

THE BANSHEE MURDERS

Maxwell Grant

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THE BANSHEE MURDERS

Maxwell Grant

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CHAPTER I

ALL was pitch-black in the seance room. That blackness was weird, like an invisible jelly that held all present in gluey imprisonment.

Only the moans of Madame Mathilda filtered through that gloom. Madame Mathilda was the medium and when she moaned, it meant that a materialization was likely to occur.

Hence the sitters in the seance room were tense, with one exception. Lamont Cranston was unperturbed. Cranston liked darkness – the blacker the better. When blackness became absolute, it saved him the inconvenience of wearing the black cloak and slouch hat that ordinarily enabled him to blend with dusk or gloom.

Which, in two words, meant that Lamont Cranston was none other than The Shadow.

Now Madame Mathilda was moaning louder, with accompanying tremolos that produced a ventriloquial effect in the darkness. Gasps sounded here and there among the sitters; they thought they were hearing spirit voices.

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Space, direction, sense of proportions, were apt to fade from a person's mind during a seance held in total darkness, but not in Cranston's case.

To Cranston, this was just an overstuffed parlor on a side street a few doors east of Central Park. It contained the usual quota of about a dozen clients who came here in hope of witnessing spirit manifestations; plus a few strangers of whom Cranston was one.

The other strangers included Police Commissioner Ralph Weston and Inspector Joe Cardona. Cranston knew their exact location in the darkness, particularly that of Cardona.

Parked on the other side of the medium, Cardona was supposed to grab a ghost if one arrived and Cranston was expected to do the same from his flank. Turning on the lights was to be the province of Commissioner Weston, who was stationed near the door.

Except that there wouldn't be any ghost to grab. Knowing that fact, Cranston was a trifle bored.

Madame Mathilda dealt in "clairvoyant and clairaudient materializations," a high sounding definition which caused the commissioner to think a lot was due to happen. The police had received a lot of complaints lately about wealthy people investing large sums in questionable ventures due to spirit guidance. Therefore to grab a phoney ghost in a much advertised medium's parlor would be a fine starting point toward cracking up a growing racket.

But those terms "clairvoyant and clairaudient" were a hitch that Weston didn't recognize. They meant simply that Madame Mathilda saw and heard things to which ordinary eyes and ears were not sensitive. All she had to do would be describe spirits and relay what they said; that would satisfy the regular customers and with it disappoint the strangers.

Right now, Madame Mathilda was coming to that phase and Cranston was settling back in his chair hoping it would soon be over, when he saw the glimmer.

It was a dot of light, an uncanny thing that might have come from outer space. It blinked like some strange eye, nervous and untraceable.

Yet not untraceable to Cranston.

Before the seance began, Cranston had taken in every detail of the room. He had noted a loose-hanging corner at the top of an old blackout curtain that Madame Mathilda had drawn across a high window opening into a courtyard. Since the court itself was very dark, that gap had not admitted any light until now.

Only Cranston and the medium could see it, for they were the only two faced in that direction. Cranston studied the phenomenon calmly, analyzing the blinks as something distant from outdoors. The effect upon Madame Mathilda was electrifying.

The medium's trill-sprinkled moans culminated in a stupendous shriek.

"Canhywllah Cyrth!" she shrilled. "Canhywllah Cyrth!"

Whatever those words mean, they were echoed by another woman's voice, close by Cranston's elbow.

"Canhywllah Cyrth!" This woman's tone was a gasp. "I see it too! It will bring the Gwrach y Rhibyn!"

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"She is materializing there upon the rock!" Madame Mathilda was shrieking anew, but her words were coherent. "She has raven tresses and her arms are ivory, she is reaching for the branch of lilac above the crystal pool!"

Apparently this referred to the Gwrach y Rhibyn, whoever she was, for the glimmers of light were no longer twinkling through the corner space of the blackout curtain. Calmly, Cranston waited to hear more. It came.

"In her other hand she holds a dirk!" There was hysteria in the medium's high-pitched voice. "In one hand life, in the other death! Which is to be, you must ask her, for only she can answer!"

"Yes – yes –" Cranston could hear the words panted by the other woman. "I must ask her –"

"But you must wait!" screamed Madame Mathilda. "She is waving her hands, this woodland spirit, in token of farewell. The vision fades, all but the hands, now they are going into mist, but she is flinging tokens of this visitation. Here they are!"

The medium gurgled that last utterance. Something brushed past Cranston's face and from the center of the room there came a clatter across the hardwood floor. Then those sounds were drowned by the hard, violent thud of the medium's body landing on the floor, echoed by the crash of an overturning chair.

Other screams punctured the darkness, voiced by sitters who imagined that they too had seen the singular vision hysterically described by Madame Mathilda.

Strange how a cramped space, pitch-dark, could turn crazed shrieks into reality through the power of suggestion!

Except that Officer Reilly wasn't cramped, nor was it pitch-dark about him. Just starting his nightly patrol, Reilly had all the open space of Central Park in which to amble and already the moonlight was silvering that vast expanse of green.

It was the moon that attracted Reilly's notice. It was taking up a whole side street, over there to the east of the park, as if all the traffic lights in Manhattan had been rolled into one big yellow ball and hung there, saying "Caution."

It wouldn't have surprised Reilly if the moon had switched to red or green, the way all traffic lights did, after hovering on yellow. For Reilly had a strong dash of imagination and therefore liked to believe that the impossible could happen.

Of course if people told you of something that they'd really seen, that was different. It might be that they were right. For instance, Patrolman Reilly remembered his old aunt who had once sworn that she had seen a banshee. Therefore people found it unwholesome to argue against banshees with Reilly, because it might cast doubt upon his old aunt.

Therefore banshees came into the "seeing is believing" category where Reilly was concerned and that was why Reilly now stood stock-still.

Reilly was staring squarely at a banshee!

Outlined against the moon, the weird creature fitted banshee specifications and more. From above her shoulders streamed flowing long hair; her outstretched arms were sweeping as if her hands were casting curses upon everything within a wide enough range to include Reilly.

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She was atop a rock, beyond a shrub-clustered slope that was skirted by a stony path. Below, hidden beyond the rock, lay a sizeable pool that had its outlet under a rustic bridge that Reilly crossed when covering his beat.

The path was the shortest route to the rock and Reilly would have taken it at once, except that his dread of banshees somewhat stilled his urge toward duty; but as Reilly stared, he began to wonder if this creature could be a banshee after all.

According to some authorities, Reilly's aunt for one, banshees were fearsome hags who wore garments resembling tattered coffin shrouds. This sylvan sprite was slender and shapely, while at this distance and in the uncertain moonlight, her raiment seemed to consist solely of her flowing hair.

What broke the spell was the breaking of the bough. As Reilly stared, he saw the banshee's arms complete their sweep by grasping the branch of an overhanging tree and breaking it away. That was against the rules of Central Park and banshees were no exception. Furthermore, a physical act by a spirit creature struck Reilly as against the rules governing banshees.

The lithe creature of the rock was snapping a smaller branch from the broken large one when Reilly, duty prevailing, began a dash up by the path which carried him briefly away from where he could see the rock. It was during that trifling interlude that Reilly proved himself a man of determination, unwilling to abandon whatever course he had begun.

For from the crag that overhung the pool, the spot that Reilly could not see, yet could locate by the direction of the sound, there came the certifying token of the banshee, a weird, rising wail that ended in a harrowing scream.

Hardly had the cry ended before the hurrying patrolman was above the slope, blowing his whistle as he arrived. Shouts came from across the pool as persons reached the rustic bridge and pointed excitedly to the overhanging rock in proof that they, too, had heard the unearthly wail.

Then Reilly was stock-still again, still trilling the alarm and beckoning to other persons who appeared along paths well down the flanks of the slope. Cars were stopping on a drive below, even two riders on a distant bridle path halted their quivering horses, as the steeds whinnied terrified answers to the trailing scream.

From further away came the rising siren of a patrol car, responding to Reilly's call, but it seemed like something from another world. For the world in which Officer Reilly now stood could well be termed unearthly in itself.

Reilly was on the very crag where he had seen the beauteous maiden with the flowing hair; on every side were witnesses who could not only testify that they too had glimpsed the ethereal creature, but were placed where they could cut off all parts of escape.

Yet like the banshee that she represented, the spectral visitant was gone. The only proof that such a creature could have been here was a broken branch from a lilac tree that rustled lightly overhead.

Though Reilly did not notice it at this moment, that lilac branch was not intact. It lacked a twig that had been snapped from it as rudely as the branch itself had been wrested from the tree!

CHAPTER II

MADAME MATHILDA responded well to the aromatic spirits of ammonia. In fact they were the only spirits that had actually appeared in the seance room.

Nevertheless the scene was not without a trace of mystery.

Just before she had passed out with a horrible wail, the medium had shrieked something about objects representing life and death. Those items were on exhibit in the light that now filled the parlor. They were lying in the very middle of the room, the things that Madame Mathilda had named: a sprig of lilac and a dagger.

Commissioner Weston took the case in hand. That was, he took Madame Mathilda in hand, by planting a hard hand upon her shoulder and shaking her to her feet despite the protests of the faithful clients who surrounded their poor medium.

Announcing himself in a tone of final authority, the commissioner started to declare that the medium was under arrest for producing fraudulent materializations, only to find himself interrupted by a timid-looking client who suddenly became vociferous.

"Those aren't materializations!" the man argued. "They are apports. You have no case against this medium, commissioner."

The term "apports" rather stumped Weston until Cranston intervened in his calm style.

"This gentleman is right, commissioner," declared Cranston. "A materialization is the partial or complete production of an actual spirit form. The mere arrival of an object in a seance room is called an apport, particularly when the object is inanimate."

The distinction didn't quite satisfy Weston.

"These things were materialized," stormed the commissioner, gesturing to the knife and the sprig of lilac. "Of course the medium faked it, but she claims the objects came from the spirit land."

It was Madame Mathilda now who was interrupting with emphatic headshakes. Somehow she couldn't find the voice which had been so rampant only recently.

"You are wrong, commissioner," continued Cranston, patiently. "These are obviously material objects which can be traced to a natural source. The twig for instance has been broken from a lilac tree quite recently; we may discover that the dagger belongs in some museum.

"True the medium may claim that they were brought here by spirit forces" – Cranston was glancing at Madame Mathilda, who halted her head shake and began to nod – "which certain scientists might decide to be evidence of some fourth dimensional activities. Outright skeptics might class the whole matter as a fraud, but it was not the sort that you came here to uncover, commissioner. You hoped to witness a materialization, but you saw none."

Before Weston could reply, another person entered the argument. This was another of the medium's clients, a gray-haired woman whose very vigor belied the term elderly. She was the person who had gasped the strange words when the medium talked of seeing a figure on a rock.

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"Perhaps you have heard of me, commissioner." The woman spoke with a hauteur that suited her tall and somewhat portly stature. "I am Sylvia Selmore, one of the very people whose affairs you are trying to protect by meddling into them!"

Weston acknowledged the introduction with a bow. He had often heard of Sylvia Selmore, former lecturer, writer, champion of peace and reform, as well as being generally eccentric and wealthy enough to continue so.

"There was a materialization," Miss Selmore insisted. "I witnessed it along with the medium!"

At that, Madame Mathilda sank back with an unhappy gasp that called for more spirits of ammonia. To give the medium air, Cranston tugged away the blackout curtain covering the courtyard window, then opened the window itself. The darkness of the court was complete, with no trace of that distant light which had blinked the curious signal.

Yet at that moment, Cranston wouldn't have wanted the blinks to recur.

Thanks to the darkness, Cranston was viewing something closer and better. The blackness of the window pane gave it the quality of a mirror in which he observed Madame Mathilda. All eyes had turned toward Cranston, therefore the medium relaxed in unguarded style.

Reflected by the lights of the room, Mathilda's face revealed not only the opening of her shrewd eyes, but the satisfied smile that crept across her lips. Sole witness of the medium's minor triumph, Cranston recognized the reason for it. Madame Mathilda was erroneously assuming that the clue of the dangling curtain now was gone. She didn't guess that it remained in the memory of the very person who had destroyed it, Lamont Cranston, otherwise The Shadow!

Now attention was back upon Mathilda, so her eyes were closed again. Moaning feebly, the medium began to recuperate in slow, well-rehearsed style. Coming completely from her fake trance, she stared wonderingly at the faces about her, as though to ask what had happened.

Portly Miss Sylvia Selmore rallied to the medium's aid.

"Poor dear," expressed Sylvia, referring to Mathilda, "she can't remember a thing that happened. She was in a trance you know and everything she saw was a clairvoyant phenomenon."

Angrily, Weston drew himself up to say something, then switched to a brusque-mannered silence, his broad face glowering to a degree that seemed to bristle his short-clipped military mustache.

"She heard things too," continued Sylvia, "because she is clairaudient. Then the spirit itself controlled her and spoke through the medium's voice."

Miss Sylvia nodded as though she knew all about such phenomena, but her theory didn't help solve the question as to whether or not there had been an actual materialization, the thing that the law wanted to witness.

It was Inspector Joe Cardona, a swarthy, stocky individual who brought up that point. So far Cardona had been a good listener; now he proved himself a good talker. Facing Miss Sylvia, Cardona put a blunt query:

"Tell me, Miss Selmore, you saw these things that the medium talked about, didn't you?"

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"Partly," acknowledged Sylvia. "I am sure I saw the Canhywllah Cyrth."

Cardona repeated Sylvia's pronunciation of a term he never could have spelled.

"Canhywllah Cyrth," said Joe. "What does it mean?"

"The English call it a corpse candle," explained Sylvia. "Canhywllah Cyrth is the Welsh term. I am Welsh, you know. My family dates back to early Pennsylvania, shortly after its settlement. The Canhywllah Cyrth is a strange, tiny light that announces the arrival of the Gwrach y Rhibyn."

Weston gave a despairing gesture at hearing this second name repeated, but Cardona was persistent.

"What is the Gwrach y Rhibyn?"

"A family spirit," explained Sylvia. "Some call its appearance a bad omen, but not those who understand. More often than not, the Gwrach y Rhibyn brings a fair warning. I didn't see the Gwrach y Rhibyn, but Madame Mathilda did, which proves she must have materialized somewhere."

"Who materialized?" put in Weston, briskly. "Madame Mathilda?"

"No," retorted Sylvia. "The Gwrach y Rhibyn. I have seen her myself, when death threatened the family. She appeared as a hideous old hag –"

"I get it," interrupted Cardona. "A banshee."

The comment stiffened Sylvia's hauteur.

"A banshee indeed!" The portly lady was indignant. "Banshees are wayward creatures that howl around the walls of Irish castles for any and all to see. In Wales our family spirits are more particular. They manifest themselves in ancient halls or beside sylvan pools."

"That's what Madame Mathilda saw!" Sylvia was becoming eager now. "She saw my family spirit materialized beside some forest pool. As a token, the Gwrach y Rhibyn sent this" – Sylvia picked up the sprig of lilac from the floor – "But with it there was a warning." Pausing, the portly lady pointed stiffly at the dagger. "A warning that might mean death," Sylvia continued. "No wonder the Gwrach y Rhibyn vanished with a wail!"

Sylvia finished that statement with a shudder and in a moment, most members of the group were quaking too. For from outside the house there came a rising wail that at this instant carried everything unearthly in its hideous cry.

Lamont Cranston wasn't one who shuddered, but he had to press a reassuring hand upon the shoulder of a scared girl who was standing beside him. She was Margo Lane, who accompanied Cranston on many of his milder adventures. Margo had thought it a lark to attend a spirit seance, but this one hadn't proven the mild affair she'd anticipated.

In fact, despite Cranston's steadying clasp, Margo would have let out a wild scream of her own, if she hadn't suddenly recognized what the wail was – a thing which Cranston had caught upon the instant.

