, he was gone into the alcove before Margo realized that someone had approached the library door.

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The girl turned as the door opened. Amru Monak was on the threshold. He stepped stiffly into the room, and his eyes glinted darkly when he saw the book that lay in front of Margo.

Stepping forward, he reached the table; there, Monak shut the book with a heavy thud as he demanded, his tone for once quite harsh:

"Where did you find this?"

"On a high shelf," replied Margo. "It looked so interesting –"

"You read Greek?"

Margo shook her head. She'd been about to put the book away for that very reason, so she claimed. Monak's manner smoothed. He turned toward the door and called:

"Hakim!"

Instead of Hakim, it was Eltab who appeared. Monak handed the great book to the servant, told him to replace it on the proper shelf. Monak was watching Margo as Eltab stepped into the alcove. Despite herself, Margo couldn't cover her anxiety.

"The Book of Thoth is deep reading for a tyro," Monak told Margo, solemnly. "Serious things have happened to those who explore its pages without permission. They are apt to see strange sights without the need of a temple ritual.

"Weird beings creep into their lives; creatures that they cannot control. Should such experiences grip you, I advise you to inform me immediately. Without my aid, you will be helpless. Beings from another sphere, beneficent to those who know how to greet them, may appear to you as fearful monstrosities."

Despite herself, Margo was impressed by Monak's harangue. She folded her arms and gripped them tightly with her fingers, to hold off the shivers. Monak gloated at the success of the "sales talk," he had delivered in such serious fashion. Then:

"Should someone not connected with our cult open the Book of Thoth" – Monak's tone was coming with a warning hiss – "it would mean death to him, or worse! Death, perhaps, from a human hand like mine" – Margo noted that Monak's hand had slid into a fold of his robe – "under the direction of Thoth himself!

"Or, perhaps" – Monak's face relaxed, though his hand did not – "Thoth himself would remove so impious a person from our midst, and sentence him to torture away from this mundane sphere. Thoth, who moves among us as a mortal, but whose head, that of the ibis, marks him as a dweller in a loftier realm."

Eltab was stepping from the alcove, which he had entered only a short way, to put back the Book of Thoth where it belonged. Margo knew that Cranston had gone clear to the alcove's depth, where he could not be seen, particularly by Eltab, whose back had been turned toward the darkened hiding place. But Margo's expression of relief made Monak decide that someone was in the alcove.

Monak was thinking of Cranston, when he spoke to Eltab:

"Throw a light into the alcove. We must make sure that it is empty. Strange things may happen when someone" – he laid his hand on Margo's shoulder – "opens the Book of Thoth without my permission."

Margo came half to her feet, and at that, Monak's grip tightened. He was drawing her in front of him, like a shield, as he faced the alcove, and his other hand was still hidden in the fold of his robe. Nor was Monak the only threat turned Cranston's way.

Eltab had found a light on the end of a long extension cord, and was turning it into the alcove. Like Monak, Eltab had his other hand close to his robe, as though ready to produce a weapon. Monak was thrusting Margo forward, stating that she should be the first to see; and Eltab, like his master, was letting the girl become a human shield.

IT was a predicament for Cranston; one that Margo herself had caused. She tried to find words to gasp to Monak; something that would stop him before he saw Cranston, trapped in the book-walled cell that had no outlet.

Before Margo could think of anything to say, Eltab poked the light across her shoulder, throwing the glare into the alcove.

Margo's gasp came – without words.

Never had she felt such a mingling of relief and horror. Relief, because a disaster had been stemmed; horror, because she already half believed Monak's claim of what could happen to unwary persons who tampered with the Book of Thoth.

Margo had expected that Cranston might become The Shadow. He had done more. A feeling of the sheer incredible overwhelmed Margo Lane as she peered into the confines of the alcove, that were revealed, to the last detail, in a glare of brilliant light.

Lamont Cranston, otherwise The Shadow, had disappeared without a trace, as utterly as if the ibis-headed Thoth had acted at the word of Amru Monak and spirited an unwary intruder into some unknown domain!

CHAPTER XI. THE CROCODILE GOD

A MENTAL daze gripped Margo Lane. She'd heard of enough strange things to render her bewildered. The findings that Lamont Cranston had learned from the Book of Thoth were, in themselves, startling. His talk of quaking earth, of babbling pythonesses, of statues that revealed themselves in temple walls, had been enough to stir her imagination to the utmost.

Then came Amru Monak with his words of warning concerning the ways of Thoth; stuff that Margo wouldn't have believed a few days ago, but which was sharply real after the things she had seen in the Temple of Ammon. Monak had spoken more truly than he might have realized, when he declared that persons could disappear after delving into the Book of Thoth.

For Lamont Cranston was gone, like The Shadow that he was, under circumstances that left no solution.

Had Margo, alone, peered into the alcove, she might have decided that Cranston had found a secret outlet. But in company with Monak and his servant, Eltab, such an opinion could not count. They, of all persons, would know if the high bookshelves, reaching to the ceiling, were hinged like doors to furnish outlet through the wall.

Evidently, nothing was wrong with the bookcases, for Monak and his servant accepted the alcove as empty, after they had thoroughly inspected it. Monak turned, to observe Margo's stare.

"If you have seen something," he said, in a tone that actually seemed to carry concern, "you must tell me. I am not anxious that you should gain the gift of supernatural vision too soon for your own good."

Margo couldn't announce that the reason for her amazed stare was the fact that she had seen nothing. Those walls of tall books nonplused her. Nowhere were they obscured by a swirl of living darkness that might have been The Shadow.

Did he have the ability actually to disappear?

With anyone else, Margo would have believed that Thoth had actually carried away an intruder, but she had seen Cranston perform remarkable feats before, when given opportunity to first become The Shadow. Having been in the library earlier, he could have parked his black cloak and hat in the alcove.

Often, Lamont had claimed knowledge of the Tibetan system wherein, by becoming immobile and rendering one's thoughts a blank, a human being could put himself out of other minds and often escape notice of passers-by.

Such was the art of disappearance, as they did it in Tibet, but usually more space was required. What might happen in the fastnesses of the Himalaya Mountains could hardly be duplicated in a library alcove that lacked elbow room.

Besides, Margo had been thinking of Cranston, or The Shadow, yet she saw neither!

It was noteworthy, how thoughtful Monak had suddenly become. His gripping hand had lost its firmness and was gently easing Margo from the alcove. His other hand had lifted from the robe and showed no sign of a hidden weapon. Monak was bowing in profound Egyptian style, and so was Eltab, who looked equally innocent. They watched Margo snap from her dreamy pose.

"All is well, Eltab," said Monak, his tone quite pleased. "But we must lock the library to make sure that no one else enters."

"Hakim has the keys, effendi," reminded Eltab. "I do not know where he has gone."

"We can wait until he returns. Hakim is seldom absent long. Send him to my study if you see him."

"Yes, effendi."

Was it imagination, or did Margo view blackness near the door of the library? She was looking that way while Monak and Eltab were in parley, and for a moment fancied that something had performed a swirling glide close by the door. Then, as if recovering from a dizzy spell, Margo felt her vision clear.

She saw the door, quite shut, though she did receive the brief impression that the knob was turning, as though someone had released it from the other side.

Could it have been The Shadow?

If so, he must have glided right through Margo, Monak, and Eltab, for they had been blocking the only opening from the alcove where Cranston last had gone!

Monak was turning toward the door, bowing Margo along. The sharp-eyed Egyptian failed to observe the odd thing Margo had noticed. As they neared the door, someone knocked from the other side. Monak paused,

told Eltab to answer it.

The servant opened the door, and Margo stiffened with another shock, though her companions did not share it.

In the hallway stood Lamont Cranston!

CALM as ever, he gazed toward Margo, and her amazed expression relaxed into a glad smile. Of course, neither Monak nor Eltab were at all astonished, for they hadn't an idea that Cranston had slid into the alcove on the far side of the room just before they entered.

There was something of the quizzical in Monak's expression, however, but Cranston promptly ended it.

"I'm leaving you, Monak," he said. "Inspector Cardona is going to drive me over to the station. I've found my visit useless. I can never convince Margo to leave the Ammon Cult. Her thirst for Egyptian lore is too great."

Margo gave the smile that she had learned by imitating the face of Monak's sphinx. Then, in condescending tone:

"I shall see you to the car, Lamont," she said. "I am glad that you are honest enough to admit your failure."

They weren't halfway to the door before Margo was pumping questions regarding his disappearance. When she asked if he had put on his hat and cloak when he slipped into the alcove, Cranston nodded. But Margo still couldn't understand how he had left the alcove unnoticed.

"Why, there were those walls!" she exclaimed. "Everyone solid with books –"

"And how solid are books, Margo?"

"How solid –"

Margo stopped, abruptly. Something was glimmering in her mind. It was getting brighter than the light that Monak and Eltab had used to search the alcove, when Cranston said:

"I knew I might need a way out. So I made one beforehand. I took a line of books that wide" – he spread his hands three feet apart – "and set them in the adjoining alcove. All I had to do was slide through the opening; a bit of a squeeze, I'll admit."

"But when did you replace the books?"

"Just about when Monak reached you. I put them back in a single lump, right through from shelf to shelf."

"But weren't there books in the next alcove?"

"Of course. I had them stacked on the floor, too. I took my time replacing them. By then, Monak and Eltab were moving into the alcove. I didn't want to make any noise."

So it was The Shadow who had glided out through the library while Monak and Eltab were finishing their search of the wrong alcove. He'd taken time to dispose of his cloak and hat before approaching the library, again as Cranston.

At present, Cranston was pausing by a large vase in Monak's hall. From behind it, he brought black garments that weren't easily distinguishable in the gloom.

"I'll be back inside an hour," promised Cranston in an undertone. "This is just a stall, to impress Monak or anyone else that needs to be impressed. You'll hear from me, Margo, but from now on, I'll be operating as The Shadow."

Margo put a last question:

"Do you think Monak suspects anything?"

"Only that you were doing some extra homework," said Cranston, "when you studied the Book of Thoth. You ought to rate high in the cult from now on. If Monak loosens up and lets you see the book again, copy some of those diagrams. I could use them."

WITH that, Cranston was gone, and Margo turned back through the hallway. She saw Monak going to his study, and Eltab wasn't anywhere in sight. The door of the library was still open, and Margo had a sudden inspiration. It wasn't far up to her room. Hurrying there, she scribbled a note, that said:

LAMONT: I'll be in the library. Don't worry if it's locked.

I'll stay until tomorrow. It's safer there than anywhere else.

MARGO

Leaving the note, Margo hastened to the library and entered. She knew that Hakim would be the man who locked it, and he wouldn't bother to look around. If he did, he would find Margo with a book that didn't matter. She picked up one that dealt with the simple traditions of Egypt.