Neither human nor supernatural, the howl was purely a mechanical utterance from the siren of a police car wheeling past the house in the direction of Central Park.

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Immediately alert, Weston and Cardona exchanged glances that were promptly answered by the jangle of the telephone. Cardona took the call in official fashion; then hung up and turned to Weston.

"Headquarters," stated Cardona. "They knew you were here, commissioner. That's why they called. All available patrol cars have been ordered to Central Park."

Staring a moment, Weston demanded:

"A murder?"

Shaking his head, Cardona turned to Miss Sylvia.

"This thing you talked about, Miss Selmore," said Cardona. "The family spook with a Welsh name. You're sure it isn't the same thing as a banshee?"

Again, Miss Sylvia exhibited her full dignity.

"Positively not!"

"Then you're due for an argument, with an officer named Reilly," announced Cardona. Plucking the lilac sprig from Sylvia's hand, he added: "Right at the time Madame Mathilda was describing something, Reilly saw it. A beautiful creature over by a pool in Central Park, breaking off a bough from a lilac tree, which is against all regulations."

Bringing two handkerchiefs from his pockets, Cardona laid the lilac twig in one, then picked up the dagger with the other, to wrap both items together. Then, to make the act official, the inspector furnished this addendum:

"Officer Reilly says the creature was a banshee," declared Cardona, "and a banshee it is until we find out different!"

CHAPTER III

HUNTING a banshee in Central Park was a shivery sport, even on a warm night. At least Margo Lane found it so, despite the presence of police in plentitude. In fact it was the prevalence of uniformed searchers that made the situation so uncanny. Only a banshee or its equivalent could have eluded the sizeable cordon established around the rock-rimmed pool.

On the jutting rock where Reilly had seen the banshee, there was evidence to support the officer's testimony. That evidence was a lilac bough which anybody might have wrenched from the tree, but it bore a distinctive mark linking Reilly's banshee with Sylvia's Gwrach y Rhibyn.

There was a jagged mark where a portion of the branch had been ripped away and when Cardona fitted the twig that he had brought from the seance room, it corresponded exactly!

Certainly this made it seem that Madame Mathilda had viewed the actual scene upon the cliff above the pool and that in departure, the phantom had projected a souvenir of the occasion into Mathilda's parlor.

To emphasize his testimony, Reilly led the investigators back to the spot from which he had first seen the banshee. Pointing to the rock, he declaimed:

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"'Twas there she stood, reaching for the branch, which as any eye can see, was a good bit above her head. What she was wearing I wouldn't know, after seeing her from this distance only, but 'twas scanty. The moon is higher now, but right then it was bucking traffic over from across the park and against it I could see the banshee's hair, all waving with the black glisten of a raven's wings.

"Only half way there I was, when she gave the banshee screech and vanished. Mind you, there is nowhere else she could have gone except into nowhere, as others here will testify. Some saw her from the bridge, others heard her from the bridle path and the drive. It's their word, not mine that you can take, though nobody lives that has ever questioned the word of a Reilly."

At Weston's suggestion, they went around to the bridge and studied the rock from there, only to find the mystery even tighter. Though the top of the rock was dim because of the overhanging tree, the front surface caught the full glisten of the moonlight.

Except for slight crevices and the tough, stunted bushes that grew from them, the rock was almost sheer until it reached the water's edge. It certainly couldn't have hidden a random figure, but Weston's doubts concerned the brow of the rock. With a cautious look at Reilly, to make sure that the patrolman wouldn't feel that his own testimony was being criticized, Weston spoke to persons who had been on the bridge.

"Regarding the woman on the rock," said the commissioner. "Are you sure you really saw her there? It's dark up there from this angle. You didn't have as good a view as Reilly."

"There was moonlight then," returned one of the witnesses. "It was shining straight at the rock top. The lower part was darker at that time."

Another witness corroborated this statement. In addition there were some who had arrived when they heard the wild departing shriek of the creature that was more and more assuming the proportions of a banshee. Some had heard the crackling of the lilac bough; others had glimpsed the sylphlike figure that had flung the tree branch. All admitted that their view was vague, but that the shape was real until the moment that it dwindled, as if swallowed by the rock itself.

One witness gave a novel bit of testimony. She was a middle-aged woman attired in an out-of-date riding habit and her face was as long in expression and as solemn as that of the horse that stood beside her.

"I did not see the rock, nor the person on it," this woman declared. "What attracted my attention was the light that blinked very strangely, off yonder."

The woman stabbed a long finger in a direction at an angle to the rock and on a level a trifle above the trees. Following her point, others saw only the silhouetted outline of a tall apartment building to the west of Central Park.

"That light," suggested Cardona, suddenly. "Was it like a candle, floating through the air?"

The long-faced woman thought a while, then nodded so vehemently that her horse followed suit.

"The corpse candle," said Cardona to Weston, "or whatever they call it in Wales. The thing Miss Selmore said she saw, commissioner."

The commissioner wasn't impressed. He eyed the long-faced woman dubiously as though wondering if she had played the banshee and then skipped off to acquire her riding habit and her horse. But after a brief appraisal, Weston decided that this witness couldn't have come up to the specifications of the woodland sprite

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who had been described in captivating terms.

It was time to tighten the cordon and bring in the banshee. So the commissioner dismissed class and went about his business, which left Margo on the bridge by moonlight, thinking she'd have a few quiet words with Lamont. But when Margo looked around, she found herself alone and realized only too suddenly that she hadn't seen Lamont Cranston during the past ten minutes.

Somehow this setting was becoming a trifle too spooky. The ripple of the water beneath the bridge, the added tumult where it tumbled into a series of cascades down the lower slope, were sounds that threatened to drown anything less than a banshee's wail. If such a howl should again disturb the night, Margo didn't care to be the only person to hear it.

Looking for somewhere else to go, Margo happened to glance beyond the westward trees. A moment later she was riveted by a sight she didn't want. It was starting again, that blinky light that Madame Mathilda and Miss Selmore had called the Canhywllah Cyrth!

Oddly, the sight stiffened Margo's nerve. At least this was one mystery that she might solve in her small way. So she started in the direction of the intermittent light, even though it led around to the other side of the rocky pool which was unexplored territory to Margo.

The light was like a will-o-the-wisp, but it served as a beacon even though it might not be leading anywhere. Suddenly its flickers ceased and only then did Margo realize that her path had been guided by the light itself. Now she was suddenly worried, for she was past the pool and practically among the searchers who were clinging around it. If she ran into any of them, Margo might be arrested on suspicion of having impersonated a banshee, which would mean a lot of troublesome explanations.

That thought impelled Margo to undertake a detour further around the pool and the immediate result was grief. The turf gave suddenly and along with a deluge of spilling stones, Margo was precipitated down into a narrow gully which was completely hidden under the spread of overhanging trees.

Though startling, the slide proved brief. As for the gully, it furnished exactly what Margo wanted, an outlet past the cordon. As she crept along, moving away from the direction of the pool, Margo realized that at intervals this narrow passage actually burrowed under solid ground where drives and bridle paths crossed it. By the time the gully leveled off, the crowd of circling searchers was far behind.

Still, the ground was still high here, for as Margo ventured past some large boulders, she saw a downward slope and beyond it some rapid moving lights that flitted a reflection from among the tree roots. She realized then that she had reached a transverse, one of the speedways that cross Central Park below the level of the driveways.

Those were the lights of automobiles, rolling along the underpass. Since there was no way to cross the cut, Margo was about to turn and look for a pathway, when she saw a figure come stealthily from behind a tree near the transverse.

It was a singular figure, lean and stoopish that could hardly be termed more than an outline of something human, though with a trifling stretch of the imagination it might have been mistaken for an orangutan escaped from the Central Park Zoo. If the thing hadn't turned in Margo's direction, she probably wouldn't have attracted its attention, but it did turn.

Sight of an ugly, darkish face leering into the moonlight brought a half-scream from Margo and that was not only enough, but too much. The figure wheeled, unlimbered to full height, and whipped its arm back to

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throw.

Right then an avalanche struck Margo.

That avalanche came in the form of human blackness, launched from the darkness of a large rock that Margo had just skirted. Spilled by the drive, Margo sprawled headlong, hardly realizing that her rescuer was The Shadow. For rescuer he was, as testified by a whirring sound that whipped past the spot where Margo had just been, to end with a thud against a stout tree.

From her sprawl, Margo saw a sight that really dazed her. As The Shadow lunged toward the embankment, the stooped man who had thrown the knife made another of his unlimbering motions, but with a complete turnabout. It seemed that he literally scooped himself from The Shadow's grasp and vanished into the darkness above the transverse which at that moment, fortunately for the fugitive, was devoid of passing cars and their tell-tale lights.

It was The Shadow's voice that hissed the warning that Margo heeded. Scrambling up past the rocks, the girl found a driveway and ran along it toward where she knew a cab was waiting for Cranston. Finding the cab, Margo popped into it and felt safe at last, for she knew the driver. His name was Shrevvy and his cab was always at Cranston's service, especially on nights like this.

Five minutes later, Cranston arrived back at the cab to report that the police hunt was still under way and accomplishing nothing. In fact, Cranston seemed rather bored with the whole business until the cab had rolled from Central Park and was swinging along a lighted avenue.

Then, turning to Margo, Cranston queried:

"Remember that mysterious apport business over at Madame Mathilda's?"

"Of course." Margo found her voice with a forced laugh. "You mean the sprig of lilac that they found there. But there was plenty more lilac out in the park."

"And that was only half of it," reminded Cranston. "There was a dagger that landed on the floor of the seance room. There seems to be plenty more of such out in the park too. I found this as a sample."

In the light of the passing street lamps, Cranston exhibited the object which Margo realized was the whirring thing that had sped past her and planted itself in the trunk of a tree.

Glistening in Cranston's hand was the exact twin of the dirk that had arrived so mysteriously in Madame Mathilda's parlor!

CHAPTER IV

CENTRAL PARK was anything but sinister when seen in the pleasant light of afternoon. It was a melody in green, tempered by streaks of rocky gray, broken with the sheen of blue pools and ponds, plus a few spots where pleasant streams came into sight.

Of course there were paths and drives, along with occasional buildings. People were everywhere. Margo wondered how long they would stay around after dark, particularly if they thought in terms of a banshee's wail.

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Probably everyone was thinking in such terms, for the newspapers were full of the banshee business. Nothing quite like it had come along since the days of the famed Jersey Devil or the more recent Mattoon Madman.

Rather fun, having such a mystery right in your own front yard, which was what Central Park was to all Manhattan. Only the police had placed strong restrictions upon anyone trampling around in search of the vanished sprite. In fact, Commissioner Weston had issued an edict to the effect that officially the banshee did not exist.

Central Park did look like a huge front yard from where Margo viewed it and that was why the trees, people and everything else looked proportionately small. Margo's vantage point was the top story of the sizeable Chateau Parkview, a huge apartment-hotel that towered from the lower side of Central Park South, once called Fifty-ninth Street.

This apartment belonged to Niles Ronjan and Margo had come here before with Lamont Cranston. The place was so curious that despite herself, Margo began to forget Central Park and its mystery of last night.

If the place was curious, so was Ronjan.

Here was a man with the genius of an inventor, the urge of an adventurer, and the air of a fanatic. He was sallow, quick of eye, and with shaggy, unkempt hair that fluttered on any provocation. Ronjan gave it plenty of provocation, the way he bobbed around the room.

Ronjan had to hop around because the room was large and the whole center was occupied by a large tank the size of a billiard table and similarly mounted on heavy legs. The tank was full of water, and the metal bottom was shaped irregularly, as though representing part of the ocean bottom, which it did.

Not only did Ronjan sail boats in this tank, he sank them. At present one was under water, hanging to a submerged ledge, while another was floating nearby. The two boats were connected by a curious piece of metal hose which was made in joined sections.

"There you are, Cranston." Ronjan shook his shaggy hair and spread his arms deprecatingly. "The Good Wind sunk off Skipper's Rock, with our salvage boat moored above. The treasure is there, the link is completed" – another shrug from Ronjan – "and now we must begin all over."

Cranston's eyes denoted query.

"We approached from the wrong side," explained Ronjan. "We took the lee side, thinking that the sand would have piled from windward. We were wrong, as Yuble will tell you."

Ronjan gave a gesture toward a corner of the room and Margo furnished a half-gasp from the window. Margo knew who Yuble was, but she hadn't realized that the man was here at all. On the few occasions that she had previously seen Dom Yuble, he had at least been conspicuous.

Now Yuble was rising from the corner chair where he had been a silent witness to proceedings. Whether he'd been here all along or had come in silently later, Margo couldn't guess. However Cranston didn't appear perturbed, probably because he was used to silent tactics himself.

Dom Yuble, sometimes called Captain Yuble, looked like something washed up from the Spanish Main after having been lost there a long, long time. He couldn't be termed a chunk of human wreckage because he had stood the test of time. Rather he was stout timber that had hardened into iron.

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Solid of build, taller than he looked because of his brawny proportions gave him extra width, Yuble had a face that was a study in itself. That face looked like something that had been molded soft by an apprentice, who had not done his job too well; then, discouraged, the moulder had left the job alone and it had set like cooling metal.

Not that Yuble's features were permanently fixed; that applied only to two scars, one across his cheek, the other a jagged line at the side of his forehead. Yuble's face was usually stolid simply because he had no reason to make it otherwise. When he wished, he smiled by parting his straight lips and showing the gleam of white teeth, but the smile had no particular expression and might have been interpreted in a dozen ways.

As for Yuble's complexion, it too fitted the hardened softness of the man. Yuble was dark, or had been once, but his face had become so weather-beaten that its color was reduced to a peculiar tawn that almost matched an olive drab.

In a way, Yuble seemed the tropical equivalent of a New England fishing skipper whose face had become as rugged as the rocks of his own shore. In Yuble's case, his features had taken on something of the look and contour of a coral reef.

As Yuble stepped forward, his face caught the gleam of sunlight from the window and his ear-lobes showed large, with round, pierced holes showing in them. In his native habitat, Yuble evidently wore ear-rings, of a large and heavy variety. Those lobes had been stretched to double size and they were the only part of Yuble's ears that showed. The rest was hidden by the mass of Yuble's curly hair, which was so dark and glossy that Margo wondered why it wasn't slick instead of curly.

When he spoke, Dom Yuble supplied an apologetic tone that was chiefly mannerism, though in this case there was cause for it, since he was ready to take part blame for Ronjan's failure.

"There was sand," agreed Yuble. "Much sand. More sand than would pile on reefs in the West Indies. But I should have thought to expect sand."

"That's why we need more money, Cranston," asserted Ronjan. "We shall require new units for the articulated tube when we operate from windward."

Carefully, Ronjan shifted the position of the floating boat and altered the miniature pipe line accordingly. It came short of the sunken model and because of the contour of the ocean bed, it was obvious that the new segments of pipe would have to be inserted at specific intervals along the line.

Cranston accepted this with an understanding nod; then queried calmly:

"What about Craig Farnsworth?"

"He has promised us more money," returned Ronjan, frankly, "but so far he has not provided it. Perhaps if you talked to him, Cranston –"

With that Ronjan paused, his eyes so canny that Margo suspected that there was craft behind them. Ronjan was waiting for a response that came. Cranston nodded again.

With that, Ronjan started eagerly for the door, as though to speed Cranston to his coming conference with Farnsworth. Cranston followed and Margo did the same, with Ronjan talking all the while.

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"It's a sure investment, Cranston – no need for extra shares in the enterprise – merely a loan to be paid at interest – perhaps a special bonus for the investors – the basic arrangement should be the same –"

Repeating such running patter, Ronjan stepped into the elevator when it arrived and rode down to the ground floor, continuing his statements in a confidential tone close to Cranston's ear. Out through the spacious lobby, clear to the street, Ronjan accompanied his parting guests, all the while emphasizing the very things that he had said before.

Standing by while Ronjan completed his repetitious discourse with Cranston, Margo stared across at Central Park, now deepening with dusk. As she asked herself the same old question of whether banshees did exist, Margo had a sudden start.

Something loomed into the glow of the early street lamps opposite. It wasn't the exotic figure of some sylvan creature, but a shape even more unexpected.

For the moment, Margo thought she saw The Shadow!

Then the illusion ended. It was only some peculiar bird that had fluttered from the gloom, its wings giving the curious effect of a cloaked silhouette, magnified against the light.

Turning, Margo thought she saw the creature flying upward; then all sight of it was lost against the front of the tall hotel, though Margo had a vague impression that the bird had come to roost up beneath the long-eaved roof of the Chateau Parkview.

A taxicab horn interrupted Margo's train of thought. Having finally shaken hands with Ronjan, Cranston had hailed the cab and it was waiting to take him and Margo to their interview with Craig Farnsworth.

"Yes, Margo," said Cranston, "that's Ronjan's apartment up where you see the top floor lights. He's gone back up there, so we can talk about other matters."

Margo responded with a surprised smile as she stepped into the cab. If Lamont wanted to play at reading her thoughts, it would be just as well to let him think that he was right. No use mentioning the odd bird that had given such a brief but startling imitation of The Shadow.

If Cranston's guess was wrong, so was Margo's conclusion as was later to be proved!

CHAPTER V

MINUTES mean much in Manhattan. They produce surprising meetings, curious situations that often seem like something designed by fate's hand. Yet for all the remarkable coincidences that occur, there are many more that miss. People who haven't met for years may pass within a block of one another, or just around the corner, without ever realizing it.

Similarly, for every singular occurrence that a person may witness by chance, a dozen other similar incidents may remain unobserved because of the same freak. Usually though, there is a direct cause; this time it was a taxicab.

If Shrevvy's cab hadn't been at Cranston's call, things would have taken a different turn. The slight delay that Cranston avoided by having the cab handy, caused him to miss a bit of luck that fate would otherwise have tossed right in his lap.

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Another cab stopped in front of the Chateau Parkview just after Cranston's pulled away. From it stepped a girl, an attractive blonde dressed in blue, which made her floral decoration seem rather drab and therefore conspicuous in a negative way.

The blonde was wearing a bunch of lilacs.

Looking about, the girl frowned rather prettily, then entered the lobby and stared at the people there. Her eyes returned to the door, then roved the lobby again, missing the young man who entered at that moment.

He was a rugged type, this young man, and his stolid expression made him look older than he was. He had a slight limp, but he wasn't tired when he paused just inside the doorway. The reason that he paused was because he expected someone to be looking for him, which was evidenced by the way he took a stance well in the open of the lobby.

Against the dark brown of his suit, the flower that the young man wore in his lapel stood out very sharply, except that it wasn't exactly a flower.

It was a tiny sprig of lilac.

At about that moment, the girl in blue decided that she too should be letting someone look for her, instead of the other way around. Relaxing, she turned toward the doorway and her gaze met that of the man in brown. She noticed a contrast instantly; the young man's face looked very pale, but that was because his hair matched the color of his suit. A slight pallor would naturally be exaggerated in such a setting.

The young man smiled, both slightly and nicely, then took a few steps forward. Realizing that she was about to be accosted, the girl was worried, but only briefly. The man's face was frank and he obviously intended to be polite. The girl started to smile in return, hesitated, then let the smile arrive.

She had seen the sprig of lilac.

"I'm Philip Harley," the young man stated. "You expected me of course."

The girl nodded. Then:

"And I'm Arlene Forster," she declared. "Of course I knew that you would expect me, but I wasn't quite sure _"

"Quite sure that I'd be here?"

"No, no." Arlene spoke hastily. "I was certain that someone would meet me, but I wasn't positive when it would be."

"But the time was specified. Seven o'clock on the evening of the fifteenth."

"That's what I wasn't sure about, whether you said the fifteenth or the sixteenth. It was you who phoned me, wasn't it, Mr. Harley?"

A striking change came over the young man's face. Phil Harley was puzzled, which was why his expression tightened. As quickly the expression faded, before Arlene Forster noticed it. The girl at that moment was answering her own question in a reminiscent tone and her violet eyes had a reflective stare.

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"No, it couldn't have been you, Mr. Harley," Arlene mused. "The voice was different. Whoever called said the fifteenth, then changed the day to the sixteenth. I was sure of it at the time, yet afterward –"

Pausing, Arlene nodded.

"Well, this is the fifteenth," she decided brightly. Her eyes sparkled as they again met Phil's gaze. "Anyway, we were supposed to meet, and here we are. We know we're the right people, because we're both wearing a bit of lilac. It's rather unusual, lilac as a flower, isn't it?"

Phil agreed that it was. Now his expression was very steady. He wondered if this girl was trying to trick him, or whether she simply wanted him to declare himself. Since Phil had nothing to declare, the only alternative was to profess ignorance, which was something else he didn't care to do.

Fortunately, the girl herself provided an opportunity for Phil to parry longer. She glanced across the lobby toward a pretentious restaurant; then remarked:

"One thing I remember from that long distance call. The date included dinner. Am I right this time?"

"You are," assured Phil, "so let's go."

Though various things might puzzle Phil Harley, he had cultivated one faculty, that of sensing when something odd was occurring nearby. Right now, Phil was sure that somewhere in the lobby someone had observed his meeting with the blonde who answered to the name of Arlene Forster.

Phil could almost feel a stir among the patrons of the place, whether they lived here or merely intended to dine in the swanky cafe that flanked the lobby of the Chateau Parkview. Locating that stir or the invisible eyes it represented was a problem in itself, but Phil felt sure that something would happen to solve it.

Something did happen.

A bell-boy emerged suddenly from behind a pillar, included Arlene with a quizzical look and called:

"Paging Miss Forster – paging Miss Forster –"

The blonde interrupted the process and announced herself as Miss Forster. The bell-hop gestured to a deep alcove around past a newsstand.

"Phone call for you," he told Arlene. "You'll find it in the phone booth where the receiver is off the hook."

Phil tipped the bell-boy a quarter and followed Arlene. To be polite, he paused at the newsstand while the blonde entered the booth. As Arlene closed the door, Phil gave her a final glance.

She was very charming. Her profile was shapely and the flowing fluff of her hair showed beautifully against the background of the booth, though it lost its blonde effect in the semi-darkness.

What interrupted Phil's stare was the query of the man behind the newsstand, asking if he wanted anything. Phil decided to buy some cigarettes, so he named his brand and while the man was finding them, Phil glanced at the headlines of some newspapers lying on the stand.

Funny headlines, these, all about a banshee in Central Park. There wasn't any picture of the banshee, but she was described as something very sprightly and beautiful. Apparently the banshee liked lilacs, for there was a

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picture of a lilac tree with inserts showing a broken bough and loose sprig that fitted it.

That cluster of lilac blossoms depicted in the photograph was oddly like Arlene's corsage!

Eyes narrowing, a flush sweeping his pale face, Phil swung toward the phone booth. Another oddity impressed him now; he couldn't see Arlene through the glass of the closed door. There were times when Phil Harley could become impulsive and this was one of them.

Striding to the phone booth, Phil thrust the door open on its inward hinges, intending to interrupt Arlene and ask her what the lilac was all about.

That was simply the beginning of a real surprise. Arlene Forster wasn't in the phone booth. It was entirely empty!

This was something that just couldn't happen – or could it? If Phil's senses were right, and he prided himself on their accuracy, he certainly should have been aware of Arlene sneaking past him, if she'd chosen that course. Phil glared accusingly at the newsstand man, who stared back blankly.

"You saw the girl, didn't you?" demanded Phil. "Where did she go?"

The man seemed to remember the girl vaguely; then, piecing events, he took the obvious that Phil rejected.

"Guess she went out to the lobby." The newsstand man gestured in that direction. "I was getting cigarettes; when I turned around, you were reading the paper. No wonder neither of us saw her leave."

The logic of it made Phil smile.

"I was reading about banshees," he acknowledged. "I suppose I was in a mood to think somebody vanished."

With that, Phil started to the lobby to seek Arlene, but he couldn't subdue the belief that he wasn't going to find her. The lobby was large and by Phil's calculations, Arlene would have had to do some fast footwork to reach the street door before he saw her. Still, she wasn't in sight, which was just what Phil expected.

An elevator was standing open; the dials of the others showed them around the higher floors. The only stairway, a rather grand affair, was as distant as the street door. That left only the restaurant as the one place near enough for Arlene to reach. But when Phil reached the entrance to the cafe and surveyed its expanse of tables, he still couldn't locate the missing blonde.

The cafe was only about half-filled and spotting Arlene should have been easy, provided she was there, although the place had some pillars that partly obscured Phil's view. More puzzled than ever, Phil turned toward the lobby again and stared right at a girl who met him with a smile.

The newcomer wasn't Arlene. To even presume that she might be would mark the transformation as the fastest and most convincing quick-change on record. This girl was a brunette, with sleek, black hair, a complexion that was clear, yet in a sense darkish because of its slight olive tint. Her dark eyes seemed wondering and gave the same effect to her smile, yet with it there was something strangely exotic in the brunette's demeanor.

Those dark eyes fixed on the tiny bit of lilac that embellished Phil's lapel. The girl inquired:

"You are Mr. Phil Harley?"

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That was what she said, but it didn't sound the way it spelled. There was something musical about the girl's accent that made the words sound better when she mispronounced them. Staring hard, to make sure this girl wouldn't vanish, too, Phil acknowledged his identity with a nod.

"Very good," the brunette declared. "I was told to meet you here. We are to have dinner together. Shall we?"

Blonde or brunette, name or no name, Phil Harley decided that it made no difference, provided there were no more vanishes. At least from this girl, he might learn something of the situation as it concerned Arlene Forster.

Phil Harley felt he was on the verge of a mystery. He was wrong. He was right in the middle of one!

CHAPTER VI

FROM the terrace apartment where Craig Farnsworth lived, Central Park appeared now as a vast patch of black velvet, studded with jewels of light. It seemed odd, as Margo Lane considered it, how great a change a few hours could produce in that setting.

Even more odd what a few minutes had done back at the Chateau Parkview, where a peculiar drama had developed involving Phil Harley and Arlene Forster, two persons whose connection with an existing mystery had begun too late for Lamont Cranston to learn about it!

While Margo studied the darkened park and also the distant line of buildings to the south of it, Cranston listened to Farnsworth's discourse on the subject of Ronjan's treasure quest.

Craig Farnsworth was a big man and emphatic in proportion to his size. He was also a big money man, or he couldn't have afforded this fancy apartment in a high-priced neighborhood on the upper East Side. But having made his money, Farnsworth wasn't the man to part with it too quickly.

"Ronjan's proposal is very simple," summed Farnsworth, in a scoffing tone. "We're to put up the extra money, but he is to gain the big share of the treasure. How does that proposition strike you?"

"As a very minor shareholder," returned Cranston, "I would prefer to hear your opinion, Farnsworth."

"Quite naturally." A smile spread over Farnsworth's broad, ruddy face. "You would only have to contribute pro rata to the loan. If I risked much, you would be willing to risk little. Is that it?"

"That is it."

"Very well then," Farnsworth decided. "I shall advance Ronjan all the money he needs" – there was a pause while Farnsworth watched Cranston raise his eyebrows as an expression of surprise – "provided he puts up suitable bond."

This brought an actual smile from Cranston.

"If Ronjan could post a bond," he stated, "he wouldn't need to borrow the money."

"I said a suitable bond," defined Farnsworth. "By that I mean that Ronjan should give over ownership in his articulated under-water tube provided he fails to deliver."

"But failure would prove the tube worthless."

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"Not to my mind, Cranston. I believe the device is thoroughly practical. It may not be suited to present conditions and that is the chance that I am taking. I want Ronjan to share the hazard."

Cranston understood. Full ownership of the diving tunnel would mean that Farnsworth and any associates could use it for other projects if this one failed. However, Farnsworth still had confidence in the present enterprise.

"We've double-checked the story of that treasure off Skipper's Rock," declared Farnsworth. "It belonged to Master Glanvil, who owned the brig Good Wind, which was chartered under a letter-of-marque. Unfortunately Master Glanvil turned pirate himself, while he was supposed to be preying on corsairs, much like Captain Kidd did.

"It was on account of what happened to Kidd that Glanvil wouldn't come into port. Meanwhile, the men who had backed him as a privateer, an Association of Adventurers, they called themselves, saw their investment dwindling away if Glanvil skipped."

Margo was listening now from the terrace rail, forgetful of Central Park and its mysterious charm, in view of this thrilling tale.

"The Association of Adventurers had their rights of course," continued Farnsworth. "The treasure was declared legally theirs, the question of Glanvil's status being another matter. However they unloaded their shares cheap and the whole was bought out by a hard-headed old Dutchman named Thales Van Woort."

As Farnsworth paused, Cranston put in an appropriate comment.

"A good example, Farnsworth," said Cranston. "Why don't you buy out all other shares in the missing treasure the way Van Woort did?"

"Because a fool and his money are soon parted," returned Farnsworth. "Not being a fool, I prefer to part with my money slowly. Still, if Ronjan wants to sell out entirely, I am willing to buy. But getting back to history —"

Pausing long enough to pour a round of drinks, Farnsworth proceeded.

"Old Van Woort hired a smuggler named Caleb Albersham to go out and urge Master Glanvil to come into port. It was a smart move, for Albersham was close to a pirate in his own right. Maybe the fact that Albersham was still at large was supposed to influence Glanvil, but it didn't.

"After a few trips, made secretly of course, so the authorities wouldn't interfere, Albersham went out again and this time he was supposed to have papers on him guaranteeing a safe-conduct to Glanvil. I suppose Van Woort paid for them too, through the proper official channels.

"Anyway, it was too late. A storm was coming up and Albersham's sloop, the Rover, which left openly that trip, headed square into trouble that the Good Wind had already met. It was a bad wind for the Good Wind, because she went down off Skipper's Rock and the Rover failed to outride the storm.

"Wreckage from the Good Wind was found on Skipper's Rock and chunks of the Rover washed ashore out toward Montauk Point, where she was carried by the hurricane. So here's to the Good Wind and the Rover" — Farnsworth raised his glass — "and salt your drink with a few tears for old Thales Van Woort whose fortune lies off Skipper's Rock."

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It was the first time that Margo had heard the detailed story of the missing treasure, but she wasn't crying over Van Woort's loss. She was thinking of a legend she'd heard once: how mermaids were supposed to hover around sunken treasure, and the connection made her think of the Central Park banshee.

The ringing of the telephone was summoning Farnsworth into his living room and with the conversation lulled, Margo glanced toward the deep gloom of the park, only to hear Cranston's calm and accurate query:

"Thinking about banshees, Margo?"

"Why, yes." Momentarily surprised, Margo laughed it off. "I suppose a lot of other people are, too."

"Miss Sylvia Selmore for one," informed Cranston. "I forgot to tell you that she postponed her trip to Florida today."

Still staring at the darkness, Margo asked why.

"Sylvia wants to attend more seances," explained Cranston. "She hopes for another manifestation of the Gwrach y Rhibyn."

Remembering the tense scene in the seance parlor, Margo wasn't inclined to laugh.

"Of course the Canhywllah Cryth must appear first," assured Cranston. "We saw it again in the park last night. Remember?"

Margo did remember. She shuddered; then asked in hollow tone:

"That creature near the transverse. Did it – did it really materialize when those lights appeared – over there?"

Staring straight across the park, Margo was looking toward the dimly outlined tower of a building, the same one she had noted the night before.