In it, Margo found a plate that showed the ancient gods, and she began to identify them. Thoth, of course, had the head of an ibis. Pakht was a goddess whose face resembled that of a lioness. She differed in expression from the cat goddess, Bast, and neither had the contented look of Hathor, the cow lady.

It was all so fanciful that Margo would have laughed, if she hadn't begun to remember those creatures of the temple. They had lived when Margo saw them there, and Cranston's quasi-explanations regarding the writhing sculptures didn't quite click with Margo. Not when she studied the jackal-faced Anubis, and took a long look at Sobk, whose visage was that of a crocodile.

Shakily, Margo closed the book, and her recollection of the temple chilled her. They'd been real, there, these weird monstrosities, and, according to Monak, Margo would be seeing them again if she let her mind dwell too much on such subjects. She stepped to the shelf where the book belonged, and decided to pick something in the way of lighter reading.

At that moment, she heard the door of the library open. Thinking it was Hakim, Margo eased slightly out of sight and pretended to be having trouble putting the book on the shelf, in case the servant saw her.

Only it wasn't Hakim.

That dawn, Margo had seen stone figures come to life. The thing that really amazed her at this moment was that she didn't reverse the process and change to stone. For Margo was as nearly petrified as any living thing could become.

Into the library stepped Sobk, the crocodile god!

He was wearing sandals and tunic; up to his shoulders, he looked human; but above, his head was reptilian. Long, with the huge beak of a crocodile, it showed beady eyes and jagged teeth. Most ferocious of all the carved creatures in the Ammon temple, it was logical that Sobk should be the first to venture forth to other grounds.

Fortunately, the human crocodile did not turn in Margo's direction. Instead, he stole to the alcove where the Book of Thoth was on the highest shelf. For a moment, he was out of sight, and Margo, blinking her eyes, hoped that she had seen something imaginary. Then Sobk emerged, carrying the Book of Thoth.

How well it fitted with Monak's prediction that Margo would be harassed by horrifying visions. Sobk, come to this room to take away the Book of Thoth, that no mortals might meddle further with the all-important volume.

Margo felt icy, from head to foot, as she watched Sobk leave the library and close the door behind him.

HOW long she remained frozen, Margo did not know. It must have been minutes before panic warmed her and she dashed for the door. Her whole idea of staying overnight in the library was banished.

Sheer fear was driving Margo to flight, without giving her time to reason that a stay in the library would be useless, anyway, now that Sobk had taken the Book of Thoth.

Margo was out of the library and along the hall before her panic ended. Leaning against a vase, she looked back, panting, and saw Hakim coming from the other direction. He stopped at the library door and locked it. Margo started for her room, hoping she wouldn't run into Eltab or any of the other servants.

She paused outside Monak's study. He wasn't in there, nor was Ravion. Only Gorth was present, and he was talking to some of the men who had assembled the Ammon temple. They were remarking that many of the blocks had varied considerably in weight, though of the same size.

Gorth was explaining that the ancient Egyptians made little distinction between the rocks that they quarried; that limestone and granite, though quite different, might be found side by side in the same edifice.

Passing along, Margo went by the sphinx room. It was empty, but she didn't enter. She caught a glimpse of the masks along the wall and shuddered, fearing that she would see the face of Sobk among them. It wasn't until she reached her room that Margo wondered why she hadn't spotted the crocodile mask at first glance.

Clenching her fists tightly, to relieve her nervous strain, Margo managed to bring reason to the fore. She could guess why she hadn't seen the Sobk mask. Monak must have figured that she would return to the library. So he had guised himself as Sobk, most fearful of the lot, and come there to teach Margo what real fright was!

Library, study, and especially the weapon room, would all be locked; but the sphinx room, merely an extension of the museum which filled Monak's mansion, would remain open. Any time he wanted, Monak could put back the Sobk mask without attracting notice. A trifling game, perhaps, but The Shadow might think differently.

Picking up the note that she had written, Margo crumpled it and tossed it into the wastebasket. Then, by the window of her darkened room, she stared out into the moonlight, studying the poplar grove across the lawn.

Cranston had said that he would return within an hour. He would be coming as The Shadow, and Margo was sure that his course would be past the temple in the grove. That would be the place to meet him and tell him what had happened in the mansion. But it would be best to wait a half-hour, at least, before starting to the grove.

Grimly, Margo tolled off the minutes, as she awaited the starting time. She felt confident and restful, looking forward to that meeting with The Shadow. Perhaps it was unfortunate that Margo's mind stayed on the subject of The Shadow.

Had she let her thoughts revert to Sobk, the crocodile god, her imagination would have peopled the grove with fearful creatures, the running mates of the figure that had entered the library while she was there.

In that case, Margo would have abandoned all plans of an excursion to a spot where death and danger lurked, even though The Shadow might be present!

CHAPTER XII. PATHS THROUGH THE DARK

LAMONT CRANSTON stepped across the station platform as the local train pulled in. He raised a suitcase and swung it back toward a departing car, that was driven by Joe Cardona. Such was Cranston's farewell to the scene where mystery had reigned. But it wasn't a long farewell.

That gesture with the suitcase was purely bluff. As Cranston went up the train steps, he let the suitcase strike against the doorway. Obliging, the bag opened and black garments tumbled from it. The train was jolting from the station, and Cranston gauged his own stumble to the motion.

Stooping in the doorway of the day coach, he pushed the suitcase aside and stepped back to the platform, whisking the black garments with him. In one twirl, he had a cloak around his shoulders, a slouch hat upon his head.

Taking the steps with a stride, Cranston landed on the turf just past the station, his leap unseen. He was no longer Lamont Cranston; he was The Shadow.

The conductor, coming through the train, was puzzled when he found an empty suitcase lying open. No one knew where it had come from, nor who had tossed it into the day coach. Strange were the ways of The Shadow; so swift, that they escaped notice.

The fact was proven back at the station. There, Amru Monak, watching from the right side of a darkened coupe, spoke to his servant, Eltab.

"Cranston has gone," declared Monak. "It is for the best. Cranston sees much, but says little. He is unlike Cardona, who sees little, but says much."

Just what Monak really meant by those remarks, he did not specify. Eltab, however, understood. As members of the Ammon Cult, both master and servant, if for no other reason, could well be glad to see Cranston go. He had shown open opposition to the cult, in his effort to convince Margo that it was quite the bunk. Cardona, at least, had confined himself to matters of crime, and ignored the cult as such.

There was another car parked near the station. It was a coupe, too, and its occupants watched Monak's car pull away, as Cardona's had. They waited until Monak's lights were gone along the road, then turned on their own.

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They were hard-faced men, and the looks they exchanged were rendered all the more expressive by a ruddy light that flickered through the rear window, then was gone. They didn't notice that brief red glow. The man on the right said to the driver:

"Let's go!"

The motor started, drowning the much slighter sound that came from the closing of the trunk compartment. The noise from the compartment explained the dab of ruddy light. It had come from the center taillight, when the lid of the compartment was lifted.

The Shadow was riding in the trunk compartment. He'd left the handle turned, and his cloak was wedged into the catch to prevent rattling. There wasn't a chance that he would be locked inside, or discovered when the ride ended. But the trip wasn't too comfortable.

Not that the driver wasn't careful. For some reason, he was taking care that the coupe didn't bounce along the byroads that he followed. The Shadow's lack of comfort was caused by a squarish object that took up just enough of the compartment to make his own position cramped.

THE car traveled about twenty minutes; then halted on a downgrade. Quite sure that this was the destination, The Shadow lifted the compartment lid as little as possible when he slid out to the ground.

All was darkness; the driver had turned off the car lights. Easing into gloom, The Shadow came up against a solid barrier that proved to be a high stone wall.

Then he was watching flashlights at the back of the coupe. The driver and his companion were very carefully removing the bulky object, and with that done, they carried it to the wall. By then, The Shadow had moved farther along. He listened to gruff voices.

"Why we're planting this thing here, beats me," declared one. "There's enough in this charge to blow those temple doors into the next county! Why don't we use it there?"

"We've got to get rid of this wall, first," the other speaker argued in reply. "That's why we're putting it here."

There was a snort in the darkness.

"Get rid of this wall! The rest of the guys are over it already."

"Maybe. But what if they need a quick way out? That's why we've got to blow this wall."

"Who told you?"

"I just guessed it."

"Maybe you need another guess. I don't see any sense in the thing. Still, that isn't our business. We'll plant it, the way we were told."

The Shadow heard scraping sounds against the wall. He didn't wait to listen for further comments from men who admitted their own ignorance. Instead, The Shadow took advantage of their noise to scale the wall himself. On the other side, he used a small flashlight, guardedly.

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Not sharing the ignorance of the men who had given him the free ride, The Shadow picked a straight path through trees ahead. He was quite sure that an absolute line would lead him directly to the Temple of Ammon and bring him up in front of the doors that faced to the east.

How The Shadow calculated that, without compass or bearings, was simply the result of his previous observations, substantiated by his perusal of the Book of Thoth. Direction was no problem; distance was the only factor.

The poplar grove was extensive, and The Shadow knew that it would be a long trip to his goal. However, he was in no hurry. The night was still young. Shrouded by darkness, his flashlight no more conspicuous than that of a glowworm amid the underbrush, The Shadow continued his course.

FROM the casement window of her room, Margo Lane noticed tiny twinkles from the blackish grove. They were occasional, and shifting, and very soon they were lost from sight. Like signal blinks, although they had flashed no message. As if someone had come to the fringe of the trees and then turned back again.

She was sure that The Shadow must be somewhere in that glen, and the brief flashes convinced her. True, they had shown startling shifts, almost as if a light had blinked from two places at once. All the more reason to think in terms of The Shadow.

Maybe he couldn't be in two places at the same time, but it was his habit to create the illusion that he could. As witness his disappearance from the library alcove to the hallway. He'd started as Cranston, finished as Cranston, and had been The Shadow in between.

At present, he was The Shadow. He had assured Margo that he would be. Strange, the way The Shadow had of shaping everything to his design and taking advantage of natural opportunities.

Amid those twinkles from the grove, moonlight faded. A cloud had come across the great eye of Isis, the all-seeing. Good enough reason for The Shadow to flash word to Margo. He'd planned to return to the house and meet her, since he could navigate through darkness better than could she. But with the moon obliterated, Margo, too, could move unnoticed.

Hurrying downstairs, Margo went past the study. Monak had returned; he was talking to Cardona. Gorth and Ravion were also present, but they were saying good night. Everyone was very cordial, and none was looking toward the door. Getting by, Margo reached the sphinx room and found that its door was closed. Probably Hakim had locked it, too.

No sign of either Hakim or Eltab, nor any of Monak's other servants. It was nearing midnight, a very late hour in this mansion, where cult members so often rose at dawn. Trying a side door, Margo found it open and started a skirting course to the grove.