"The right place," declared Cranston. "In fact the only place the blinks could have come from. That tower is on a direct line with the rear window of the parlor in Madame Mathilda's house."

Margo turned, surprised:

"How soon did you learn that?"

"Before we left Mathilda's," declared Cranston. "I took a good look from that window after I ripped away the blackout curtain."

"Then why didn't you send someone over there?"

"I did. Shrevvy took Hawkeye there to find if the way was clear. Harry Vincent and Cliff Marsland followed."

"But the blinks occurred again –"

"Because Harry and Cliff sent them," interposed Cranston, "to assure me that the roost was empty. It worried the lurker in the park. He was stationed where he was to cover the banshee's trail."

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"But how could she slip through the cordon?"

"Very easily. A slide down the rock, slowed by the scrubby shrubs she encountered; then around to the gully."

Margo shook her head.

"I don't think it could be done, Lamont. She would have been seen from the bridge."

"I'm looking up the proof tomorrow," assured Cranston, "and until then –"

A change came into Cranston's eyes. Following their direction, Margo saw something that riveted her, then added a freezing touch. From far across the park, at a new angle, there came another set of mysterious blinks, like those of the night before.

At last, Margo laughed.

"That's carrying it too far, Lamont. Sending our friends to play the blinker just to frighten me."

"Except it's not Harry and Cliff," declared Cranston. "I would know their signals. Besides, they are watching the park itself tonight." Cranston's arm steadied Margo and turned her toward the living room. "Stay here" – the words were an undertone – "and talk with Farnsworth. Tell him I want complete details on the business of the treasure. Take them in shorthand."

As Margo nodded, Cranston left. Farnsworth was still busy on the telephone, his voice came booming from the next room as he argued with his lawyer over the tax exemptions that were legally permissible on money invested in a treasure hunt.

Despite herself, Margo was back at the terrace rail a few minutes later, but she wasn't looking for the tiny twinkles that still continued. Margo's eyes were gazing downward toward this subdued sector of Fifth Avenue.

Imagination maybe, but Margo Lane could have sworn that she saw a cloaked figure glide across the avenue and blend into the foliage of Central Park. This time at least, the illusion wasn't caused by the chance flit of a passing bird.

The Shadow had appointed himself a one man Association of Adventurers to find out what wasn't right in Central Park!

CHAPTER VII

THE name of the sleek-haired brunette was Thara Lamoyne, which went with her exotic appearance, at least in Phil Harley's opinion. During dinner she had proven reasonably talkative, always with that unusual accent which Phil couldn't quite trace back to its origin.

She thought strange things were ludicrous, this Thara.

"How very funny!" Thara exclaimed, reverting to a topic of the dinner. "You meet a blonde lady and pouf she vanishes! Then you meet Thara. But tell me" – Thara leaned across the table in a fashion most intriguing – "the name of this blonde girl. You still remember it?"

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Phil nodded and said:

"Her name was Arlene Forster."

Annoyed, Thara leaned back.

"By now you should have forgotten it!" she asserted. "Tell me, why do you still think of this other girl, who disappears like – like" – Thara couldn't find the word at first – "like that thing they talk about, the banshee."

That opened Phil's eyes really wide.

"Say, maybe that was it!" he exclaimed. Then, with a laugh, Phil added. "No, that couldn't be. According to the descriptions of the banshee, Arlene would have left her clothes in the telephone booth if she evaporated in person."

Thara took that statement seriously, or in another sense, she was serious enough to think that Phil was gullible.

"You believe that nonsense?" she queried. "It is very foolish if you do. Maybe the moonlight played some tricks with people's eyes, as in the country where I have lived so long. Or perhaps some girl wearing a bathing suit was going swimming in the pool, just because it was not allowed there."

"She wasn't wearing a bathing cap," reminded Phil. "The newspapers spoke of her long, flowing hair, like Arlene's, except that it was dark."

"You mean the night was dark," argued Thara, "except for the moonlight, which plays so many tricks. But if you wish to find out more, go to the park – in daytime."

"Why in daytime?" parried Phil. "Are the banshees liable to catch me?"

"The banshees? No! The police! You read the newspapers and you will find out they have put many of them there. Too many police – no banshee. You see!"

With that, Thara laughed in her really musical style; then, resting her elbows on the table, her chin between her hands, she gave Phil all that serious glow of her dark, breathtaking eyes and came back to prosaic matters.

"It is a friend of mine who asked that I should meet you," said Thara. "Just a business friend" – seemingly she added this so that Phil would lose no budding thoughts of romance – "but it is better it should be that way, because the business should be good for you."

Phil gave an approving nod.

"You were in the army," stated Thara. "You were with what they call the engineers, doing special work?"

Another nod from Phil.

"The job will be one hundred dollars a week," asserted Thara. "It is to study some papers that they call patents and give reports if they are practical."

"Sounds great," enthused Phil. "Whose office do I work in?"

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"Some office?" queried Thara. "No, that would be too much expense. The hotel room is reserved for you, along the street here, at the Sans Souci."

"The Sans Souci," repeated Phil. "That sounds expensive in itself. Still, since I'm starting at one hundred a week –"

"None of the expense is yours. The hotel room; it will be paid for each week in advance, by the person who will wish the work done with the patents."

If money had come floating through the air, Phil Harley couldn't have been more amazed. Still, he'd heard of fabulous business dealings in New York, and getting off to a quick start like this was probably the type of break that occurred every day.

They were rising from the table, Phil and Thara, the girl awaiting the decision that she was to take back to her unknown friend. Phil wasn't long in rendering it.

"I'll take the job," he said, "and gladly. Maybe we should go out and celebrate right now."

"Not now," reproved Thara, as they crossed the lobby. "Later, when you have the money. To get to the Sans Souci, you walk to the east, two blocks. Good-night."

Thara was turning away when she spoke and Phil turned too, hoping that the girl hadn't vanished like Arlene. Momentarily, Phil saw an elevator with its door open, but Thara hadn't stepped into it; the only darkish face that he saw belonged to a stolid, brawny man who looked as wide as the door itself, and his features were tawny, compared to Thara's delicate olive.

Odd people, these New Yorkers; perhaps Phil was right in that supposition, but he shouldn't have included Dom Yuble in that category. The Caribbean sea captain was purely a portion of Manhattan's passing show.

Then, as the elevator door clanged shut, Phil saw Thara over by the newsstand, giving him a parting smile so thoroughly alluring that he hoped she wouldn't vanish.

Which reverted Phil's thoughts to Arlene as he went out the street door. Wondering if anybody chanced to remember the missing blonde, Phil glanced to his left and saw a most amazing thing.

Drawn up to the curb was an old-fashioned hansom cab, its driver half-asleep on the high box. As Phil approached and paused, the man opened one eye beneath his old plug hat and looked down. Figuring that from such an elevation the hansom driver should have witnessed much. Phil called up:

"See anything of a girl about an hour ago? A blonde, wearing lilacs – like this?"

Plucking the blossom from his buttonhole, Phil showed it, then tossed the wilted flower away. The hackie waved his whip toward a doorway at his right; then wagged it across the street toward the border of the park.

"She came out and somebody called a victoria for her," stated the hansom driver. "She was kind of breathless, like she needed fresh air. This hansom was too cramped for her; that's why she took an open carriage."

"Where did she go?"

The man gave Phil a stare, then gestured with his whip.

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"For a ride in the park," the man stated. "Where else would she want to take a carriage?"

Nodding to prove he'd learned something, Phil started along Central Park South. Impressed with the very sudden notion that Arlene might really be the banshee, Phil thought of turning back and asking the hansom driver what else the girl had been wearing besides lilacs. It struck Phil then that Arlene certainly wouldn't take to sylvan costumery until she reached her favorite pool.

Wondering about that pool and its allure, Phil went west instead of east. Failing to see the name of the Hotel Sans Souci, he paused to make inquiry. Phil was right in front of a hotel called the Parkside House, when he witnessed what seemed a trifling incident.

A man with a large suitcase was coming from the doorway brushing away a bell-boy who offered to carry the bag to a waiting cab. Poor policy on the man's part, for of a sudden, his burden became too heavy, and he sagged toward the sidewalk. Phil caught him as the bag clattered, steadied the fellow and looked at his thin, peaked face.

"Very sorry," the man muttered. He gave Phil a look with gray eyes that were watery, but appealing. "I guess – guess I was just a bit dizzy."

"Blind staggers," diagnosed Phil. "Ease your head back. I'll get you into the cab."

There was something about the man's long face that was vaguely familiar to Phil. Drawn though they were, those features had a trace of the aristocratic. As Phil helped the fellow to the cab, the man fumbled in his pocket and a wallet fell out, spilling some loose papers. Phil recovered them and in the light of the marquee, saw both a calling card and an addressed envelope that bore the man's name.

That name was Winslow Ames.

The door man now was giving Phil a hand with Mr. Ames. In his turn, Ames put away the wallet and its papers, to bring out a smaller envelope that contained a railroad ticket.

"Penn Station," he muttered. "Going to Boston."

"Boston?" queried the door man. "You want Grand Central."

"Couldn't get a ticket on the regular train," argued Ames, apparently recuperated. "Have to take the car that gets picked up at Penn by the through train from Washington. Pennsylvania Station" – this was to the driver – "and take it slowly. I'll feel better if you do."

The cab pulled away and another drew up. Muttering to himself, the door man opened the cab door, thinking Phil wanted it.

"Oughtn't to have let him go," the door man was saying, referring to Ames. "He may be wrong about that sleeper. Somebody ought to have gone along with him."

That gave Phil an idea of his own. He took the cab and told the driver to follow the one ahead. Rather than have it seem that he was trailing somebody, Phil explained:

"A friend of mine. He isn't feeling well, but he wouldn't hear of my going to the station with him. I'm going anyway."

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It wasn't just a good deed on Phil's part. He wanted to see some of New York anyway. It happened that he was going to have that wish fulfilled. Both cabs did a lot of turning around corners and finally wheeled through a gateway composed of two great stone pillars.

"Your friend must be going to One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street," announced Phil's driver, gesturing ahead, "considering that his cab is going through the park. That's the only station, the way he's headed."

Odd, thought Phil, that this should happen. Intrigued as well as puzzled, Phil kept his gaze glued to the cab ahead and therefore didn't notice that a third such vehicle had fallen into the procession.

Except for its driver, the last cab seemed empty, but it wasn't. Riding in it was a figure cloaked entirely in black.

That passenger could only be The Shadow!

CHAPTER VIII

CENTRAL PARK boasts perhaps a dozen miles of driveways which form what has been termed an informal pattern.

If Phil Harley had heard the term "informal" thus applied, he could well have regarded it a synonym for "confusing" because the pattern became exactly such.

All the drives were winding affairs that had a habit of being one-way, though they seemed too broad for that. Hence cars were passing one another in a puzzling and unorthodox fashion, at least from the stranger's viewpoint.

There were traffic lights at places where none seemed needed; these were to let pedestrians or horse-back riders cross the drives, though Phil didn't realize it. Mixed with the stream of automobiles were occasional carriages or hacks, forming part of the general procession.

Keeping track of direction was impossible, particularly at night. The passing scene was frequently blacked out by slopes, even cliffs that flanked the drive, with plenty of attendant trees. Emerging after a long curve, Phil could not tell on what side of the park the various tall buildings were located when he saw them again.

Not only the lights in Central Park, but those around it became a kaleidoscopic whirl and as for tracing things by watching the crossings of the driveways, that was impossible too. Many of the drives forked apart or flowed into one another and they crossed the underpasses on bridges that couldn't be distinguished in the dark.

One thing, however, was certain.

Phil's cab was getting the runaround.

"That friend of yours," the driver growled. "He can't seem to make up his mind. Where is he going – to the One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street Station, or back to Grand Central?"

"Neither," replied Phil. "He said he was going to the Pennsylvania Station."

"He's more likely to wind up at the Jersey Central Ferry," the driver decided. "Unless" – Phil could see narrowed eyes in the front seat mirror – "unless maybe he doesn't want you to tag along."

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Before Phil could answer that one, the cab ahead took an unexpected spurt. It was gone around the next curve like a whippet and if Phil's driver hadn't answered the challenge automatically, he would have been left far behind. As it was, the pickup of Phil's cab was a trifle too late, or would have been, but for an added factor.

As they took the bend, Phil saw an odd thing ahead. The cab containing Ames was performing badly on an S-turn, as though its speed had thrown it out of the driver's control. It looked as though it had careened clear from the road on to a slant of hard-baked open ground, only to come ricocheting back to the driveway.

The cab was completing its gyration when Phil spotted it and that would have ended the episode, but for the added factor. Whizzing up beside Phil's cab and passing it came The Shadow's speed-built job with Shrevvy at the wheel. The Shadow too wanted to see what was happening beyond the bend and in passing Phil's cab, Shrevvy revealed an added item of the scene.

Shrevvy's headlights slanted across the sun-baked terrace and momentarily picked out a ghost cab that practically evaporated under the glow!

Phil would have considered it an optical illusion produced by a peculiar reflection of Shrevvy's headlamps. The Shadow, however, did not think in those terms, even though the sight was fleeting. He spoke an order to Shrevvy, who promptly cut across the path of Phil's cab and hit the hardest soil.

Shrevvy calculated that swerve down to a matter of inches. If Phil's driver had gauged as well, he would have kept straight ahead, clearing Shrevvy's rear bumper cleanly. Only Phil's driver didn't see it that way, so he did the instinctive thing. Cutting his wheel he swerved hard, letting the cross-clipping cab drive him from the road, so that side by side the two vehicles went lurching over the hardened ground like a scene from an ancient chariot race.

Thus began a series of complications.

It happened that The Shadow was aiming after the ghost cab. By rights, Phil should have continued the chase of the cab that had gyrated and then continued along the driveway, whether it still contained Ames or not.

As a matter of fact, it didn't contain Ames, because it wasn't his cab at all. Ames was in the cab that had disappeared across the terrace, namely the ghost cab. The other was a substitute cab that had purposely scooted from some lurking spot to replace the original and carry on a blank trail.

But Phil didn't believe in ghosts, particularly when they took the shape of cabs. He presumed that Shrevvy had run him off the road just so he couldn't keep after Ames. Thus, as Phil's cab halted at a clump of trees right beside The Shadow's, Phil was not only ready, but literally aching for action.

Not knowing that Shrevvy's cab contained a passenger, Phil sprang out to grab the only person that he saw, the driver. Even Shrevvy, a quick, darty chap by nature, wasn't able to get clear of Phil's clutching hands. With the expert precision of his army training, Phil hauled Shrevvy out from behind the wheel and would have started choking information from him if something hadn't intervened.

The something was solid blackness that came with the speed of a whirlwind, the impact of a battering-ram. Phil Harley had met The Shadow.

When Phil rubbed his head, his own cabby was propping him and speaking across his shoulder.

"You must've run into a tree or something," the fellow said. "You just kinda bounced right back."

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Looking around, Phil saw that the other cab had pulled back to the drive and was starting away. Phil's own cabby decided to do the same and invited Phil to get inside. Phil would have, if the cabby hadn't dropped a remark.

"This place reminds me of that banshee talk," the cabby said. "Only when a taxicab does banshee stuff, I'm not the guy to believe it."

"What taxicab?" demanded Phil.

"The one that was rolling in here ahead of both of us," the man explained. "The blackness sorta swallowed it up and when we got here to the trees, it was gone. I still don't believe it, but the thing was spooky."

Phil still couldn't swear that it hadn't been an optical illusion but this testimony, coupled with his own recollection, made him decide the thing was real. Stepping half into the cab, he hopped out again and slammed the door as the driver was backing to the drive.

Then, with his own cab departing by the same route as Shrevvy's, both far behind the trail that a third cab had taken on the one-way drive, Phil stole back toward the darkness of those thick-clumped trees. He moved rapidly but cautiously for he didn't want to run into the living figure of blackness that had sprawled him not long before.