Even though the moon was still obscured, she felt worried as she crossed the thick-tufted lawn. She was wearing her Egyptian costume as a matter of policy, for it marked her as a member of the cult and therefore entitled her to certain privileges, such as roaming at large. A white costume needed thicker darkness to really hide it; hence Margo hurried for the proper refuge: the poplar grove.

Its darkness didn't frighten her. Instead, she welcomed it, even though she stumbled into tree trunks. As she groped her way, flexible objects brushed her arms; they were only poplar branches. The things that actually clawed her bare legs could be nothing more than brambles; though painful, they weren't terrible, and she knew that she would soon be free of them.

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Margo's fear was stirred when something clutched her ankle and sent her sprawling forward, but she ended her stumble by clutching a tree trunk. Then she knew that she had encountered nothing more than a root along the ground.

Moving more warily, Margo found better footing, marking a path. With a relieved laugh, she picked her way toward the temple.

Easy going, now. Better in darkness than in light. A happy contrast to those times when the torch-lighted procession had marched this way. There were no phantom shapes from passing tree trunks.

Moonlight was returning, but it was very faint above the poplars, and it helped by revealing Margo's goal, only a hundred yards ahead. The goal, of course, was the clearing where the temple stood.

No further sign of the twinkles of light. To Margo, that meant that The Shadow must be at the temple. The path improving as she neared the open spot, she hurried eagerly along the last stretch and emerged into the clearing. She had no fear that spying eyes would see her, for the whole grove now intervened between her and Monak's mansion.

IT wasn't until she reached the temple doors that Margo felt a shudder that she couldn't repress. The moon was bright again, and its orb was watching her.

More than that, it revealed her as a trespasser in these sacred preserves. Not to human eyes, perhaps, but to others. Though Ammon might be sightless until dawn, the other inhabitants of the temple could be on watch; even on the rove.

Strange that Margo could believe such fantasy – or was it strange? She had seen a stone horde come to life within the temple. Later, she had watched Sobk, the crocodile god, when he entered and left Monak's library. Illusion in one case, imposture in the other.

Good explanations, but they didn't suffice, not in this weird spot where an ancient temple, white and silent as a tomb, reared itself amid a glade where tree leaves stirred an ever-present whisper.

Voices from darkness!

One voice would help: The Shadow's. It was whispery, too, and darkness was his habitat. Hopefully, Margo turned away from the temple doors and looked toward the trees, wishing that a cloaked shape would materialize from the grove and by its presence assuage her qualms.

What Margo saw, put fantasy into the background. The fear that she had hitherto felt was drowned in a flood of horror like a white-hot flame, so fierce that it numbed Margo's nerves and left her powerless.

Figures were coming from the grove; not one, but a dozen, all mates of the monstrous crocodile creature, Sobk!

Living things, lunging with one accord. Anubis, Pakht, Khnum, Hathor, even Thoth himself, with his long, ibis-billed face. Sobk had been delegated to preserve the Book of Thoth; in return for the favor, Thoth was taking charge of the angry gods who kept watch on the temple.

They were springing upon Margo from all directions, and she, in her folly, tried to take refuge in the worst place possible: the temple itself. But the doors were tightly shut and would not yield to her frantic shove against their smooth fronts. The horde of angry creatures reached her.

Clutched by many hands, Margo gave a despairing scream, that turned to a sobbing choke as human hands clapped over her face and smothered the outcry.

Eyes wide and frantic, Margo saw a sea of horrendous faces above her in the dancing moonlight. It was too much for any human nerves to bear.

With a choked sigh, Margo sank into black oblivion, limp in the arms of her incredible captors. Faces of birds and beasts turned toward their beaked leader, Thoth. He raised a human hand and gestured. The creatures turned their backs on the temple that was their dwelling place.

Sharing Margo as their burden, the hellish horde marched off into the blacked-out grove, under the command of Thoth, whose title in Egyptian lore was one that foreboded doom to the unwary mortal who had defied these gods of the Nile.

Thoth, the Keeper of the Dead!

CHAPTER XIII. CREATURES OF DOOM

MOONLIGHT, glowing on the Ammon temple, seemed to lull the rustle of the trees and preserve the hush that gripped the ancient edifice. Even to The Shadow, such silence seemed impressive when he emerged, a shrouded figure, from the grove of which he seemed a portion.

Weird in his own right, the master of darkness was like a thing attracted by a magnet as he moved slowly toward the temple. Nevertheless, The Shadow was wary, and with good reason.

While coming through the grove, he had heard a strange, suppressed scream that had struck him as distinctly human. The cry, from the direction of the temple, had hurried him to his destination.

Who had screamed – and why?

The silent temple gave no answer; nor did the lispings of the poplars. To gain the facts he wanted, The Shadow would have had to employ a process of sheer deduction, counting in a host of factors. As yet, he knew nothing of Margo's secret trip to the library; how she had seen the crocodile god, Sobk, remove the Book of Thoth.

Nor had The Shadow, far off in the grove and on the ground level, observed the twinkling lights which Margo had seen from her window. They had lured her into trouble, those lights, because she had foolishly regarded them as a signal from The Shadow.

The lights, if anything, had indicated the presence of Sobk's playmates: Thoth and his accompanying horde.

They, too, had escaped The Shadow's observation. They had taken a different route than his when they carried Margo, a prisoner, off toward Monak's mansion. As for Margo's cry – her fright, and the way her captors had suppressed her, had given it an unearthly touch. When The Shadow heard it, the frantic call sounded more like something from the temple than anything human.

Nevertheless, The Shadow felt the answer might lie elsewhere. He regarded the temple merely as the focal point for strange occurrences that might bring more important repercussions in places like Monak's mansion. He was turning toward the trees, ready to accept their enveloping darkness, when the flicker of a flashlight halted him.

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The blinks were coming from the path that the processions used. Edging in another direction, The Shadow reached the fringe of trees and watched. The flashlight vanished. Moments passed; then, from the grove, a figure stepped forth, a creature too outlandish to be real.

The arrival was Sobk, the human crocodile.

Advancing, this lone member of the Egyptian pantheon reached the temple doors. He placed a hand upon them as he reached for something in the tunic costume that he wore. Then Sobk paused, a bit surprised; though his actions, not his crocodile face, disclosed the fact.

Sobk had expected to find the temple doors tightly shut. Instead, they swung inward as he pressed them. The Shadow was less surprised than Sobk. Linking the present with the past, The Shadow remembered the scream he had heard. Unfortunately, in considering such a connection his thoughts did not include Margo.

Entering the temple, Sobk, before closing the doors behind him, poked his huge crocodile snout from the opening to scan the ground about the temple. He didn't see The Shadow, who had eased into the trees.

As soon as the doors were shut, The Shadow began an upward trip, scaling the very tree that he had used for earlier observations, the one that persons had mistakenly supposed to be the hiding place of Calbot's assassin.

The Shadow's climb went beyond all normal limits. He finished among the higher branches, no thicker than pencils. The whole tree swayed as though threatening to drop him, but he balanced neatly in his perch until the branches ceased their swing. From where he rested, The Shadow could see into the temple.

He saw Sobk in front of the Ammon statue.

Not Sobk, of course, but some mere human come here in ancient disguise borrowed from the sphinx room in the mansion. Even under stressed conditions, Margo had figured that much; so The Shadow naturally took it as his starting point. His question was that of Sobk's actual identity, a thing which might soon be answered.

THREE names were in The Shadow's mind. Whether for evil, good, or neither, any of three men might come here. Each, however, would logically have a different interest.

Amru Monak, for a starter. Whatever his status, Monak took deep interest in temple rites. Maybe he believed in them; perhaps he recognized them as fakery, but fancied that they would accomplish something. Fanatics like Monak sometimes dealt in murder if anyone doubted their sincerity, whether it was real or false.

The chief fact, however, was that Monak, temporarily denied the privilege of holding ceremonies with cult members present, might logically have come to the temple to try some rituals on his own. Rather than let others into the fact, he could have chosen the Sobk mask as a disguise.

Another man to be considered was Basil Gorth. He wanted to find something in the Ammon temple. That something might apply to some ancient curse, or it might not. Ceremonies, however, were not in Gorth's line. He wanted to probe the place, and if he found what he was after, he might call men in to help him.

Jan Ravion was the third man in the case. There couldn't be a doubt as to his purpose. He wanted to translate the strange inscriptions that covered the fitted tiles in front of the Ammon pedestal. Inscriptions that no one had deciphered, and would be a challenge to a man like Ravion.

Such inscriptions could have much more than passing importance. Mere temple secrets were things to be found in the Book of Thoth for those who knew how to read between the lines. Other facts, far more

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important, would be engraved in secret writing upon the pedestal of Ammon's statue.

There, for example, might be found the riddle of the pyramids; a key to how those mighty structures had been raised. Or the secret of perpetual light, to which the ancient priests of Egypt had claimed knowledge, would be a logical thing to find on the pedestal that supported an enthroned Ammon.

Naturally, Ravion wouldn't want to explain what he was after. His interest, he had said, was merely in inscription; which was true enough.

Which man was Sobk?

For a short while, The Shadow had no clue. The man with the fake crocodile head studied the Ammon statue, as Monak might have; then moved about the cella in a way that suited Gorth. Pausing to stoop in front of the pedestal, he was behaving in Ravion's style, until it turned out that he was merely drawing a square bundle from beneath his tunic.

Opening the package, Sobk poured a powdery substance into an urn. Then, kindling fires in the braziers, he flung the powder in handfuls, as Monak had during the ceremony that preceded the dawn when Ammon spoke.

As grayish smoke filled the cella, it seemed more and more certain that Sobk was Monak, performing a lone rite in honor of Isis.

The incense, however, was different. Its smoke was thinner, darker, and disappeared more rapidly. Finished with one package, Sobk produced another, and kept on tossing powder that burned so rapidly that all traces of its smoke had soon disappeared.

Out of ammunition, Sobk turned from the statue and stepped toward the atrium.

Poplar branches swayed as The Shadow stared a downward trip. There was no need to waste further time. The thing to do was end the masquerade of Sobk, in such sudden fashion that The Shadow would at least learn the purpose behind one man's actions.

The Shadow had been looking forward to the time when he could confront Monak, Gorth, or Ravion, under ideal circumstances and have a heart-to-heart talk.

The fact that Sobk's actions classed him as Monak, made it all the better. If Monak believed in the impossible, he would accept The Shadow as some specter of the past, perhaps as a reincarnation of Osiris, who ruled the abode below the setting sun.

As a fakir, Monak would be equally impressed. He would think that his past had caught up with him. No one could toy with ancient rites, as Monak had, without getting a little worried now and then. The Shadow would see to it that Monak became worried in a really big way.

THE SHADOW was on the ground when Sobk's crocodile face poked out from the temple. Then the whole figure appeared, and Sobk turned to pull the doors shut.

During the interval, The Shadow swept forward. His hand, deep within his cloak, clutched an automatic. He was close to the temple when the doors came shut. As they clanged in place, The Shadow delivered a low, sinister laugh. Sobk didn't hear it, but when he swung around, he saw The Shadow.

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No meeting could have been more weird. The Shadow, a strange symbol of the present, was confronting Sobk, a legend of the past. Both were real, the being in black and the crocodile creature that faced him. Eyes that burned from beneath a slouch hat brim were met by a beady gaze located deep within a fantastic mask.

If either quailed, it was Sobk.

He stood against the temple doors, his hands pressed flat against them. As yet, The Shadow's own hand hadn't come into sight. He chose to impress the impostor with a sense of the unreal, the thing in which the fakir himself specialized. Until Sobk made a move, The Shadow preferred to merely watch for any lesser reactions.

At last, Sobk stirred. He raised his hands slightly, gliding them upward against the temple doors. Then, with a great lunge, he came forward, flinging his arms high and wide.

Expecting such an action, The Shadow side-stepped it, whipping his gun out to jab it toward Sobk, when the creature, missing one lunge, tried to make another.

But there was something about Sobk's lunge that marked it as a single effort. Though turning as he made his fling, the man with the crocodile face was doing odd things with his hands. One was pointing toward The Shadow, the other making a frantic beckon.

Catching the significance, The Shadow swung about, his own back coming against the temple doors.

Sobk had seen something that The Shadow hadn't.

Out from the grove were bounding a dozen figures, all attired in outlandish trappings similar to Sobk's. The Shadow knew them by their masks: Khnum, with the head of an animal; Set, whose face resembled the wild okapi; all the rest of the strange horde.

They were coming to the aid of Sobk – a host of creatures that never existed, rallying to support another as nightmarish as themselves.

But they were real enough, as The Shadow saw them, these replicas of imaginary Egyptian gods. They were betraying themselves as modern fighters, who carried doom as potent as any that the ancients attributed to them.

Beneath those faces of birds and beasts, human hands carried guns, which they were raising when Sobk pointed out The Shadow. A lone gun against a dozen, the black-clad fighter was in the tightest of spots. The whiteness of the temple doors revealed him, and those closed barriers, if they yielded, would only open the way into a trap that had no other outlet.

The Shadow flung himself upon the nearest figure. He hadn't far to go, for the enemy he chose was Sobk. It wasn't the fact that Sobk appeared unarmed that made The Shadow pick him. The Shadow needed a buffer against the arriving attackers, and Sobk was the nearest at hand.

The thrust took the human crocodile unaware. Grappling frantically, Sobk became a reeling figure, lunging out into the clearing.

Sobk was fighting to get The Shadow's automatic, and was failing in the effort, for the weapon was out of his reach. The Shadow had it across Sobk's shoulder, and was jabbing shots at Khnum, Set, Horus, and the rest. Though rendered wide by Sobk's struggle, the shots were getting results.

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The other nightmares couldn't shoot; not without clipping Sobk before they found The Shadow, for the thing with the crocodile face was the only target they really saw.

Away from the white temple, The Shadow wasn't clearly visible in the pallid moonlight. Furthermore, his opening shots were too close for the comfort of his ghoulish foemen.

Some spread for the corners of the temple, while others dropped back toward the shelter of the grove. Then Sobk was reeling alone, stumbling to a sprawl that would have cracked his crocodile's snout, if he hadn't shoved his hands ahead of him.

All that the others saw was a streak of blackness diving for the grove.

THAT streak was The Shadow. Figures leaped in to halt him. They came shooting, but their fire was too late, for The Shadow had cut down the range and was able to force conflict hand to hand. He met the foeman who wore the lioness head of Pakht and bashed an aiming gun aside. They whirled in a mad dance that ended when Pakht went spinning to the turf.

Then The Shadow was doing the polka with Hathor, of the cow face, while guns were shooting at blackness. Hathor took a tumble and The Shadow was off into the trees, sending back a laugh that defied the whole tribe of Egyptian myths.

One gun empty, The Shadow was producing another, to stave off further attack. This time, he intended to prove that his foemen were not immortal. Relieved of grapplers like Sobk, Pakht, and Hathor, The Shadow held a vantage that the imitation gods would soon understand, though they did not yet foresee it, for they were coming in a body, with flashlights as well as guns.

Again, The Shadow laughed.

His tone was a summons that worked in reverse. New lights blazed from the trees behind him, accompanied by the sudden burst of guns. A dozen enemies had been a large order for a start; to be cut off by another crew of equal size was a thing that threatened tragedy, even for The Shadow.

Recoiling from the new lights, The Shadow took a wide angle, that had all the earmarks of a bad mistake. It carried him closer to the clearing, straight into the flashlights that his first pursuers provided. In answer to loud shouts from the grove, there were triumphant howls from the clearing.

Guns spoke from everywhere, at once. From everywhere except The Shadow's position. His gun didn't fire. He was stumbling over tree roots, into a long dive that stretched him flat upon the tuff, where he rolled over and lay still.

Doom had come to the poplar grove, and the first to fall was The Shadow!

CHAPTER XIV. IN THE SPHINX ROOM

GLARE for glare; gun for gun.

Lights were all about, and revolver shots were answering the blasts of shotguns, the crackles of rifles.

The grove was alive with fighters, darting in and out among the trees, some stumbling by accident, others going down when bullets reached them. Yet all were imbued with the same mad desire. They, the living, would forget the dead – after they had given the death status to others who were alive.

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They had seen a black-cloaked figure fall at the first volley; then the meeting of their own dazzling lights had caused them to forget him. These factions were too busy battling each other. Men who preferred shot guns and revolvers were blasting away at imitation gods who used revolvers.

Lights were sweeping wide; some were flung from hands that dropped them. Casualties, though, were few, because of the battlefield. Trees that not only passed for human figures, but cut off gunfire, were making it hard for sharpshooters to find targets or to reach them when discovered.

As the battle spread, it was curious how widely the blackness intervened among the lights. Well away from the starting point, that particular spot was forgotten except by a lone person who occupied it. His laugh was low, unheard amid the rattle of guns, and it told a story that others did not guess.

It was The Shadow's laugh.

He had chanced much on that moment when he was caught between two groups of lights. Had the newcomers been reserves, supplementing the crowd in the clearing, The Shadow's doom would have been both real and rapid.

Forced to a quick decision, The Shadow had accepted the likelihood that the men from the grove had come to battle with the tribe of masquerading gods. On that assumption, he had dived when the lights found him, not waiting for guns to do the same.

The Shadow had formed the right conclusion.

He was between two fires, directed at each other. Each faction had identified him with the opposite group. His fall eliminated him, in their separate estimates. None bothered to waste shots at a figure on the ground while guns were blasting back and forth. However, if any had, they would not have found it healthy.

Rolled on his back, The Shadow was letting his head tilt back and forth, watching for a gun jab that might come his way. Whoever delivered a test shot would receive a sure one in return, for The Shadow specialized in such. That particular specialty wasn't needed, because the running battle moved rapidly away. So The Shadow employed another talent in its stead.

Coming to his feet, he picked his way through the grove until he reached the lawn that led to Monak's mansion. He saw lights in the great house, but the place was silent. All the hubbub was coming from the grove.

So were occasional figures that bobbed out from the trees, but The Shadow gave them no attention. He was on his way to the mansion to see what might be happening there.

Entering the deserted hallway, The Shadow made directly for Margo's room. Tapping on the door, he received no answer, so he opened it and used his flashlight. The room was vacant, and The Shadow moved across to the window.

He could see lights moving through the grove, and hear scattered shooting still in progress. The Shadow turned and brought his flashlight about, a moment too late.

His foot struck something that gave a metallic clang. It was the wastebasket, and it overturned before he could stop it. Something rolled into the flashlight's glow. A moment later, The Shadow was reading Margo's crumpled note.

The note said that Margo was in the library; its crumpled condition proved that she had changed her mind. Anyone else finding the note, would have kept it, or destroyed it. Margo, having changed her mind, had simply thrown the note away, and The Shadow had the positive impression that she had gotten herself into hotter water than any the library might offer.

His own sight of lights in the grove, visible from Margo's window, made him decide that she could have seen lights earlier. If so, the chances were that she had met up with some members of the fake tribe that had snatched Sobk from The Shadow's power. Where they had taken Margo, was the next question.

HEADING downstairs, The Shadow tried the library door; then started toward Monak's study. He saw the door of the weapon room, locked as it should be. But the sphinx room was closed, too, which was unusual.

Testing its knob, The Shadow found that the door was not locked. Nevertheless, he opened it in a slow-motion fashion, in accord with his usual policy.

His policy was wise.

From beyond the squatting sphinx, The Shadow heard muffled voices. Leaving the door ajar behind him, he stole past the sphinx to view what lay beyond. He saw the mummy case of Mathrax, and beside it stood two figures.

At first glance, he might have marked them as persons fresh from the grove, but it happened that The Shadow, despite his rapid action, had checked off most of the ancient creatures in the horde that had come to the aid of Sobk.

This pair hadn't been among them.

One was Thoth, with the long, sharp ibis bill that rendered him so distinctive. The other was Anubis, he of the jackal face.

It was in keeping with Egyptian lore that these two should be together, for Anubis shared with Thoth the task of conducting the dead to the judgment hall in Amenti, the subterranean realm that received the setting sun.

This pair would logically be found rummaging around a mummy case, enticing the ka that occupied it to join them in a journey to Amenti. But the trouble with this mummy case was the fact that its proper occupant, Mathrax, had been dead a few thousand years and his body no longer where it belonged.

Anubis was handing Thoth the big padlock that belonged on the loops that had once sealed the mummy case. Thoth turned to clamp the padlock in place. He stopped when he heard The Shadow's laugh.

It came, a low, weird quiver that Thoth must have momentarily connected with the sphinx, for he turned toward the great stone creature.

Then, at a muffled word from Anubis, Thoth saw The Shadow. His gun, wavering from one to the other, held them rigid. No change of expression showed upon their strange faces, for the faces were not real. The Shadow noted with a side glance that most of the ceremonial masks were missing from the shelf where they belonged.

Human hands lifted to the level of faces that represented ibis and jackal. Warily, the two creatures shifted apart as The Shadow approached. With his free hand, he lifted the open padlock from its loops and left it dangling on the lower one. The Shadow drew the mummy case open.

Out toppled Margo Lane, bound and gagged. Thoth and Anubis thought that The Shadow might forget them; but he didn't. He caught Margo with his free arm, side-stepping to keep the fake gods covered. Then, toppling the girl into the arms of the surprised Anubis, The Shadow spoke to Thoth:

"Unbind her!"

Thoth stooped and tugged the cord from Margo's ankles, then released her wrists and removed the gag. Freed, Margo stumbled forward, caught herself against the sphinx, and turned to give The Shadow a grateful gaze.