Maybe he'd have to fight that invisible foe again, but first Phil wanted to find what he erroneously supposed The Shadow was protecting, namely the thing that Phil had first mistaken for a ghost cab.

For now Phil Harley was confident that the wayward cab was real; that it was actually the one that he had seen leave the Parkside House; that most important of all, a missing man named Winslow Ames had been spirited away in that very vehicle!

CHAPTER IX

MYSTERY cleared itself, at least in part, as Phil Harley reached the trees. There he found a gap among them and realized, as he came into the midst of the clump, that he was following what could have been once a narrow road.

Moreover, the narrow clearing ended in a style that established the fact. It stopped at a broad brick building, which had a large, sliding door. Looking up, Phil distinguished by the trickly moonlight that the building was of brick; from its cupola, he judged it to be an old fashioned stable, now deserted.

Phil tried the door and it rattled freely, but proved to be fastened on the inside. Off to the left and far below, Phil caught a passing glitter of light and decided to learn what it meant. If he'd known Central Park, he wouldn't have been puzzled.

The stable was built atop a transverse; what Phil saw was the passing light of a car down in the deep underpass. Other lights sped by in the same fashion, indicating that traffic was as usual down there, despite the mystery of the ghostly phenomena above.

Except that it wasn't ghostly any more.

To Phil, the explanation was quite palpable. The missing cab, with Ames in it, must have rolled right into the old stable. After that, somebody had barricaded the door. But when Phil peered through the small-paned windows of the old stable door, he didn't see a cab inside.

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That meant it would be a good idea to look around. The way to look was to the left, where the lights were slithering through the transverse, which Phil didn't know as yet was just a roadway. Phil thought that those lights indicated some strange subterranean manifestations. He could have soon corrected that impression, but he didn't.

Something else intervened.

Just as Phil was about to start around the left side of the building, he heard the music. Considering that Phil's head was still ringing from his brief but jolty encounter with The Shadow, he began to think that his ears deceived him.

But the music persisted, though muted, and it came from the right of the building, not the left. So Phil started in that direction.

Just around the corner of the building, something slithered across Phil's path and tripped him. The thing had the swift, crawly touch of a snake, which by its size must have been something resembling a boa constrictor. So when Phil sprawled, he rolled over twice, to get away from the reptilian hazard and his roll carried him into a cluster of shrubs.

Rising gingerly on hands and knees, Phil disentangled himself from the bushes. He could still hear that muffled music, somewhere to the right, while from behind him came the slicking sound that he classified as a passing snake. Central Park was quite a place in Phil's present opinion, which only proved that he had no idea of what the future might hold in store.

The crawly sound dwindled off in the direction of the music, which suddenly ceased. Then, from the right side of the building came the clatter of an opening door. Dropping behind the bushes, Phil saw some huddled figures emerge from the building; the door that they used was smaller than the one in front, too small in fact to accommodate the missing taxicab.

From the way the figures were hunched, Phil was certain that they carried a burden, which in turn made him think of Winslow Ames!

As soon as the procession passed, Phil followed in its wake. The huddled men took what seemed to be a winding path, veering in among trees and bushes. They passed a circular building not far from the old stable, then continued deeper into the wilds of Central Park, until their course took a sharp turn.

All this while, Phil was thinking in terms of the invisible fighter that he had met before. Somehow he classed that mysterious being as part and parcel of this strange procession.

In brief, Phil was sizing The Shadow wrongly; hence he was making a bad beginning something worse. For the Shadow, too, was on that very trail.

Behind Phil, visible only at moments when a clearing allowed a strong glow of moonlight, stalked a cloaked shape that had come from the left side of the old stable, attracted by the muffled music that had drawn Phil's attention.

Two things occurred at once. Phil lost the trail of that hunched crew ahead and at the same time stumbled upon a dirt road that happened to be a bridle path. Figuring the direction that the men must have taken, Phil tried to find them in the dark.

Phil succeeded, but in a delayed fashion.

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Off above a hedge that flanked the bridle path, Phil saw some quick flickers of light that could only have come from a high building. Those blinks struck him as a signal, but when they finished Phil was unable to interpret them. Looking toward the hedge, which was thick, like a line of shrubbery, Phil saw a signal blink below and heard a rumble that accompanied it.

This was a truck, coming beneath an underpass over which the bridle path ran on a hedge-flanked bridge, but Phil didn't recognize it. What impressed him was a stir amid the hedge, an indication that the men he was following were still on the move. That was quite enough to end Phil's urge for caution.

With a fierce lunge, Phil started to fling himself into the unknown band, when he saw another figure flanking in from the moonlight. It was black, that shape, but with a flowing effect that gave the impression of a cloak. His instinct at a fever pitch, Phil took it that this must be his opponent of a while before.

Phil was right; this was The Shadow. But Phil was wrong in considering the cloaked interloper an enemy. Vengefully, Phil hurled himself upon The Shadow and a moment later they were reeling in a clinch, crashing half through the hedge.

From below came the roar of the truck as it disappeared beneath the bridge. Then, Phil was hovering over a brink that showed him the roadway below. The Shadow, knowing this terrain, had turned the grapple into a disaster where Phil was concerned; but as Phil forgot the clinch in order to grab for safety, The Shadow responded by hauling him back to safe ground.

Figures were scrambling in the opposite direction, starting a mad getaway through the hedge in order to reach the bridle path. After them went a laugh, fierce and sinister: the challenge of The Shadow. It was the sort of mirth that rankled men of crime and Phil, being of quite the opposite stripe, knew then that The Shadow was a friend.

What the fugitives had done with Ames was a matter for further speculation. Right now, the job was to round up that crew, and as Phil heard The Shadow's laugh trail after them, he decided to follow. Thus began a pursuit that was to end in startling surprises.

So fast did The Shadow travel that Phil soon realized his own job would be to deal with stragglers. They were across the bridge and spreading pell-mell down through a slope of thinly wooded land. Off to one side, Phil was certain that he saw a figure drop into a crouch, so he drove in that direction.

Up came the figure with a snarl, out into the full moonlight. To his amazement, Phil saw a spotted leopard, springing at him with all the fury that a maddened beast would display. Instinct called for a quick change of course, but it was too late by then.

Meeting the leopard head on, Phil found that it wasn't a leopard after all. The swing that he made for the creature's jaws met a face that was rubbery, but human. The speed of Phil's punch reduced its value, for he literally knocked his antagonist some twenty feet down the slope and before Phil could go after the leopard-man, the fellow was away.

Chasing a man who wore a leopard skin was just about as crazy as hunting a banshee, but this was Central Park, where anything could happen. For one thing, the man in the leopard costume didn't vanish, perhaps because he was carrying more weight than the girl who had played the banshee the night before. What was more, he had an objective.

Coming to a long flight of stone steps, Phil took them almost headlong in pursuit of the fake leopard. Phil caught himself by grabbing at some tall bars that he passed and was greeted by a protesting roar from

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something huge and white, which he realized was a polar bear. Kiting away from that hazard, Phil rounded the fenced area that formed the bear's cage and overtook the creature he was after.

Except that it wasn't the same creature.

This time the snarl was genuine; the beast likewise. A real leopard, vividly spotted in the moonlight, popped right up from the path to bar Phil's way. In no mood for an argument, Phil took to another flight of steps, which led upward, and thus avoided an encounter with the bona fide jungle prowler.

From somewhere came a long shrill whistle like a cat-call. The leopard turned and ran among some buildings that were backed with extensive cages, for this was the Central Park Zoo. Then all was silent, all sounds of the strange drama blotted.

A whispered laugh sounded from above the steps that Phil had first navigated. Again, The Shadow was visible against the moonlight. The first fugitives had gained too great a head start; The Shadow, like Phil, had diverted his attention to stragglers, but now none of them were to be found. The Shadow simply saw the leopard scooting one direction, Phil traveling in the other.

With that, The Shadow decided that this episode was over.

Perhaps The Shadow was right, where he personally was concerned, but Phil Harley, who had blundered into about every type of experience, was due for one more.

Enough commotion had occurred to produce the blare of police whistles and the answering sirens of patrol cars, for Central Park was heavy with the law tonight. The Shadow could easily pass through a forming cordon, but not Phil Harley.

Racing madly through a tunnel formed by a foot-path, Phil took to the bushes and clambered up a rocky slope which brought him to an upper drive. The excitement hadn't reached this higher elevation and Phil saw exactly what he wanted for a restful getaway. An open carriage with two seats that faced each other, was coming along the drive at only a fair gait. Popping from a clump of brush, Phil pulled himself on board.

The plug-hatted driver was half asleep, so Phil's arrival scarcely stirred him. But what stirred Phil was the sight of a passenger already in the carriage. The moonlight showed a girl in the opposite seat of the victoria; she was resting back, with her head tilted upward, her eyes closed.

A girl in blue, but lacking the lilac bouquet that she had worn earlier: Arlene Forster!

As the hack emerged from one of the park gateways, Arlene stirred. Lifting her head, she stared at Phil, then drew up the sleeve of her dress to cover a bare shoulder. Drawing her hand across her throat, Arlene stared at Phil as though she had never seen him before.

Then, gradually, the blonde's memory seemed to return.

"I – I was dizzy," she stammered. "I must have gone out for some air. Nice of you – thanks a lot – for the drive through the park. I – I feel a lot better already."

The carriage hauled up in front of a hotel that bore the name Plaza Central. With a smile, Arlene alighted, scarcely needing Phil's steady hand.

"This is where I live," said Arlene with a smile. "Good-night. I shall see you again, I'm sure."

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The victoria was on the move again, its horse acting as though the swank line of hotels were a regular milk route. The next in order happened to be the Sans Souci, so Phil stepped to the sidewalk when the carriage stopped. Before Phil could question the driver, even on the point if anything was owing for the trip, the fellow flicked the horse with his whip and the hack continued on its way.

People strolling along Central Park South saw Phil Harley staring dumbly across the thoroughfare as though he expected Central Park to speak for itself and explain the enigmas that it harbored.

CHAPTER X

THE newspapers were loaded with a story of a man named Winslow Ames who had disappeared most peculiarly and Lamont Cranston was reading all about it, much to the annoyance of Margo Lane, who had other things to talk about. At last Lamont laid the newspaper aside.

"It's time you apologized for last night," broached Margo. "I thought we were going to a night-club. Instead, you left me parked at Farnsworth's."

"Sorry, Margo," Cranston returned. "I was detained longer than I anticipated."

"In Central Park?"

"In Central Park."

Eyeing Cranston as though she didn't believe him, Margo gave the reason.

"It wasn't so very long before all those blinks ended," the girl declared. "Nor was it long after that, when I heard the whistles and the sirens and saw a lot of lights that must have meant police cars because they went so fast. So you couldn't have been banshee hunting very long" – Margo's gaze narrowed – "unless perhaps you found the banshee."

"No banshee," said Cranston, with the slightest of smiles. "I was checking on the lights. They came from different places."

Margo nodded.

"I know," she admitted. "I saw them from Farnsworth's terrace."

"Some were messages," Cranston analyzed, "while others were just signals. Whoever is delegated to send them is working it cutely. One batch from one place; then he goes somewhere else. They must have learned that I sent men to track down the lights, the first night."

Margo began to realize that Lamont could have been quite busy hunting clues to the lights, without wasting any time around the banshee pool. Besides, there were no reports today of any gorgeous femininity having created a new stir among the lilacs, the night before.

"But how do they get away with it?" queried Margo. "People just can't go up to the top of apartment buildings and start flashing lights."

"Can't they?" queried Cranston. "Have you ever tried it?"

Margo shook her head.

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"It's easy," assured Cranston, "when you have a mile or more of buildings to pick from. Lots of them have open roofs where the tenants go in hot weather and their friends come up to visit them. Some buildings have service elevators and there are all sorts of excuses such as delivering packages, that would allow a trip to the top floor.

"Besides, those flashes weren't all from top floors; a lot of them were just high up. They didn't have to come from apartments; but from corridor windows that opened in the right direction. So you can be quite sure that none of those lights really represented the Canhywllah Cyrth."

"Particularly since the banshee didn't reappear," agreed Margo. "But you said some of the blinks were messages. How did you know?"

"I worked at decoding some that flashed the other night," Cranston explained. "The first glimmers that showed this evening fitted with the code. It said something about the Parkside House and there was another word, rather hard to make out."

"Have you any idea what it was?"

"I have now. The word was a name. It spelled Ames."

Margo's eyes widened.

"You mean the disappearance of Winslow Ames was ordered by those signals, Lamont?"

"It was. I was lucky enough to pick up the trail of two cabs outside the Parkside House. Their actions were suspicious, so I had Shrevvy follow them."

"And one contained Ames!"

"Very probably. Its route was a throw-off. It doubled around a few blocks and then back to Central Park. The police haven't yet supposed that a trail would go back to where it started from" – Cranston gestured to the newspaper – "so they are still trying to trace Ames to Penn Station."

All this left Margo rather amazed and with it brought the situation back to its starting point. Where last night was concerned, Cranston had a complaint of his own, so he introduced it in timely fashion.

"Up at Farnsworth's, recalled Cranston. "I left you there for a purpose, Margo. You were supposed to gather a detailed report regarding the treasure hunt off Skipper's Rock."

That threw Margo on the immediate defensive.

"Why, I did –"

"Did what?" put in Cranston. "Moon at Central Park over Farnsworth's terrace? Maybe Reilly saw your beaming face shining down from above and blew his whistle as a matter of routine."

Margo's face was roundish, like the moon's, but that was only because she was trying to glare. From her purse, she produced a notebook and planked it down hard.

"There's the report," she announced, "all in shorthand. Mr. Farnsworth dictated it between telephone calls. I didn't want to be impolite, so I went out on the terrace when he talked to people. Shall I read the notes?"

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"A good idea," decided Cranston, blandly, "but let's proceed in a leisurely manner. Suppose we go over to the park and hire ourselves a barouche or whatever they call those open carriages. You can read the report while we take a drive."

Fifteen minutes later, the clatter of a horse's hoofs formed the obligato to Margo's monotone rendition of the shorthand notes.

The details were pretty much as Cranston knew them, particularly as Farnsworth's summary was honest and impartial. Condensed, it ran as follows:

The history of the Good Wind, sunk off Skipper's rock with the treasure brought back by Master Glanvil, pirate pro tem, was well authenticated, in fact verified by the records that concerned the visits of the sloop Rover, owner Caleb Albersham, to the moored brig.

Perennially, treasure seekers had visited Skipper's Rock in hope of reclaiming the sunken wealth that should have been the property of Thales Van Woort, last and only member of the Association of Adventurers. If the treasure had ever been brought ashore, it would have become Van Woort's, or a legacy to his heirs; but sunk at sea, it belonged to anyone who could execute a successful salvage.

No one could, because the Good Wind was sunk too deep.

Thus the treasure situation had remained static while the world progressed until Niles Ronjan, an inventor of peculiar genius, had devised his articulated tube, a water-tight tube that could descend to submarine depths and allow access to sunken vessels.

It sounded simple, this business of shoving a pliable pipe-line down to the bottom of the sea, but the actual process produced complications. Money was needed to finance the undertaking; this, Craig Farnsworth had provided.

In so doing, Farnsworth had invited others to share in the undertaking; Farnsworth's reason was that he wanted to be sure the project was a sound one. At the same time, economy was the watchword and Ronjan had agreed to abide by it. When the sectional tube neared its goal, Ronjan had hired Dom Yuble, an accomplished Caribbean diver, to go down and steer the creeping tunnel into place.

Dom Yuble should have been hired earlier.

The diver's report showed that sand had buried the Good Wind. To get at the sunken vessel a new attempt was necessary from the other side. From that point, Farnsworth's notes became queries.