What she saw produced a gasp instead. The Shadow heard it, and wheeled.

Sobk had arrived upon the scene.

THE crocodile god was carrying a revolver that he had picked up in the grove. Before Sobk could aim, The Shadow seized Anubis and whirled him Sobk's way.

Anubis gave a cry suited to the jackal he represented as he landed hard against the sphinx. Sobk, diverting his aim toward Margo, found Anubis in the way.

By the time Sobk swung his gun back toward The Shadow, the cloaked fighter had taken Thoth in a strong grip and was using him for a shield. The snarl that came from Thoth's mask was by no means the screech of an ibis.

Thoth was angry. Foolishly, he had lunged at The Shadow, only to find that he was helping the cloaked battler counteract the efforts of Sobk.

The Shadow held control, but footsteps from the hallway told him time was brief. He lunged forward, shoving Thoth ahead of him, and Sobk made a dart beyond the sphinx. Shoving Thoth aside, The Shadow swung toward Sobk.

Guns spoke from the door. Others of the masked clan had arrived, a trifle too soon. Back behind the sphinx, The Shadow grabbed Anubis and flung him across the floor. Coming up over the back of the sphinx, The Shadow started to blaze with his gun.

The fantastic foemen did not wait. The doorway cleared and Thoth went through it with Anubis, Sobk following, shooting back as he retired.

His bullets were marring the smooth flank of the sphinx, nothing more, but the same smoothness of the stone was a help to Sobk. The Shadow was shoving his arm across the sphinx, and the slippery surface made his elbow skid. His shots, too, were wide. Sobk dived from sight.

Vaulting the sphinx, The Shadow began pursuit, with Margo following him. Fleeing creatures disappeared like rats in holes. The Shadow saw Sobk going out through the front door and made after him.

For a moment, the crocodile man was trapped in the glow of lights that swept up across the lawn, halfway from the grove. Then, leaping off into a thick patch of shrubbery, Sobk was gone.

Stopping Margo outside the front door, The Shadow drew her to cover. He watched the lights draw near and recognized that they were carried by some of Monak's servants, with Eltab at the head. He told Margo to meet them when they reached the house. She did, quite unalarmed, because she knew that The Shadow was still close by.

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Eltab bowed profoundly. He explained that there had been trouble in the grove. Both Monak and Cardona were down there, and had sent some of the servants back to the house. Shooting wasn't all that had happened; they had found the temple doors open. So they were looking in the temple to make sure that all was well.

Cult members were coming from the house, roused by the shooting downstairs. Learning of trouble in the mansion, Eltab entered, to be met by Hakim, who was coming in another doorway. They began a search of the premises, aided by other servants and cult members. Margo went along with them.

No one was near the sphinx room when The Shadow glided in from outdoors. Entering the room in question, he saw a line of masks on their proper shelf. Recent foemen had done more than flee; some of them, at least, had doubled back to replace their borrowed trappings. The masks of Thoth and Anubis were among those returned, but some were still missing; notably, the crocodile head of Sobk.

Sensing that the pretender might soon return, The Shadow opened the mummy case of Mathrax. Heavy, with its metal reinforcements, the mummy case rested firmly on the floor. Its hinges, stout pins that poked up through iron loops, groaned as the door swung wide: a voice, warning all comers to forget the coffin of Mathrax. A voice that The Shadow did not heed.

He saw the value of the mummy case as a hidden post of observation, from which, through a crack, he could witness the return of Sobk. He stepped past the door, turning to draw it shut.

Then did the message of the hinges prove itself. They had given warning, indeed.

Sobk was back.

THE grating of the hinges had drowned Sobk's arrival. He was springing past the sphinx, still waving his borrowed gun, hoping this time to beat The Shadow to the shot.

With one hand on the door of the mummy case, The Shadow would have had to perform a full wheel to deal with his crocodile-headed foe; that is, should The Shadow have decided to draw a gun with the hand that showed against the edge of the door.

Instead, The Shadow wheeled into the mummy case itself, whipping out a gun with his other hand, to shove the weapon through the hinged side of the case. Before he could get the gun muzzle in place, Sobk finished his lunge. Finished it in most emphatic style, flinging himself hard against the door of the case itself.

Jarred backward by the smash of the door, The Shadow hit the rear of the mummy case. Its curving top was just too low for him; his head took a hard thud that would have felled him, but for the closing of the door. There was a clatter within the mummy case as the automatic slipped from The Shadow's grip.

Whether or not Sobk heard it; whether he guessed that he had partly stunned The Shadow, were questions that were partly answered. At least, Sobk was none too sure that he had overpowered The Shadow.

Instead of yanking the mummy case open to get at his cloaked foe, the crocodile creature took the heavy padlock and linked it to both loops, jamming it tight shut.

Soon, silence prevailed within the sphinx room. A silence that awed Margo Lane, when she returned with searchers who had failed to find the missing gods. Peering in through the half-opened door, Margo saw the row of replaced masks and shuddered when she recognized Sobk's among them.

She saw the mummy case, its padlock clamped. She wondered how long she could have survived in that air-tight cell, if The Shadow had not rescued her. Not long, Margo decided. Some day, she hoped, she would find a chance to return the favor, by helping The Shadow from some equally serious situation.

Hearing footsteps, Margo drew away from the sphinx room. She saw Hakim come along the hall. Noting the half-open door of the sphinx room, the stolid Egyptian closed it.

More people were arriving: cult members, including Gorth and Ravion. They were talking about the excitement in grove and mansion, and wondering why Monak had not returned.

Margo was thinking of The Shadow, and her mind was free from worry. She knew of his ability to dwindle from sight and keep his presence unknown. He was probably close by, in the last place where anyone would expect to find him. All of which was more true than Margo surmised.

The Shadow was still within the ancient mummy case, where the wily Sobk had thrust and locked him, with full intent that the cloaked fighter's present residence would prove permanent.

CHAPTER XV. A MATTER OF PROOF

PACING Monak's study, Joe Cardona wondered what he was – himself, or something belonging in a nightmare. When he looked about him, he was inclined to accept the latter view. He was the center of a white-robed group that eyed him solemnly, reproachfully.

Sight of one person enabled Cardona to keep his sanity. That person was Margo Lane. Maybe she was part of a nightmare, too, for she was wearing a tunic outfit that marked her as a member of the cult; but Joe decided that she was real.

There were times, too, when Cardona stopped in front of a mirror and caught a glimpse of himself. He wasn't wearing a white robe, which was a help. His conventional attire served as proof of his sanity.

"It sums up to this," declared Cardona finally. "I heard a lot of shooting, so I started down to the grove and –"

"One moment, inspector." Amru Monak interrupted in his suave way. "You should say that we heard a lot of shooting."

"I'm not so sure of that," snapped Cardona. "I didn't see you until I was halfway to the grove."

"But you had only left the study, inspector. How could I have traveled to the grove and back in that time?"

Cardona had an answer for that one.

"It ought to be easy for you, Monak," retorted Joe. "You believe in such things. We see a lot of guys rigged out in funny masks, and you claim they're a bunch of Egyptian gods."

"With good cause," declared Monak solemnly. "We found the doors of the temple open, and the stone gods were in place."

"Like they always are –"

"Not always," interrupted Monak, shaking his head. He gestured to the robed persons who surrounded him. "Ask my followers. They attended the last ceremony. They saw the gods rise."

Nods came from Gorth and Ravion. Cardona decided to quiz them for a change.

"And where were you fellows?" he demanded. "Upstairs asleep, while all this was going on?"

Both men continued to nod. Cardona turned to Margo. He wanted her testimony, but when she gave it, Margo had to keep to the same story. Shooting in the house had roused her, as it had the other members of the cult.

The telephone jangled at Cardona's elbow. It was an answer to a call that he had made to New York. Lamont Cranston wasn't at his favorite spot, the Cobalt Club, but they were calling his New Jersey home, to tell him that Cardona wanted him to return to Monak's. Cardona began to paw among a stack of telephone books.

"Maybe I ought to call Cranston myself," he began. "If you've got a Jersey book here, Monak –"

Joe stopped. The thing he had come across was not a telephone book. It was something larger, bound in leather, with the gold figure of an ibis-headed creature imprinted on its front.

Margo gasped despite herself. The volume was the Book of Thoth!

To Margo, the arrival of the great book on the study desk was new indication that Monak was the masquerader who had posed as Sobk. Fortunately, Monak's own exclamation drew attention away from Margo. Monak seemed much startled to see the Book of Thoth.

"Try to deny the powers of ancient Egypt!" he defied. "This book was locked in the library. Some hand other than human must have brought it here, through solid walls. This is the Book of Thoth" – snatching the volume from Cardona, Monak clutched it in his arms – "and it is not meant for profane eyes! That is why Thoth, himself, or some one of his companions, brought it here, where I might find it and keep it safe."

EYES dilated, Monak showed all the manner of a real fanatic. Rather than be sidetracked by a lot of Egyptian talk, Cardona suggested that Monak put the book away. Turning to Hakim, Monak ordered the servant to place the precious volume under lock and key.

"Getting back to something important," said Cardona testily, "there was a lot of shooting in the grove. Your servants mixed into it, which they had a right to do; but the question is: who were they shooting at?"

Monak started to answer, but Joe halted him.

"Leave out Thoth and Hathor and all that bunch. They wouldn't have been using guns."

The point impressed Monak. He had to agree that the members of the Egyptian necropolis would have been far out of character if they indulged in gunplay.

"Marauders, then," decided Monak. "Like the other night. That is the answer, inspector."

"Then how did they get into the house?" demanded Cardona. "They must have swiped those masks and things from the sphinx room."

"But the masks are still there, inspector!"

RISING, Monak started toward the sphinx room, and the other followed, Margo keeping quite close to Cardona. She could, at least, picture part of what had happened around the poplar grove. The men in the masks must have included outside invaders, for The Shadow had established their existence.

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It was difficult to imagine Monak's servants playing double parts, though the matter of the masks indicated it. That piece of evidence, of course, was important in Cardona's mind. Having wasted time around the temple, with Monak responsible for the delay, Cardona naturally suspected double dealing.

As for the cult members, they could have played no hand. They had proven their innocence before, and they were too stupid, as a group, to participate in any rapid action. But there were two men of their number who might have acted individually, just as Margo had when she left the mansion. Those two were Gorth and Ravion.

It was Gorth who asserted himself when they reached the sphinx room. While Monak was pointing out the masks along the shelf, Gorth gestured toward the mummy case of Mathrax.

"How long have you kept that locked, Monak?" he inquired. "The padlock wasn't in place when I noticed it last."

Monak gave the mummy case a puzzled stare, as though he didn't remember whether it should be locked or not. He turned an inquiring glance toward Ravion, who shook his head. Ravion wasn't interested in mummy cases. Summoning Hakim, Monak asked for the key to the padlock.

It was then that a gruesome impression crept through Margo's mind. She'd noticed the locked mummy case when she looked into the sphinx room, and hadn't thought anything of it at the time. That had been hours ago, for it was getting close to dawn. What if someone had been in the mummy case during those hours!

Someone – perhaps The Shadow!

He'd neither returned as a figure in black, nor had he arrived as Cranston. If loose around the mansion, The Shadow would certainly have known that Cardona had been trying to get Cranston by telephone, ever since the strife down by the temple.

Tingling horror chilled Margo as she saw Monak open the great mummy case. Remembering how she had been bundled into that same snare, and the tople she had taken from it, she could visualize The Shadow in the same plight. A real plight, had Margo only known it, and it seemed real enough when the swinging door revealed blackness that came falling forward.

The Shadow –

As the name flashed through Margo's stricken mind, the illusion faded. It wasn't The Shadow; it was only blackness. The darkness that came from the mummy case, giving the effect of a toppling shape, receded as soon as the door was wide open, with the light from the room shining into the case!

Gorth turned reprovingly to Monak.

"Why waste time on trifles?" queried Gorth. "I have an idea that will appeal to you, Monak. If Inspector Cardona doubts that stone gods can rise, why not take him to the temple and let him see what happens there?"

Monak was still looking into the mummy case; he turned, askance, at Gorth's suggestion.

"Never!" began Monak. "Only those who recognize the power of Ammon can enter the temple!"

"You took Cardona in a while ago," Gorth reminded. "We can arrive nowhere, until we learn the difference between true and false."

The argument appealed somewhat to Monak. He decided to consult the Book of Thoth. They went back to the study, and Margo, still standing by the sphinx, was suddenly surprised to find herself alone.

Not wanting to remain in a place of such nightmarish recollections, she turned hastily toward the door, then dropped back.

The door was opening, and Margo momentarily forgot that masks were resting on their shelves; forgot, therefore, that no masquerader such as Sobk, or any other fanciful creature, could be coming to accost her.

Nevertheless, she was crouching by the sphinx, hoping its shelter would hide her, when she recognized the black-clad personage who entered.

The Shadow!

THE SHADOW gave a whispered greeting as he approached. When Margo asked where he had been, The Shadow delivered a low laugh and gestured to the mummy case, as he added the words:

"In there!"

Margo couldn't believe it. Calmly, The Shadow stepped to the mummy case, entered it, and told Margo to close the door and clamp the padlock. When she hesitated, his tone became sharply commanding.

Numbly, Margo complied, although when the padlock clicked, she was gripped with the feeling that her wits must have totally left her; that all this was a crazy dream.

Clicks from the mummy case ended Margo's mental daze. Its sections were jouncing up and down. The mummy case was like a mammoth jumping bean, The Shadow the bug inside it. With a click-clack, the front half heaved; then the other section.

To what avail, Margo could not guess, until suddenly, the mummy case split on its hinged side. It opened bookwise, the loops of the padlock serving as a hinge on the other side.

Stepping from the mummy case, The Shadow gripped one section and gave a heave. Then Margo saw the secret of the process. He was lifting the loops of the hinges, so that they would drop over the pins, which they did, sealing the mummy case intact. Those jounces from the inside had been The Shadow's way of getting the loops off the pins, thus managing his escape from the mummy case.

"As simple as all that," The Shadow told Margo. "The simpler such a trick, the better. It didn't occur to Sobk that there was an easy way out of the mummy case. Nor to me, until I was in so bad a jam that I had to try it."

Leaving the sphinx room, they saw that the study was deserted. Entering, The Shadow sat at Monak's desk and listened to Margo's details of Cardona's conference. It happened that The Shadow had been roving the grounds all that while, looking for hiding marauders, but finding none.

"All threats are ended for a while," The Shadow told Margo. "Our present task is to wait and watch. Here, for instance" – he picked up a list on Monak's desk – "is something important. A listing of the weapons in his collection. We must see to it that no one gets hold of any more ancient knives."

The Shadow was running through the list. He came to the end of it, and laughed lightly when he saw shotguns, rifles, and other modern items. They had been taken from the weapon room, and should have been stacked in a corner of the study. But when The Shadow looked there, he saw only a trench mortar and a few

gas masks.

Margo noted The Shadow's glance.

"I suppose the servants took them to the grove," she said absently. "Cardona would probably want them on duty while he is in the temple."

So quickly did The Shadow come to his feet, that Margo realized that he must have obtained unexpected news. It dawned on her that he hadn't been around before the others left the sphinx room, and therefore didn't know of the expedition that Gorth had suggested.

With a beckon to Margo, The Shadow sped for the front door. Hurrying after him, Margo was only halfway to the door when he swung it open. She could hear the sound of a distant chant, telling that the procession had reached the temple. Not all, however, had gone to the grove. Like Margo, some had preferred to stay in the mansion. Her clatter must have roused them, for several appeared.

Among them, Margo saw Jan Ravion, as she looked back across her shoulder. Then Margo was through the door and slamming it. In the moonlight, she saw a blotch of blackness fading off across the lawn, and knew that it must be The Shadow. As fast as she could, Margo followed.

Gifted with some singular intuition, The Shadow had divined that some new horror must be stirring in the temple, and was on his way to thwart another stroke of doom!

CHAPTER XVI. AMMON STRIKES

WITHIN the temple, Hakim and Eltab were hurriedly kindling fires in the braziers, while Amru Monak stood by, impatiently holding an urn filled with powder.

Basil Gorth was near, his robed arms folded; his steely eyes were fixed on Joe Cardona and his bronzed lips wore a smile.

When this ritual was ended, there would be one less skeptic to scoff at the legends of ancient Egypt. One less skeptic in the person of Joe Cardona. Such, at least, was the opinion that Gorth's face proclaimed.

Gorth's smile dwindled when Monak turned to the small group of cultists who had formed this special procession to the temple. Hakim and Eltab were having trouble starting the fires. Monak glanced anxiously toward the gaps above the atrium; then lowered his gaze toward his followers and shook his head.

"It is too late," he declared solemnly. "The moon of Isis has waned. The dawn of Ammon is at hand."

Cardona flashed a contemptuous look at the carvings on the walls. So those stone creatures weren't going to dance, after all. Holding the same expression, Cardona turned it on Gorth. The tawny man unfolded his arms and clamped Cardona with one hand.

"Forget the things that you might see," declared Gorth. "Listen for the voice of Ammon. When you hear it, here within the temple, you will be convinced that the incredible can exist!"

Outside the temple, Monak's servants were standing guard, shotguns and rifles tucked under their arms. They were watching for telltale gleams within the grove, the logical signs of any new marauders. But they were lax in their vigil, with dawn so close. It was only by chance that one servant glimpsed the shape that suddenly emerged from the woods. The fellow shouted.

TEMPLE OF CRIME

Almost to the temple doors, the figure halted, wheeling about. A laugh issued from hidden lips; mirth so unearthly, that it shivered the men who heard it. For the first time, and in the open, these men of Monak had met The Shadow!

Wild and prolonged, the strange mirth reverberated from the temple doors. The startled servants broke rank, some fleeing toward the grove, others, bolder, dropping to the ground. Those who dropped were nervy enough to fight this strange being who seemed more than human. Three of them had shotguns; weapons that could not miss at this close range.

Undaunted by the gesture of The Shadow's automatic, they lifted their shotguns and fired.

Slugs hailed through space, finding no target. The Shadow was gone. He hadn't wasted an instant in departure, for the way was clear. The cloaked fighter had wheeled into the temple – a thing, in itself, incredible. Mere moments ago, the temple doors had been tightly shut.

They had opened at the laugh of The Shadow!

Startled figures in white were turning when The Shadow came plunging through the atrium, into the cella, where Monak had just begun to invoke the statue of Ammon. Hearing shouts behind him, Monak turned angrily; noting that the doors were open, he called upon his followers to repel intruders.

The Shadow's laugh, echoing through the inner room, had all the mocking challenge that was needed. It seemed to defy the myths of ancient Egypt, as well as the modern folk who took them seriously.

Gorth took up Monak's cry, pointing the robed crowd toward The Shadow. They flung themselves upon the cloaked fighter, with one exception. Gorth did not accompany them.

There was one friend of The Shadow in the group: Joe Cardona. He grabbed for Gorth and stopped him, which proved a timely deed. There were no real fighters among the remaining cultists, who made up a mere handful.

Spinning in among them, The Shadow turned them into a white-robed whirl that he scattered out through the atrium like so many sheep.

Since Gorth was occupied with Cardona, Monak drove for The Shadow. These were Monak's own preserves; the very atmosphere gifted him with a savagery that few foemen could have halted. Monak had the urn as a weapon; he drove it hard at The Shadow's head, only to have it torn from his hand with a clang.

Met by the smash of a bullet from The Shadow's automatic, the urn couldn't stand the strain. It was gone from Monak's grip, and the powerful Egyptian was grappling bare-handed with The Shadow. As they reeled, they bowled against Cardona and Gorth. Shoved toward the atrium, Cardona heard The Shadow's sharp command:

"Out of the temple! Quickly!"

Joe went, dragging Gorth along, and after them came The Shadow and Monak, while Hakim and Eltab stayed within the cella, holding torches that they had yanked from wall brackets. Whatever The Shadow's mission, the servants intended to forestall it, should he return into the cella.

At that moment, Ammon spoke!

TEMPLE OF CRIME

THE statue trumpeted a cry as long as the one that listeners had heard before, but its volume was a trifle less. Today, the doors were open; hence the great tone wasn't confined within the temple, but found the outer air without delay.

There was this about Ammon's sigh: What it lacked in loudness, it made up for with a new phenomenon. For Ammon was not satisfied with merely exercising his stony vocal cords. From the statue issued a great gasp of graying smoke, that clouded the apsis in which the throne stood and came gorging into the cella, obscuring the graven images along the walls.

Cardona saw the smoke as he sprawled with Gorth on the ground outside the temple. Then Monak joined them, flung like a figure of straw that whirled over and over before it finally stopped. The Shadow had ended his combat with the Egyptian in a most decisive fashion. For The Shadow had other purposes.

He was speeding back to the heart of the temple, a black blot against the grayish, volcanic smoke that swooped to envelop him. He seemed to be defying Ammon's wrath to the extreme, disdainful of the new power that the great idol had exhibited. The Shadow's laugh could be heard despite the blare of Ammon, which had reached its final pitch.

Then, as the mighty sigh halted, to be followed by echoes of a fading laugh, The Shadow locked with Hakim and Eltab at the fringe of the enveloping cloud of smoke. He was wheeling them outward, when he stumbled; both were pouncing forward with their torches to strike him.

Cardona, at that moment, fired a revolver shot. It wasn't needed, for The Shadow was on his feet again. He was lunging toward the outer door, the servants right behind him. Again Cardona fired, aiming high as he had before, intending his shot only as a warning to men who might otherwise harm The Shadow.