Would the project be worthwhile?

Could it be that sand had buried the Good Wind completely, making Ronjan's invention useless?

Was Ronjan entitled to a larger share because of the increased investment, or should the added cost be charged against him because he had failed to hire Dom Yuble earlier?

Farnsworth had answered those questions. In his opinion, he should still receive the major share. Apparently, Ronjan was agreed, but if so, Farnsworth felt that Ronjan himself should defray the added cost.

This brought up another question: Why not let Ronjan pay it? From that came a further query: Did Ronjan have the money?

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Farnsworth claimed yes to both.

Then why hadn't Ronjan undertaken the entire project on his own?

Easily answered, that question. In Farnsworth's opinion, Ronjan had wanted others to bear the freight in case of failure. It was time that Ronjan admitted the fault and until he did, Farnsworth wouldn't put up another penny. That was final and it ended the report.

Amid the clatter of the horse's hoofs, Margo looked up from her notes and said:

"Do you know what Farnsworth really thinks?"

"I'm interested," replied Cranston. "So tell me."

"Farnsworth thinks that he can outlast Ronjan," declared Margo. "Farnsworth has to pay rent anyway, up at that de luxe apartment of his. But Ronjan can't live forever at the Chateau Parkview; he's staying there only while the treasure hunt is on. So Farnsworth thinks that Ronjan will have to come around begging sooner or later – and probably sooner."

It pleased Margo when she saw that Cranston was responding with a nod. Getting Lamont to admit anything was quite a feather for Margo's cap, except that she wasn't wearing a cap and therefore couldn't put feathers in it.

Cranston proved that when he countered:

"Do you know what I think?"

Margo shook her head.

"I think," decided Cranston; "that it would be a lot of fun to take a ride on a merry-go-round. We'll stop right here and try it." He gestured to the driver indicating that he wanted the carriage to stop. "I'm sure it would clear our minds of a lot of problems, Margo."

Right then, Margo Lane decided that she'd like to have her mind cleared of one specific problem, by name Lamont Cranston, whose idea of fun was something Margo didn't think was funny.

CHAPTER XI

THE merry-go-round was some distance away, across a stretch of hard-baked ground and it proved to be a very dilapidated affair. Despite herself, Margo was intrigued by the fact that Cranston had discovered a forgotten carousel, off here in Central Park.

"Why, it's terribly old!" exclaimed Margo. "Probably nobody has used it for years!"

"Better say hours," suggested Cranston. "The same applies to that old stable over there."

Looking among the trees, Margo saw the stable. It was a brick building oddly constructed. Up here they were on the level with the stable's second story, because the first floor – which might have been termed a basement – extended down into a stone wall flanking a deep transverse.

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This was rather interesting, but Margo was more impressed by the merry-go-round. She knew that one was in operation in Central Park, but this wasn't it. This one had apparently been forgotten for years, but it was due for revival. The interior was freshly painted; so were the wooden animals, what there were of them.

Most of the carved animals were gone, but the dozen on display were spick-and-span, fresh from the paint shop where the rest were probably undergoing treatment. Lions, tigers, even a miniature giraffe gained Margo's fascinating stare, until Cranston interrupted:

"What would you say of a merry-go-round that had a boa constrictor, Margo?"

The very thought shuddered Margo. Apparently serious, Cranston gestured toward the stable and as they walked in that direction, Margo saw traces of the very creature suggested. Cleaving its way through the dusty topsoil was a broad streak that looked exactly like a snake's trail!

Small wonder that Margo's shudders increased as they neared the stable, but Cranston promptly reassured her.

"It wasn't a snake," he stated. "It was a rope. It came out through there."

By "there" Cranston referred to a space beneath a side door of the stable and the door itself was unusual. It looked like a door for horses, except that it was so small a horse would have had to crawl through on its knees. The door was locked, but Cranston opened it with a skeleton key and bowed Margo inside.

Right near the little door were some old stalls of miniature size, which answered Margo's mental query.

"They must have kept ponies here, Lamont!"

"Wrong," replied Cranston. "They kept goats. It was quite fun, years ago, for children to go riding in little wagons drawn by goats. You should delve into the history of Central Park, Margo."

There were larger stalls on the other side of the stable, near the big door, while in a corner Cranston indicated a platform set in the stone floor.

"They kept horses in those big stalls," he explained, "and there were a lot more downstairs. That platform is an elevator that was used to haul hay up from below."

The wooden platform rattled when Cranston stepped upon it, but it bore his weight quite easily.

"This elevator was used last night," declared Cranston in a tone that seemed more than mere conjecture. "A taxicab was hauled up from the floor below and sent out through the big door. Another cab came in and was lowered to the transverse level. After that the elevator was brought up again."

Margo suddenly shook her head.

"Couldn't be," she insisted. "The elevator may be strong enough, but there's no motive power to haul up anything as heavy as a taxicab."

"I told you about the rope," reminded Cranston. "It was hooked to the elevator."

"But who pulled it? A dozen men?"

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"The merry-go-round pulled it. That's where the rope was attached. The rope is under the merry-go-round now, all wound around."

With that statement, Lamont Cranston was explaining the muffled music that Phil Harley had heard the night before. Margo knew nothing about that, but she realized the importance of the cab switch.

"You mean that's how Winslow Ames was abducted?" Margo asked.

"It's how the job was covered up," returned Cranston. "I think that Ames was taken along past the merry-go-round and later dropped from a bridge over the transverse into a passing truck."

"What would the police think of that story?"

"If you would like to know," responded Cranston, blandly, "suppose we go and find out."

They rode in the old hack to Central Park South and there took a cab to the swank Cobalt Club where Commissioner Weston was often found late in the afternoon. The commissioner was present and Inspector Cardona with him, but when Cranston suggested his theory, it registered a total blank.

"I was thinking about the Ames case," began Cranston. "If his cab had gone to Central Park –"

"I suppose the banshee would have gotten him," interrupted Weston. "Only it didn't, because there isn't any banshee and Ames didn't go to Central Park."

Cardona added an opinion.

"We're covering the park like a blanket," the inspector claimed. "The only cab that gave us any trouble was a fellow with a flat at the entrance to a transverse. He fixed the flat and went through."

Cranston nodded.

"Eastbound, of course."

"That's right," rejoined Cardona. "When he came out the east side, he stopped to report to an officer stationed there" – Joe paused – "say what made you think he went from west to east? Do they get more flat tires on the West Side?"

"It was just a guess," replied Cranston. "At what time was this reported?"

"The fellow started to fix the flat just before Ames left the hotel," said Cardona, referring to a long list of reports, "so he couldn't have had anything to do with the case. Central Park is out."

Thus discouraged, Cranston naturally couldn't be expected to press his theory regarding Central Park. It was after they left the Cobalt Club that Margo asked him:

"How did you know that the cab went from west to east?"

"I told Cardona why," replied Cranston. "It was just a guess. It really didn't matter which way the cab was headed. It happens though that there were two cabs, not just one."

Margo's slow nod meant that she understood more or less, so Cranston decided she should understand more.

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"Two identical cabs," Cranston explained, "even to a duplication of the license plates. The idea was to establish an alibi for both."

"For both?"

"Of course. One was checked at the west entrance to the transverse while its driver was faking a flat tire. The time element proved that it couldn't be the cab that took Ames from the hotel. However, that cab never completed its trip through the transverse. It swung into the old stable, was hoisted in the elevator, and went its way along the upper drive."

"And the other cab came out below!"

"Correct. It was the cab that abducted Ames. Its driver completed the alibi that the first man had begun. His cab was brought down by the elevator to continue through the transverse."

"Then that's why the driver reported to the officer at the east exit!" exclaimed Margo. "He wanted to be recognized later, if necessary!"

Cranston nodded. Then:

"Above all," he added, "the purpose was to draw all suspicion from Central Park, the place where a lot has happened and a lot more will. Well, Margo" – Cranston was glancing at his watch – "I'll need what's left of the afternoon. I'm going down to the Graceland Memorial Library."

"To that mausoleum?" queried Margo. "Why?"

Cranston's reply could have been termed a trifle cryptic.

"To acquire a few more facts concerning old New York," Cranston announced, "and in particular that portion of Manhattan Island now known as Central Park."

CHAPTER XII

LIKE Lamont Cranston, Phil Harley could have told the police his theory regarding Winslow Ames; but Phil also doubted that he would be believed.

What was more important, Phil felt that he had gained certain leads, which if right would enable him to track down crime; but if wrong, would only give away all he knew, should any of the facts be made public.

There again, Phil's situation resembled that of The Shadow, except that they were concerned with different persons. It would have been well if Phil and The Shadow could cooperate with each other, but so far they hadn't gotten along at all; nor was there any way that they could reach each other.

Of course Phil's main lead was Arline Forster, who struck him as much more of a mystery girl than Thara Lamoyne. Phil knew where to reach Arlene; namely at the Plaza Central. At least he hoped he could reach her there, but so far none of his phone calls to her room had been answered.

Phil was thinking this over as he watched the seals disport in the oblong pool at the Central Park Zoo. He'd thought that going over last night's ground would help some, but it hadn't. Now that it was getting dark, Phil decided to go to his own hotel, with a stop-off at the Plaza Central.

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The route led past the buildings where the jungle animals were housed. The cages there were arranged to open indoors as well as out, so several sizeable beasts were on voluntary outdoor display, including a rather intelligent leopard.

Each outdoor cage had a barred door, out of reach across a low picket fence. The doors were fastened with formidable padlocks and evidently the handsome leopard rated high among the animals because his cage had a shiny new padlock. The leopard looked at Phil when Phil looked at it and then the leopard yawned.

Only it wasn't just a yawn; the leopard gave a low growl. In leopard language it was saying that it didn't like something and since Phil was about the only thing in sight, he was probably what the leopard didn't like.

So Phil proceeded to the Plaza Central.

Just inside the door of that lavish hostelry, Phil was greeted by a peculiar gasp that reminded him a trifle of the leopard's expression of annoyance. Again, Phil was the object, but this time the annoyed party was a girl.

And the girl was Arlene Forster.

"Good evening," announced Phil, politely; "and what have I done to be rebuffed?"

"I'd rather not talk about it," returned Arlene. "I have an appointment. Good-bye."

"Since you're going my way" – Phil supplied this as Arlene went out the door and turned along the street – "you won't be sparing any precious minutes if you give me the particulars."

"All right, then." Arlene tossed her blonde head haughtily. "I just don't like your persuasive way. That business of arguing me into taking a carriage ride around Central Park, for instance."

"But I didn't persuade you!"

"Then who did? I made a phone call and came out of the booth. Next you were putting me into that broken-down chariot. How long we rode, I don't know, but you were still in the carriage when we arrived back at my hotel."

They had passed Phil's hotel, the Sans Souci, but he didn't say he lived there. Phil kept right on walking in order to clear the mystery.

"But I didn't put you in the hack!" Phil insisted. "You just disappeared. When I saw you again, you were riding around like a zombie."

"Zombies don't disappear," argued Arlene, curtly, "but banshees do. Next, you'll be calling me a banshee."

"Maybe," declared Phil indifferently. "It seems I've heard somewhere that banshees have a weakness for lilacs."

It was well put, for Arlene was sporting a batch of lilac blossoms again tonight. For a moment, Phil saw blue eyes sparkle angrily; then the girl calmed down.

"I have an appointment," Arlene explained patiently. "At the Chateau Parkview, where we met last night. So you sent me away in a hack and didn't go along; all right, I'm willing to believe your story and you should know why."

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"And why?"

"Because I realize now that you intended to meet someone else and didn't want me to interfere. But since it's the other way around tonight, suppose you don't interfere with my plans."

They were nearing the Chateau Parkview, so Phil decided to make the best of a last few moments.

"You'd only arrived in New York when I met you," Phil reminded Arlene. "How did you happen to stop at the Plaza Central?"

"Because you told me I had a reservation there," returned Arlene, "or if you didn't, someone else did. I don't just remember."

"But why did you come here at all?"

"Suppose I ask you that same question?"

"Good enough," retorted Phil. "I came here because I was promised a good job. I was in the army, you know, so I suppose I ought to have a job."

"And so should I," countered Arlene. "I was in the Waves."

Arlene looked ready to give Phil a wave right then, since they were entering the Chateau Parkview. Expecting such a dismissal, Phil parried it.

"It won't matter if we chat a while," he said. "If some bashful party is meeting you, he or she will probably wait. But there's one thing I almost forgot" – Phil was looking at the lobby clock – "and that's a phone call I have to make. Don't vanish again while I'm gone!"

When Phil went to the phone booth, Arlene crossed the lobby and took a place out of his sight. Her lilacs immediately gained results, for a bellboy approached with a message in an envelope, evidently singling out Arlene because of her flowers.

Reading the message, Arlene took a quick look for Phil; not seeing him, she circled to an elevator and rode up to the top floor, where she found the door she wanted and knocked.

The door was promptly opened by a man with shaggy, unkempt hair, whose eyes were quick but friendly. He stepped back and nodded as he gestured for the girl to enter.

"So you're the young lady," the man acknowledged. "Miss –"

"Arlene Forster."

"I'm glad to meet you, Miss Forster." The shaggy head bowed again. "I am Niles Ronjan. Now let me see: you are staying at the Plaza Central."

"That's right."

"A very nice place. Very well, the charts will be sent there. You are familiar with coastal charts, of course."

"I am."

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"Then that's all. Your job will be to check them when you receive them."

"At what salary?"

"Why, eighty dollars a week," responded Ronjan, as though Arlene should know, "with hotel expenses in addition."

Arlene hardly knew what to gasp, so Ronjan saved her the trouble.

"Don't thank me," he expressed. "Thank Mr. Cranston; it was his idea. He sent me word to interview you" – Ronjan's tone became confidential – "probably because of Miss Lane."

Arlene took it that Miss Lane was probably the type to be jealous if she knew that Mr. Cranston had offered a job to a former Wave. Perhaps her face registered a trace of reluctance on the basis of possible complications, for Ronjan immediately sought to reassure her.

"It's really very important," confided the shaggy-haired man. "Any word from Mr. Cranston is important. He has influence with Craig Farnsworth, the man who backed my great invention."

With that, Ronjan gestured to the big tank where the articulated tube was on display. He didn't have to explain it to Arlene; she could tell that it was a model of some sort of device used for reaching sunken ships.

"Our calculations were correct," declared Ronjan, "but perhaps Farnsworth is not convinced of it. The work you do may furnish the proof he needs."

Noting that Arlene was interested in the tank and its contents, Ronjan let her study the exhibit, though it was apparent that he was anxious to leave. In fact, Ronjan seemed to be timing things by the occasional glances he gave at his watch. Finally, Ronjan was about to gesture toward the door when a strange thing happened.

It occurred when Arlene was on the far side of the tank, over toward the window. As she turned, the girl was attracted by the scene from that window, for outdoors the dusk had settled, bringing a typical Manhattan nightscape. Central Park was gaining its velvety touch, lights were gleaming like gems, and a soft glow, rising from the street was a natural magnet for Arlene's eyes.

Then all was blackened by a momentary horror. Arlene dropped back aghast as the window clouded, almost blotting the scene with it.

The blotting shape had all the semblance of a cloaked figure with outspread arms, looming straight up into the window, as though arrived on some monstrous mission!

As suddenly as it appeared, the illusion vanished with a curious dwindling effect. Suddenly bold, Arlene stared down from the window, thinking the intruder had dropped away, but no one was in sight.

Ronjan, having turned to open the door, apparently had failed to view the startling sight outside the window, so Arlene said nothing about it. Ronjan bowed her out and then followed, locking the door behind him, as he muttered something about an appointment.

They had reached the elevator when its door opened to emit a tawny-faced man whose features were marred by two white scars. Bowing, Ronjan croaked an introduction:

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"Miss Forster, allow me to present Captain Dom Yuble from the Caribbean. He has proven very helpful in my present enterprise."

Yuble's gleaming smile rather impressed Arlene. When Ronjan offered Dom the key to the suite, the tawny man exhibited one of his own, then smiled again as Arlene entered the elevator with Ronjan.

All the way down in the elevator, even after she parted with Ronjan in the lobby, Arlene kept wondering about that fanciful occurrence upstairs. The more she wondered, the more she believed that Ronjan had tried to divert her attention from the window; indeed, had sought to have her leave before the weird interloper made that momentary appearance.

In fact, Arlene was ready to drop her feud with Phil in order to gain someone's reaction to her strange experience, but Phil wasn't around to hear her story. Starting back to her own hotel, Arlene decided that Phil must have gotten tired waiting for her, for which she couldn't blame him. Looking up toward the towering roof of the Chateau Parkview, Arlene saw lights that probably represented Ronjan's suite, tucked just beneath the eaves of the peculiarly ornate roof.

It looked trivial, that scene high above, so trivial that Arlene was ready to forget it. After all, when things seemed trifles, they couldn't matter much.

Arlene Forster was wrong. Trifling things could mean a great deal, whether noticed or unnoticed. In the latter class could have been included the tiny blinks that were beginning somewhere off in the distance.

They came from a building flanking Central Park, those twinkling gleams, symbols that strange crime was again on the move!

CHAPTER XIII

BLINK – BLINK – blink – blink –

The flashes were guarded tonight and their code was changed, but that didn't worry the man who watched them. He sat with his back away from a window, so his face couldn't be seen at all, unless the distant blinks had eyes.

Because the code was new, its signals were repeated, which was a bad mistake. It gave the watcher more time to operate a peculiar machine which whirred after he pressed certain buttons. Various letters fell in line within an illuminated dial, switched to other sets, until finally they made sense, at which time this observer stopped the process.

Leaning slightly forward, the man attended a switchboard, without letting his face come into the light. He had ear-phones on his head and when a voice responded, he announced:

"Burbank speaking –"

That name defined him. Burbank was The Shadow's contact man who reached the active agents. To vie with crime, The Shadow had posted Burbank at this strategic spot from which the contact man could view the limits of Central Park.

Now Burbank was announcing what he had learned. His statement was concise:

"Watch Outlook Cafe – check on a man named Claude Older – watch for green coupe –"

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There were other details, which Burbank relayed as they arrived, together with his crack-down of the code, as gained by means of The Shadow's mechanical decoder. It was a neat machine, this, based on the fact that codes follow patterns and ideal for quickly breaking up simple codes once they had been changed.

As he repeated these things, Burbank was changing plugs in the switchboard, to reach various persons and inform them. There was only one that caused a brief delay; it was to the Graceland Memorial Library, which was located rather far up Fifth Avenue. Distance wasn't what delayed it; time was needed simply because a certain Mr. Cranston had to be informed that he was wanted on the telephone.

Now The Shadow's agents were definitely on the move. The question was how much they could accomplish even if they reached the Lookout Cafe in time to operate.

The Lookout Cafe was a most popular place. Only a short distance inside the park, it combined an old mansion with a garden to compose a fashionable eating spot. The only hazard was the weather; if bad, it crowded the patrons indoors, but that didn't apply tonight because although the sky was overcast, there was no threat of rain.

Hence finding a man named Claude Older, particularly if you'd never met him, was something very difficult, even more difficult than locating a blue coupe among some fifty cars all parked in the darkness.

What helped was the loud-speaker which suddenly interrupted the orchestra that was playing on the garden terrace. It announced:

"Mr. Older – Mr. Claude Older – your friend is here –"

A pause followed, during which a number of diners stirred at various tables, but only because they were restless. Nobody answered to the name of Claude Older.

Again the amplifier spoke:

"A friend waiting for Mr. Older – a friend waiting outside –"

Several people were rising to step to a larger table that a waiter had prepared for them. Nobody noticed a man on the very fringe of the garden, who sidled from his chair as if to light a cigarette away from the slight breeze. He was a man with a high forehead and a baldish head that was compensated by a bristly mustache.

This man kept on sidling out between the scrubby units of a hedgerow that had been badly planted and therefore had not become the impassable affair which it had been designed to be.

If this man happened to be Older, he wasn't expecting his friend to be waiting in a car. Across the sward from the Lookout Cafe was a hansom cab, halted just off a drive, as though to rent its horse. The man from the dining terrace moved stealthily toward the hack, though stealth was hardly necessary.

It was very dark across the greensward, even at the spot where the hansom was located. The tall vehicle showed only in silhouetted form, like a misshapen haystack. From the cafe came the final amplified announcement:

"Mr. Older, your friend is waiting outside –"

Music took over and all was as before at the Lookout Cafe, at least within the restaurant proper. Outside, however, figures were moving in from different angles and a taxicab wheeled suddenly between two gates to

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haul over by the parked cars.

There was a coupe waiting in front of the main building forming the cafe and there was enough light to show the bright blue paint job that embellished it. The driver was leaning out and he gave a friendly wave to a tall man whose chin was muffled in an upturned raincoat.

The tall man was coming from the cafe and he was starting to put his hat on. The bright light glistened on his bald head, showing it quite plainly. Then he was in the coupe and it was driving away.

One of the arriving figures hopped into the taxicab and it followed the blue coupe. As both vehicles crunched the gravel out between the gates, the rest of the arriving figures met to hold a conference.

There were three, all agents of The Shadow. One was Harry Vincent, ace of The Shadow's workers; another, Clyde Burke, a reporter for the New York Classic during his off hours; the third was Hawkeye, a wizened little man who was second only to The Shadow when it came to sticking to a trail.

Only Hawkeye had no trail on which to stick. Shrevvy had followed Older, taking Cliff Marsland along in the cab. As the socko specialist of The Shadow's staff, Cliff was a one-man crew; hence he hadn't wasted time in gathering up any companions.

Nevertheless, that didn't mean the rest of the agents were off duty.

"We'd better do some checking around here," stated Harry Vincent. "What we just saw may be simply a little smoke to cover up some real fire."

"No use going into the cafe," added Clyde. "We'd be busy sorting out tourists until closing time. Let's spread around here."

"Yeah," concluded Hawkeye, "and I'll do any spotting while you fellows keep checking on those glims. Maybe the next bunch of code will send us places."

All planned nicely, but it came too late.

The hansom cab was already starting along the drive, with the passenger who had stolen out from the Lookout Cafe. It couldn't be seen at all from the corners of the main building, where The Shadow's agents were coming into gradual evidence.

It was Phil Harley who noticed the hansom.

Why Phil should be watching a hansom, he didn't know; in fact, why he should be where he was, happened to be an additional problem. At the moment, Phil couldn't exactly say where he was, for he seemed to be floating through midair to the tune of horse's hoofs.

The hansom was just ahead, which was why Phil saw it, and it helped him recognize his own status; that, plus the fact that the floating was becoming gradually familiar. It reminded Phil of last night, or rather he thought it was still last night, at the time when he had helped Arlene finish a ride in an open carriage.

Only right now it was Phil who was coming out of a daze. He turned to Arlene to explain his quandary.

"It's very funny," began Phil. "The last time I saw you, Arlene, you were going into a phone booth –"

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"That was last night," the girl interrupted. "Don't you remember?"

It wasn't Arlene's voice and it wasn't Arlene. Phil's eyes opened gradually, but widely, as he fixed a slow-motion stare on Thara Lamoyne!

Those dark eyes of Thara's gave all this an exotic setting that seemed like anywhere except Central Park, but the hoof-beats kept pounding home the fact that Central Park it was. In the passing lights, Thara's eyes smiled, but the illusion could have come from her lips, which were ever so slightly curved.

Then, imperceptibly, the olive features became solemn.

"This Arlene you speak about," said Thara. "A blonde, you said she was. It is so strange that she should disappear again."

Thara's tone was very sympathetic, although her face floated like something from a dream. That was explainable however by the fact that Thara was wearing a light velvet cape that completely draped her shoulders and had the same attractive gloss as her smooth, severe black hair.

"I guess I was the one who disappeared." Phil rubbed his head ruefully. "I went into the phone booth. I had a call to make, but I must have been thinking about Arlene. I was looking from the booth, when suddenly she stepped out of sight –"

"Ah, I was right," put in Thara. "She vanished, pouf! Like before."

"Maybe she did," admitted Phil, "but frankly I don't remember it. Where did I find you?"

"In the lobby; of course," replied Thara, "There at the Chateau Parkview. You said very funny things" – Thara supplied a contralto laugh – "about moonlight and a drive in the park. Of course there is no moonlight" – Thara tilted her face upward – "but it was nice to take a drive. Provided one thing" – her eyes were lowered toward Phil again – "provided that you did not mistake me for this girl Arlene."

Phil shook his head.

"I don't think I could have, Thara."

"She is blonde," said Thara, "I am brunette. Is that the reason why you could not mistake us until just a few minutes ago, because it was so very dark here?"

"There's another reason," Phil admitted. "I had an argument with Arlene, but so far I've had none with you, Thara. Maybe it makes a difference if you argue –"

An argument was due right then. Up ahead, the hansom had increased its speed and the changing pace of the horse caught Phil's ear. Rising in the open carriage, Phil gained a chance view above some shrubs along the bend which the hansom had just taken.

"That hack!" he exclaimed. "It's turning off the drive, the way the taxicab did last night!"

Before Thara could stop him, Phil sprang from the carriage. Thara's hands were encumbered by a candy box which she was holding in the folds of her cape and in his haste Phil knocked the box to the floor as the girl tried to pluck his arm.

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Grabbing for the box, Thara caught it before it could fall from the carriage, but lost Phil in the process. As he dashed past the bushes, Phil heard Thara call after him:

"Wait, Phil! Don't go – not yet –"

It was good advice – if only Phil had heeded it!

CHAPTER XIV

GETTING lost in Central Park was easy. Phil Harley had done it before; he did it again.

Within fifty yards, Phil needed to regain his sense of direction and turned around to take bearings, only to find the scene quite muddled. Bushes, trees, now intervened, so that the drive was no longer visible.

Looking where he thought Thara's carriage was, Phil could no longer locate it. It was either out of sight beyond a bush clump or it had moved further along. In either case it wouldn't help Phil find the fugitive hansom, so he decided to look for the latter.

At that moment, something intervened.

That something manifested itself against the glow from a light which might either represent the drive, a footpath, or anything else that was lighted around Central Park. The thing was a shape of jet blackness, human in a weird sort of way.

It looked like a person cloaked in black, with widespread, menacing arms. It lunged up beyond a shrub clump, made an eccentric sidelong shift, then performed a truly kaleidoscopic disappearance, because changes of color were involved. One instant, the creature turned greenish; the next, it was dyed red. Then it was gone with a fantastic swoop.

Phil suddenly realized the reason for all this. He'd seen the night creature flit in front of a changing traffic light, which was why it took on those fantastic hues. The red glow of the traffic light still persisted, but no longer as a background for the fanciful monstrosity.

The light told where the drive was, but Phil didn't want the drive. He wanted to find the mysterious hansom, so he blundered off in its probable direction, at the same time preparing to meet the cloaked monster should it cross his path.

Instinctively, Phil connected that creature with the invisible fighter that he had encountered the night before. Since he didn't know that it also paid clandestine visits to the top floor of the Chateau Parkview, Phil's data on the monster subject was somewhat limited; but he felt right now that he could cope with the creature if he met it.

First though, Phil was to meet the hansom cab.

It took a long, mad rush among trees, over rocks, and through underbrush, before Phil finally came upon the missing vehicle, and then – quite curiously – it was reaching the open. The hansom must have used its own network of bridle paths and unlisted routes to reach this open stretch of flat, smooth ground which was crossed by a paved footpath, wide enough for the hack to use as a road.

This open area was an almost-forgotten spot termed the Oval and ahead it narrowed to a path with overhanging trees that was called the Willow Arch. Beyond the Willow Arch lay a section of the Great Lawn,

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but the terms would have meant nothing to Phil Harley, even if he had heard them.

Phil wanted to find out who was in the hansom and it was coming to a halt just in front of the Willow Arch, the tall bulk of this giraffe among vehicles threatening to tangle with the willow boughs should its driver attempt to take it through.

That was a break for Phil, or so he thought. Starting full tilt across the Oval, Phil found that the ground was level but heavy with thick grass, so he switched to the footpath for more speed, which proved a tactical error.

Before Phil could quite reach the halted hack, men lunged out to block him, attracted by the clatter of his running footsteps. In the dull glow that the city cast against the sullen sky, Phil recognized his assailants. They were chunky men that he had met the night before and they were garbed in outfits resembling leopard skins.

Leopards in agility they were as well, but instead of claws they had knives, long blades that flashed at Phil like great-toothed fangs!

He was a tough fighter, Phil, but battling off a tribe like this was almost as difficult as a head-on encounter with The Shadow.

Thinking of the hansom as a refuge, Phil made an effort to enter it, but without success. Getting into a hansom was troublesome; you had to enter it from the front and Phil didn't know the system. Besides, the driver was flicking down with his whip, shouting something at both Phil and the leopard men.

It was all the driver could do to restrain the horse by means of the long reins that ran clear over the top and to the driver's box above and at the back. The hansom seemed to be squirming on its two wheels and next it heeled over to the right as though something had been shoved from it.

Phil wasn't there to see. He'd dived away to escape the leopard men. His best course seemed a mad race back across the Oval, so he started that way, hoping these jungleers weren't good knife throwers.

They didn't have to be.

Amid the rough turf Phil found an old tree root that he didn't want and took a spill to the heavy sward. His pursuers were after him like rabbits, but were something much more murderous with their knives. Twisting around to ward off stabs, Phil saw blades poised above as if ready to strike in concert.

With the blades were glaring, darkish faces that looked venomous, but however ugly their spite, it was to be postponed.

Into that same dull glow from the heavy sky came the weird creature that Phil had seen before, the thing that swooped like a mammoth bat, only to evaporate. This time however, it turned the trick about.

The thing blotted all else from Phil's sight as it struck right into the midst of the savage men in leopard skins. Instead of dwindling to nothingness, it had grown to the proportions of a life-sized rescuer.

The Shadow!

On hands and knees Phil saw the men in leopard skins scatter among the willows. Ahead of them went the hansom, jouncing from right to left, as though relieved of its burden. The driver was gone; he couldn't risk the lacing he would have taken from willow branches.

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As for Phil, he would have tried to help his friend The Shadow, if gun-shots hadn't indicated that The Shadow was doing all right for himself. So Phil waited where he was, feeling both bewildered and shaky until a hand gripped him and hauled him to his feet.

The face that Phil saw was an honest one; it belonged to Harry Vincent, who had arrived with The Shadow's other guests. Harry didn't declare that fact; he simply acted as though he and Phil were persons who had run into the same peck of trouble.

"Come along," suggested Harry. "I know a way out of here."

Clyde and Hawkeye were sliding out of sight among the willows through which The Shadow had chased the leopard tribe. They didn't want to complicate matters for Harry by letting Phil know that more than one stranger was around. Matters however were due for other complications.

The way that Harry took was by a rough-hewn path up from the Oval. At times it became almost a sheer cliff and when they reached the top, it showed gradual slopes in all directions. They were long slopes and in the foreground Phil could see a dim vista with the gray lines of crossing paths and drives, along with the light-reflecting sparkle of ponds and pools that otherwise were dark.

Instead of introducing himself, Harry Vincent explained where they were.

"They call this the Knoll," said Harry. "You can see most of the park from here. People gravitate to it in an upward direction. From here we can pick wherever we want to go, except back where we came from."