At the second shot, Hakim turned about and flung himself into the thickened smoke, where no marksman could find him. Eltab, however, kept on, close behind The Shadow.

Trailing smoke seemed to shape itself into the fingers of a gigantic hand as The Shadow lunged through the doorway, Eltab close behind him. Monak's other servants were suddenly alert with guns, and The Shadow saw them. He voiced a quick command to Cardona:

"Get those doors closed!"

Then The Shadow was away, taking a surprising angle that fooled the gunners who aimed for him. He was off through the grove, with shotguns spouting harmlessly among the trees. Men were starting after The Shadow, but Cardona knew they would never find him. Not realizing that Hakim was still in the temple, Joe gripped Eltab and told the fellow to help him with the doors.

Grayish smoke was almost upon them when they hauled the two doors shut. The holes above the atrium began to trickle clouds of wispy vapor that the outer air absorbed. Cardona and Eltab watched it until Monak and Gorth joined them. All stood silent, saying nothing, as the last of the gray wisps traced themselves to nothingness.

Soon, servants were returning. They hadn't found The Shadow. After them came Margo Lane, and Lamont Cranston was with her. Presumably, he had just arrived at the mansion and had found Margo there. A quizzical expression on his usually impassive face, Cranston listened to the tale of doings in the temple.

Since all traces of the mysterious smoke had gone, it seemed safe to enter. Monak started the chant of ran, khat, khaibet, and other voices joined. They advanced to the temple and its doors swung inward. Cranston

called for them to wait, and they halted on the threshold.

Faint, pungent fumes were coming from the temple and it was wise to wait until they cleared. For, on the floor ahead, lay the body of Hakim, midway between cella and atrium. Minutes passed before anyone moved toward the motionless figure; then Cranston took the first step, Cardona following after.

HAKIM was stone dead. There wasn't a mark upon his body. The Shadow hadn't touched him, nor had Cardona's bullets reached him. But the expression on Hakim's face spoke of a death as hideous as it was mysterious.

The servant's features were distorted into a demonish leer, from twisted lips to eyes that lunged glassy from their sockets.

Amru Monak approached, studied the glassy eyes of Hakim, and fancied that they were directed back toward the statue of Ammon, whose ram's face was holding its cryptic gaze toward the new day's sunlight.

Solemnly, Monak gave his brief version of Hakim's death. He simply said:

"It was the stroke of Ammon!"

Others, seemingly, agreed, for they were silent. Not a word was uttered when they left the temple. But Margo Lane heard a token more significant than words, as she walked away with Lamont Cranston. No others were near when the token came.

It was a whispered laugh, intended for Margo's ears alone. It came from Cranston's lips; the tone was solemn, like a knell. It carried regret that its author, though he saved a dozen lives, had been unable through ill chance to add Hakim to the list of rescued.

Yet, with regret, the soft laugh carried final understanding, which told Margo that the reign of death would soon be ended. When that laugh became prophetic, its predictions were based on sound and positive conclusions.

It was the laugh of The Shadow!

CHAPTER XVII. THE FINAL NIGHT

DUSK lay over Monak's mansion, but tonight no white-clad figures were walking the verandas. The Ammon Cult was dissolved, its members dispersed. The law had clamped down heavily on Amru Monak, the man who had sought to revive the ancient gods of Egypt.

Monak was taking it all quite calmly. In his study, he sat importantly behind his desk, still wearing his Egyptian robe. He gave a sad smile when Jan Ravion entered carrying a heavy suitcase.

Ravion was wearing modern clothes and really looked the part of a professor. His eyeglasses, with their ribbon, were no longer ludicrous, for they belonged with his present garb.

"Sorry about what happened, Monak," said Ravion tersely. "I hope that later you can revive the cult and count me as a member. I am keeping my accouterments" – he gestured to the bag – "and I shall expect to hear from you."

TEMPLE OF CRIME

"Certainly, professor," agreed Monak. "Maybe, in a week or so, we shall have the temple open, even though the ceremonies may not be allowed. You can come back then and work on the inscription."

Ravion went out, nodding good-bye to others in the room. Lamont Cranston and Margo Lane were present, as was Joe Cardona. Cranston was staying at Cardona's suggestion, to help unravel a few matters; so Margo had decided to stay, too.

She didn't like Monak's mansion, but she felt more comfortable than before. For Margo, too, had discarded her Egyptian regalia for modern attire. She felt more herself in a jaunty sports ensemble than she had when garbed in ancient skirt and tunic.

Shortly after Ravion's departure, Basil Gorth entered. He, too, had switched to modern clothes, and Margo, though she did not like him, was forced to admit that he looked quite handsome. The careless way in which he treated matters was another feature that impressed Margo.

"How are you coming with the Hakim case?" queried Gorth. "Any clue to what choked the fellow? Other than Ammon, of course."

Gorth gave a glance at Monak, who returned it coldly. With the cult ruled out, Gorth wasn't hiding the fact that he considered it all claptrap. Naturally, Monak resented Gorth's new attitude.

"Ammon is powerful," asserted Monak. "So long as his temple stands, Ammon shall rule."

"He won't rule long, then," put in Cardona abruptly. "We're going to take that temple all apart tomorrow, Monak."

Monak rose indignantly behind his desk.

"On whose authority –"

"We'll have the authority," interrupted Cardona. "So there's no use in argument, Monak. The coroner has determined the cause of Hakim's death. Poison gas. His lungs were full of it!"

Gorth gave an amazed stare.

"You mean that grayish vapor?" he queried. "I owe you thanks, inspector, for pulling me out of it!"

"After you had coaxed us all into it," reminded Cardona. "Don't forget that part, Gorth. I want you to stay around until tomorrow, so you can meet the coroner."

Gorth didn't seem to remember that the visit to the temple had been at his suggestion. When finally convinced, he merely shrugged. He said he would be glad to stay another night, but requested the privilege of making some long-distance phone calls in order to rearrange his plans. The privilege was granted.

While Gorth was busy with his phoning, Cardona made a tour of the mansion, telling Monak the places where he wanted to go. Cranston came along with Margo, and they spent most of the time in the weapon room, where Cardona made another painstaking check-up on all the ancient instruments of warfare.

On the way back to the study, Cardona reassured Monak on one point.

TEMPLE OF CRIME

"Don't worry about your temple," said the inspector. "It will be taken apart very carefully. If we don't find anything wrong with it, maybe we'll put it together again. We're going to get to the bottom of this business; that's all."

Gorth met them at the door of the study and asked politely if Cardona had any further orders. Joe gruffed that there were none. Gorth was simply to be on hand tomorrow, when the coroner arrived.

Stepping into the study, Cardona picked up the plan sheet of the temple and began to check it for the fiftieth time, while Monak, behind the desk, kept watching him. Cranston suggested a stroll on the veranda, to which Margo agreed.

From Cranston's previous talk of a long vigil, Margo expected no immediate action; but the stroll, as Cranston termed it, turned out quite important. As soon as they were around the corner of the veranda, Cranston plucked black garments from beneath the porch rail and began to put them on.

"You're wearing a dark dress," he said, approvingly, "and it will help. Come on. We're going to the garage to get your car."

THE final words dwindled to a whispered tone, suitable to The Shadow, for Cranston had become the personage in black. He slid across the porch rail and dropped to the ground below, extending a hand upward so that Margo could do the same.

They reached the garage, and Margo took the wheel of the car while The Shadow pushed it to the driveway. Then, as the car coasted, he was in beside her.

"Let in the motor when we near the gates," he told Margo. "Take the old road that leads along beside the far wall."

Margo followed instructions. The Shadow kept watching the wall whenever the headlights flicked toward it. There was no sign of life along the route, but when they reached a fork in the road, The Shadow's hand gripped Margo's arm.

"Turn left, then stop."

Complying, Margo listened, along with The Shadow. They heard a car come in from the other fork and chug along the road beside the wall. The chugs ceased rather abruptly. The Shadow toned a whispery laugh.

"Around the other way," he said. "We're going in by a different set of gates. I want you to park as near the temple as you can, and stay there."

They reached the spot The Shadow wanted. As he eased from the car, he pressed a gun into Margo's hand. Then, in a tone as calm as Cranston's, he remarked:

"You may need it. I looked in the sphinx room this evening. One of our friends was missing. More may be gone before this night is finished."

By "friends," The Shadow meant the masks of the Egyptian gods; which wasn't a pleasant thought for Margo. She decided that tonight she would remain right where she was now, and if Sobk or any of his ancient playmates put in an appearance, she would use the gun that The Shadow had provided.

TEMPLE OF CRIME

The moon was just rising, and the glow it cast was shining through the trunks of the poplars, making the grove more eerie than ever. It would have taken such eyes as those of the cat goddess, Bast, to spy the figure that moved in spectral fashion through the woods; for, despite the moon's position, The Shadow was performing in his most stealthy style.

He seemed no more than a swaying tree, that dipped one way without returning, only to dip again. Trunk to trunk, he found his way to the clearing. There, The Shadow waited.

His vigil was brief. From trees opposite, a grotesque figure approached the temple. The crocodile was on the crawl again, for the visitor was none other than Sobk, the slimy member of the slippery Egyptian tribe.

The living monstrosity performed a curious action. From his ancient costume he removed a long-bladed tuning fork and raised it in front of the temple doors. Plucking the prongs, Sobk produced a low, twangy note.

The temple doors swung inward. As Sobk advanced, a figure followed him. The Shadow, too, was entering the temple.

Above the level of the tree trunks, the moon was obscured by the whole thickness of the poplar grove, so that only a dim light came from above the treetops. Thus The Shadow had the advantage of deep darkness, and his glide was perfect.

While Sobk was turning toward the door, The Shadow slid behind the other. As the first door went shut, The Shadow edged deeper into the atrium, to stay there while Sobk closed the other portal.

The Shadow let the crocodile figure go past him. He watched Sobk produce a flashlight and flicker it on the base of the Ammon pedestal. Sobk's actions were odd, to say the least. Instead of running the light across the tiles from left to right, or even up and down, he was swinging it in little squares.

He seemed interested in finding a secret opening, rather in checking the curious inscription, but when the moon had risen higher, so that its beams were floating in above the temple doors, Sobk was still continuing his peculiar task.

The Shadow had watched him long enough. Visible in the moonlight as a vague and ghostly shape, The Shadow moved forward and pressed an automatic in the middle of Sobk's back.

As though drawing something with a magnet, The Shadow raised the gun and brought Sobk along. A whispered command, and the crocodile thing was turned to face his challenger in black.

SOBK'S ugly face was indeed the mask from the sphinx room. It showed no expression, though eyes were visible deep within its structure. Eyes that were desperate, hunted; and tonight Sobk had a voice. He gave an evil hiss that fitted his crocodile appearance. But Sobk was helpless, and knew it.

In cold tones, The Shadow was telling Sobk that it was no use to play for time. Even the matter of unmasking was unimportant. The Shadow knew the man whose face was behind the crocodile visage. A name was on The Shadow's lips, when an interruption came.

It was a low, muffled blast from somewhere far outside the temple. A sound that The Shadow had expected, but not at so early an hour. He saw Sobk's head turn in sudden surprise, and The Shadow pressed the gun closer. He intended to take Sobk from the temple, and then return to handle other matters.

Time did not allow it. The Shadow had hardly drawn Sobk from the Ammon pedestal before the temple doors slashed inward, propelled by a dozen shoulders. Loosened, the doors had given way to a combined drive that let in all the evil clan of human birds and beasts. Anubis, Khnum, and their hideous companions were coming through with lights, straight for The Shadow and his prisoner, Sobk!

As before, Sobk took a frantic chance. He sprang forward, beckoning, pointing out The Shadow. Instantly, The Shadow recoiled behind the figure of Sobk and gave a quick turn toward the Ammon pedestal. He was vaulting it when a wild cry came from the invading throng.

A cry given by the beak-faced creature, Thoth. At the command, a dozen guns let loose. They found their human target and spilled it to the floor. But the recipient of those bullets was not The Shadow. Thoth had ordered the destruction of his own tribesman, Sobk!

As the crocodile creature struck the floor, the gleam of lights showed The Shadow. He was up behind the Ammon statue, lifting himself by gripping the poised staff that projected downward from the figure's hand.

Again Thoth screamed, triumphantly: his followers spread wide, sure that they, a dozen, could blast The Shadow before he could do more than damage a few of their throng.

The scream of Thoth was drowned by a mightier challenge; not the voice of Ammon, though it came from the stone figure. The tone that ridiculed Thoth and his screeching, bellowing crew was the laugh of The Shadow!

CHAPTER XVIII. THE TEMPLE SECRETS

STREAMING moonlight painted the most grotesque of scenes: The Shadow, poised on Ammon's shoulders, clutching the metal staff; Sobk, lying stiff and motionless in front of the great pedestal; Thoth and his outlandish horde raising their guns with one accord, while, on the walls, their life-sized replicas looked on, mere carvings in the stone.

As fitting harmony for such a macabre setting, The Shadow's laugh was quivering to the temple's dome, as though he, amid these false immortals, was the only one that death could never reach. Then guns began to talk defiance, burning their bullets against the Ammon statue, nicking away chunks of stone.

Quick shots that did not reach The Shadow. Cooler hands were taking better aim. A few seconds more and The Shadow's folly would be ended.

But those few seconds were more than The Shadow needed. His action was done almost in a twinkling. Gripping Ammon's staff, The Shadow hurled his whole weight upon it, lunging it downward hard against the pedestal.

As the staff struck, guns barked, with the whole figure of The Shadow as their target; yet not a bullet reached its mark!

Men were sprawling, clawing wildly, shooting their guns toward the ceiling, losing their fake heads as they landed on what had once been a floor. It was a floor no longer, but a sea; rolling tiles that heaved like waves and sent men spilling, floundering, like swimmers in a heavy surf.

Stone carvings on the walls seemed to grimace happily at the rolling forms of their living imitators. Ammon, with his ram's face, looked on approvingly, as though complimenting the black-cloaked fighter who had started the devastation.

TEMPLE OF CRIME

Since Ammon did not speak for himself, The Shadow laughed for him. Still astride the statue's shoulders, The Shadow was enjoying the confusion that he had created.

The Shadow had produced an earthquake. Doors that opened when a sound met them directly did not constitute the only secret of this temple. From the Book of Thoth, The Shadow had noted the description of ground that quaked when struck with staffs, and had linked that feature to the poised rod in Ammon's hand. He had not forgotten the grooved tiles mentioned in the temple plans.

Having guessed one riddle of Ammon, The Shadow had put it to practical use at a time most needed, and it was proving far more forceful than he had anticipated. It wasn't until men managed to reach the outer room that they could find their footing. Even then, they swayed from the effect of the artificial waves they had just left.

Some turned and fired at The Shadow, who returned their shots. Their aim was wide, for they wavered, but The Shadow's shots were straight. Bullets, instead of an artificial earthquake, produced the next sprawls.

Then Thoth was among the scramblers, howling for them to forget The Shadow and get outdoors. Of the whole crew, Thoth was the man The Shadow wanted, for he had ordered the slaughter; others had merely obeyed his word.

But Thoth kept low among the fleeing tribe. He knew that he had stirred The Shadow's anger, and would find it more potent than the wrath of Ammon.

Tugging the down-pressed staff, The Shadow lifted it and the heaving floor subsided. Down from the statue, The Shadow was driving after frantic fugitives, some wearing the false heads, others without them. His laugh reached them as they crossed the clearing. They turned at Thoth's cry.

Then, from the grove, guns blasted. Cardona, and another crew had arrived. Rather than face The Shadow and his fearsome laugh, the fugitives flung themselves into the woods, and either sprawled, or fell captive to the men who awaited them.

Only one still defied The Shadow. Thoth, thinking that some of his tribe were with him, turned about and drove for the cloaked shape at the temple doorway.

The Shadow had his finger on a gun trigger, ready to drop the foe who still wore the ibis head. He wanted Thoth to recognize his folly, but the fellow still came on. His own gun was up, ready to shoot when The Shadow fired.

A great blast drowned the blast of The Shadow's automatic. Every gun in the woods had loosed its load, with Thoth the common target. Thoth sprawled, riddled with as many bullets as Sobk, who still lay within the temple.

STANDING with folded arms, The Shadow watched Cardona lift the ibis head from the dead man's shoulders. Instead of Thoth, the moonlight showed the tawny face of Basil Gorth.

Hearing The Shadow laugh, Cardona looked up; he saw a gloved hand beckon. The Shadow led him to the Ammon statue, and there drew off the head of Sobk.

The withery features of Jan Ravion were no longer hidden by the mask of a crocodile. Again The Shadow laughed, and when his strange mirth ended, he was walking out through the doorway of the temple, through silent men who had come with Cardona to the grove.

TEMPLE OF CRIME

They watched him as he moved off into the trees. They were Monak's servants, with Eltab at their head.

Reaching Margo's car, The Shadow told her to skirt the wall again. He was explaining all that happened, when the lights of the car revealed a great gap that had been blasted in the wall.

As Margo applied the brakes, two men sprang into another car, but The Shadow, leaping to the ground, was upon them before they could get started.

Suppressing them with cudgeled blows from an automatic, The Shadow left them groggy. Bound hand and foot, this pair could wait until the local deputies found them. The Shadow had other matters to be settled. He was taking off his hat and cloak when he rejoined Margo in her car.

They reached the mansion, and The Shadow entered it as Lamont Cranston. Both he and Margo Lane expressed surprise at learning what had happened. They had gone for a drive, instead of a stroll, and the sound of an explosion and the rattle of guns had brought them back.

It was Cranston's keen mind that sorted the facts, as fast as Cardona supplied them. While she listened, Margo knew that he was drawing from past experiences, though he did not mention them. Amru Monak, seated behind his desk, kept staring, amazed, at Cranston's uncanny skill in picking up loose threads.

"I couldn't picture you as a murderer," Cranston said to Monak. "It would have been bad business, killing off your cult members in their own presence."

"Then Gorth killed Calbot?"

"No," replied Cranston. "Ravion was the murderer. You see, Gorth was after something that Calbot couldn't have known about. He wanted the treasure in the temple. Those heavy blocks he covered up so glibly. I think that when you inspect them, you will find them well filled with treasure."

"That Sterber knew about!"

"Exactly! It was smuggled in as part of the temple, and Gorth has been waiting ever since to get at it. He had a crew of men on tap, ready to pry the place apart when he found the chance."

Cardona nodded. He had identified some of Gorth's followers. They weren't ordinary crooks, but men who had served as rough-and-ready members of certain expeditions on which Gorth had gone.

"Gorth could have turned Calbot over to his crew," explained Cranston. "But Ravion, playing a lone hand, had to do murder on his own. Ravion told us the truth; he wanted to read the inscription and learn some ancient secrets. Even the mechanism of that temple floor would be something of huge value, if the inscription explains it.

"To keep the inscription as his own, Ravion had to change the arrangement of the slabs in front of the pedestal. He probably induced Calbot to fake it for him. But Calbot must have been ready to sell out to Gorth, which is why Ravion killed him."

Cardona pondered over that one; then asked:

"What makes you think that Gorth would buy up Calbot?"

TEMPLE OF CRIME

"Because Gorth bought up Hakim later. Only an insider could have helped him get those masks to outfit his crew."

STILL speaking in Cranston's style, The Shadow came to the crux of the whole case. The night when stone carvings seemed to dance under the spell of the moon and the effect of ancient incense, Gorth and Ravion had gained fresh ideas, quite independently.

Both knew that sound would open the carefully balanced temple doors. It was Gorth's idea to blast the wall, and when attention was diverted there, his men could enter the temple, rip into its walls and rifle it of treasure. By wearing ancient masks, they could throw the burden of suspicion upon Monak's servants.

Suspecting Gorth's purpose, Ravion had laid a trap. As Sobk, he had stolen the Book of Thoth, and from it learned of statues that spoke when cool air issued from them. Sure that the sigh of Ammon came from air within the adytum beneath, Ravion had gone to the temple and burned a special preparation.

"The Shadow may have seen him," remarked Cranston casually, "and taken him for you, Monak, until he learned that you could not have been there at the time. I suppose, too, that The Shadow found that a gas mask was missing."

"You mean that Ravion –"

"Burned a poisonous substance that was sucked into the adytum. At dawn, it issued forth as gas, intended for Gorth and his invaders. Ravion wanted to get rid of them, so that he could study the temple inscription unmolested."

"Then Ravion decided to pose as Sobk –"

"For a very important reason. The face of Sobk was the only one large enough to hide the gas mask that he needed when he burned the poison powder."

Cranston was picking up his hat and cane. He paused, to add an afterthought.

"The first time Ravion met Gorth's tribe," said Cranston, "they mistook him for one of their own crowd. Gorth wasn't with them at the time. Tonight, Gorth, passing as Thoth, knew that Sobk must be Ravion, because he was wearing the one missing mask. So it was death for Sobk, at Thoth's order."

Leaving Cardona to figure out the rest with Monak, Cranston escorted Margo to their car. As they rode away, with Margo at the wheel, Cranston looked off above the poplars; where the brilliant moon of Isis was shining down upon an ancient edifice concealed amid the grove.

A strange laugh came from Cranston's lips – his farewell to the silent statue of Ammon and the carved figures that adorned the walls of the temple where crime would rule no more.

The parting laugh of The Shadow!

THE END