Phil Harley was inclined to agree with his new friend. By way of appreciation he introduced himself, whereupon Harry Vincent did the same. Since Phil still took it that Harry was a chance New Yorker who had blundered in among the leopard men, it wasn't necessary to go into the details that had produced Phil's own predicament.

Looking around the Knoll, Phil saw benches and a few bicycles parked alongside of some go-carts. Apparently people who trudged up here became too tired to take such odds and ends along with them. At least it was nice to know that there was one place in New York where belongings could be left and found again.

This, however, did not apply to Phil and Harry.

While Phil was philosophizing, Harry was looking off toward a distant building where lights had begun to flicker. There was an order coming through in the new code that The Shadow's machine had cracked. At first Harry didn't get it, but when the signal was repeated, he caught the message.

Turning to Phil, Harry gave the quick word:

"Keep a sharp lookout! That same crowd may be moving up here to trap us!"

Such was the gist of the message. It was telling the wrong people to surround the Knoll. A logical move, should Phil's general whereabouts be known.

There was more to the message. It kept repeating that one term: "The Knoll."

Phil wasn't watching the lights. He was following Harry's instructions and with results. Down the slope shrubs stirred and it wasn't wind that swayed them. Furtive shapes began crossing the gray winding path; they

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had the spotty look of the leopard disguises.

"They're after us!" Phil told Harry, hoarsely. "No use to go down the path by the rocks; they'll have that covered sure! Maybe we'd better cut off the slope –"

With Phil's very gesture, that route proved blocked, for from it came the tiny twinkles of a flashlight. It was Harry who again absorbed the message, but this time the code was The Shadow's own.

Out of the night The Shadow was telling how to nullify the closing trap that he too had learned about by reading the more distant blinks.

Harry swung to Phil with the statement:

"Let's go!"

How they were to go, Harry showed. He snatched up the nearest bicycle and swung himself upon it, whereupon Phil did the same with another of the handy vehicles. Then, with Harry setting the pace, they were off upon the maddest flight that the imagination could have wanted.

The path down from the Knoll was as twisty as it was steep. All you had to do with a bike was let it ride and keep steering while you gave the brakes. In this case the braking wasn't advisable until the danger zone had been passed and there was no telling how soon that would be.

Up from the darkness the curving path flowed like a tangled ribbon unraveling itself beneath the wheels of Harry's borrowed bicycle. It did the same with Phil's, for he was keeping close behind this guide who apparently knew the route.

Things happened all the way down. As they whipped beneath some thick trees, knives came from the dark and planked hard into tree trunks. As they skewered around a huge rock, writhing, spotted figures flung themselves down at the intrepid riders and missed.

Greased lightning would have described those whizzing bicycles except at the places where the wheels screeched under the hard-jammed brakes, but even then, the speed was lessened just enough to make the turns.

Guns were barking from far above and now they seemed strangely remote to Phil. This trip had been so fast, so furious, that he hadn't found a chance to breathe the air that came whining past. And now, with the menace of the leopard men banished, a new disaster threatened.

The path ended at a huge rock, down deep in the dell. Rather, it ran into a cross path, but the rock blocked the way. Harry took a swerve that a trick bicycle rider would have envied and went to the left of the rock. He missed the path of course, but jounced the bike across the ground beyond.

Phil thought that Harry had taken the hard way. The turn to the right looked easier. Phil chose it and scaled out through space. His bicycle left him and he landed with a smacking splash in a broad pond that he hadn't even guessed was there.

Far around the other side of the pond, Harry Vincent halted his ride and turned to look for his companion. He saw men hauling Phil from the water and the glare of flashlights showed who they were. Not leopard men, but a squad in blue uniforms, representing the police.

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Perhaps Phil could explain his wild nocturnal ride, but in a sense it didn't matter. Harry's job was done.

From here on The Shadow could take over!

CHAPTER XV

COMMISSIONER RALPH WESTON was in a very grumpy mood.

"It's nonsense, Cranston!" the commissioner insisted. "Claude Older couldn't have disappeared in Central Park, any more than Winslow Ames! Both men left the vicinity of Central Park instead of going there!"

To prove his point, the commissioner thumbed through the report sheets that Inspector Cardona provided with a corroborating nod.

The report sheets proved all that Weston claimed, but largely because he so interpreted them.

First: Winslow Ames.

The man had made inquiries regarding his Pullman reservation at Penn Station. He had been seen to board the Boston car. After that he had vanished.

"What do you say to that, Cranston?" queried Weston.

"Mistaken identity," returned Cranston. "A ticket agent and a Pullman porter wouldn't notice a passenger closely enough to know if somebody else happened to be doubling for him."

With a snort, Weston tossed over the other report. It concerned Claude Older and stated that he had been met by a very reliable business acquaintance outside the Lookout Cafe. Said business acquaintance had driven Older to Grand Central Station, so he could take a suburban train to visit friends in the country. Older hadn't been seen since.

"A business acquaintance doesn't know a man too well," declared Cranston, "particularly in the dark. I would say that somebody else came out of the cafe and took the ride to Grand Central in the blue coupe."

Cardona shot a query:

"How did you know it was a blue coupe?"

"Most coupes are," rejoined Cranston. "A roadster would be flashy, a sedan somber. A coupe is generally between."

It reminded Cardona of flat tires being more common on the West Side than the East Side. Nevertheless, Joe had to admit that Cranston was right. That applied to minor matters only, for Cardona was still in accord with Weston on the matter of Central Park.

"A hansom cab runs away," gruffed Weston, "and a man on a bicycle steers himself into a pond. We've checked both matters and they concern neither Winslow nor Older."

That was Cranston's cue to bow out politely from Weston's office. At the door, he paused to toss back a query.

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"About those missing men, commissioner," asked Cranston. "What did you say their occupations were?"

"Winslow was buying commercial plastics," called the commissioner. "Older was studying the South American market for synthetic rubber. If you want to know what the chap who fell in the pond was doing, ask him. He's waiting outside and you may as well tell him he can go. We're not holding him."

Thus it was that Lamont Cranston met Phil Harley, except that he didn't tell Phil that he was no longer wanted. Instead, Cranston invited Phil to ride up town, adding that it was by order of the police commissioner.

Instead of Shrevvy's cab, Cranston was using his limousine today and Phil was duly impressed, though strictly silent. It was Cranston who broke the ice with the calm-toned question:

"And just what is your alleged occupation, Mr. Harley?"

Phil's eyes narrowed at the query.

"Ames was buying commercial plastics," remarked Cranston, "although there happen to be none available on the market. Older was arranging synthetic rubber shipments to South America which happens to have an oversupply of the natural material. I thought there might be a third connection."

Steady eyes fixed straight on Phil and this time drew a reply.

"All right," snapped Phil. "My job is to read over patent reports. Any objection?"

"None at all," assured Cranston. "How are you progressing?"

"Not so well," Phil admitted frankly. "They haven't delivered enough of them at my hotel."

"So you spend your time looking out the window at Central Park."

"That's right. I live at the Sans Souci –"

Phil caught himself and sharply.

"Say!" Phil's exclamation was heartfelt. "Why did you make that guess about Central Park?"

"It wasn't precisely a guess," corrected Cranston. "I was thinking of Winslow and Ames. They seemed to prefer the same neighborhood."

Phil's stare became steady as the limousine stopped.

"I'm dropping off here," stated Cranston. "This is the Cobalt Club. You can reach me here if you wish. My chauffeur will take you to your hotel. It has a nice name, the Sans Souci."

"It's French," explained Phil. "It means 'without worry' –"

"I know," interposed Cranston. "What's more, I hope you're living up to it."

Entering the Cobalt Club, Lamont Cranston found Harry Vincent waiting with Margo Lane. Promptly, Cranston gave Harry some vital information.

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"I've started Harley thinking," Cranston told Harry. "If he doesn't phone me, he'll probably talk to you."

Harry nodded while Margo wondered.

"Our problem is not entirely why or where people have disappeared," continued Cranston. "It is who is going to disappear next. Harley may be on the list."

"But they could have taken him last night," began Margo. "Instead they tried to murder him."

"It wasn't his turn to vanish," explained Cranston. "He was just an outsider where the leopard crew was concerned."

"But if Phil Harley is to be next –"

"He may not be the next," considered Cranston. "I am listing him purely because he is one more person who has no real business in New York. I would like to learn the names of some others. Meanwhile" – Cranston emphasized this to Margo – "I want you to stay quite close to old Sylvia Selmore."

"But Miss Selmore belongs in New York –"

"She lives here," conceded Cranston, "but at present she doesn't belong. She postponed her trip after that seance which Madame Mathilda gave. Remember?"

Margo nodded to prove that she remembered.

"The banshee business stopped her," summed Cranston, "and it marked the beginning of these disappearances. I've checked Madame Mathilda; she admits she sprang the spook stuff because she received a phone call promising her some cash, but she doesn't know who phoned."

With that, Cranston arose. Seeing that he was about to leave, Margo questioned coyly:

"Where next, Lamont? Back to the Graceland Memorial Library?"

"Of course," replied Cranston blandly. "I've learned a lot there, Margo. That banshee pool, for instance. It used to be called the Bowl."

"The Bowl? Why?"

"Because it was just a rounded gully with an overhanging ledge called Indian Leap. They dammed it by the bridge so that the stream that ran through would form a pool."

Remembering how the stream cascaded down below the bridge, Margo could visualize the old Bowl and more.

"Why, the big rock must be the ledge!" she exclaimed. "I can see it now! The banshee slid beneath what was the old ledge and worked around to the nearest gully, the one I stumbled into later!"

"Very good," approved Cranston. "There's a great deal to be learned about Central Park. All its natural ravines were not turned into pools. There would have been too many."

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Cranston showed his interest in Central Park after he left the Cobalt Club. Soon he was walking through the transverse where the truck had gobbled Winslow Ames, only to carry him along another leg of his strange disappearance.

Not far along the transverse, Cranston came to a gate. It opened into a narrow path that followed a defile, then rose gradually. Meeting another footpath, Cranston went along it and crossed a burbling stream by a little rustic bridge.

The bridge was artificial, so was the stream's present course. It had been diverted from the natural channel that marked the path to the transverse. Letting his eye rove up the stream, Cranston saw where it came from.

This rivulet had long ago been put underground. The bank which it flowed from rose high above it, forming a great mass of earth which was flanked by jutting rocks, high above.

Not as high as the Knoll, those rocks, though they were like small foothills leading toward it.

At the spot where the stream issued, there was a heavy iron grating set deep into a rock formation that formed the foundation of the grassy embankment. Cranston didn't follow the stream, because his path lay off to the right of it. So he continued his stroll by that route until he reached the Graceland Memorial Library.

A polite attendant started to show Cranston to the room that contained old maps and volumes dealing with the history of early New York, but Cranston shook his head. There was another room that interested him more today. It bore a sign:

MANHATTAN GENEALOGY

It didn't take Cranston long to find the volume that he wanted, since it was practically at the head of the row, among those bearing the letter A. In opening the book, Cranston practically skimmed through the early pages, proving that he was more interested in more modern data.

As he found what he wanted, Cranston gave a strangely subdued laugh, which by its very tone belonged to his other self, The Shadow!

CHAPTER XVI

IT was dusk when Lamont Cranston stopped around to see Craig Farnsworth. The evening was balmy so they went out on the high terrace that overlooked the park.

"It's very strange, Cranston," stated Farnsworth, "the things that have been happening in the park of late."

Cranston nodded.

"You mean those disappearances. What were the names of the two chaps? Wait, I have them: Ames and Older."

Farnsworth gave a puzzled stare.

"I didn't know they disappeared in Central Park, Cranston. Who gave you that idea?"

"You did, Farnsworth, when you mentioned strange things."

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"I meant about the animals getting loose. Several people have claimed that they saw some prowling leopards. But the zoo keepers haven't discovered any missing."

Cranston shrugged.

The result of that banshee talk, he decided. "After the things that Miss Selmore and Officer Reilly imagined, people might cook up anything. But getting around to business, have you heard from Ronjan lately?"

Farnsworth's rugged face turned worried.

"I haven't," he admitted. "I suppose Ronjan intends to wait me out. Why not?" Farnsworth gave an annoyed laugh. "He has my money all tied up."

"Our money," Cranston reminded.

"I know," nodded Farnsworth. "Well, throwing good after bad is a wrong policy, but by next week, I'll be doing it. I don't know how you feel, Cranston, but –"

A servant arrived to explain a ringing telephone that Cranston had been hearing. The call was for Cranston, so he went into the apartment to take it. Farnsworth called after him:

"Invite Miss Lane up here if she'd like to come."

The call wasn't from Margo. Instead, Phil Harley was on the wire and he was very earnest, with a trace of tension in his voice.

"You spoke about phony jobs, Mr. Cranston," stated Phil across the wire, "and the people who take them. What about the people who hand them out – would you like to know who they are?"

"It would be very interesting."

"Then talk to yourself," announced Phil, "unless you'd rather have me tell Miss Lane that you hired a certain girl for a rather useless task."

"You haven't called Miss Lane, have you?"

"Not yet."

"Then you should," suggested Cranston. "Unless you'd prefer to give me more details first."

"As if you didn't know," snapped Phil. "All right, the girl's name is Arlene Forster. She's getting paid for checking coastal charts, only she's seen less of them than I have seen of patent papers."

"I'm beginning to think that Margo really would be interested."

"A nice bluff," complimented Phil. "I guess you figure you have that old fool fixed."

"I wouldn't call him a fool."

"I'll find out if he is," retorted Phil. "I'm going up to see Niles Ronjan right now!"

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The receiver clanked heartily at the other end and Cranston stepped away from the phone with a shrug, to meet Farnsworth, who had just come indoors.

"Miss Lane is coming up here, Cranston?"

"I hope not," replied Cranston. "Some smart dealer wants to sell her a mink coat cheap because it's summer. But a mink coat is never cheap. I said I wouldn't call him a fool for trying to make the sale, but I meant it differently than he took it."

With that, Cranston glanced at his watch and added:

"The real fool would be Margo, if she made such a buy. I'd better go hunt for her before she receives a call."

While Cranston spoke, Farnsworth was dialing the telephone, trying to get Ronjan's number. Receiving no response, Farnsworth followed Cranston to the door and said in parting:

"Not that mink coats aren't important, Cranston, but Ronjan has me worried. There's only one place where he could have gone."

Cranston made a half-jesting inquiry while half way through the door.

"Somewhere out in Central Park?"

"Be serious, Cranston," returned Farnsworth. "I think Ronjan may be digging up some new investors. He may intend to drop the Good Wind job and go hunting treasure elsewhere. There's one place he would take such investors."

"Out to Skipper's Rock?"

"That's right. To see the full-sized articulated subsea tunnel. I'm going down the Battery and hire a boat myself to go out there. Call me at midnight; that's about the soonest I can hope to be back."

Cranston gave a nod and closed the door behind him. As he came out on the avenue, a taxicab swung around the corner only to be disappointed when a limousine pulled in front of it to pick up the gentleman in evening clothes.

Having just lighted a thin cigar, Cranston was drawing on it idly while his chauffeur was opening the limousine door. As a result, the lighted end of the cigar gave tiny glows that delivered a coded message.

Therefore the cab driver wasn't disappointed; he happened to be Shrevvy and he already had a passenger huddled in the back seat, namely Hawkeye. There would be work for the speedy cab driver and the ace of spotters tonight.

Since Farnsworth's apartment house was situated well up the avenue, Cranston had some distance to travel before reaching Central Park South. Lights were already beginning a mysterious series of blinks before Cranston's needed minutes had ended.

Particularly mysterious tonight, those lights. They cleaved the lush darkness that belonged to Central Park but it was difficult to tell which flank they came from. Indeed, the blinks seemed to come from within the park itself, which was puzzling, since they were from a considerably high level.

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Phil Harley didn't know about the lights and perhaps he wouldn't have cared. Phil was coming from a phone booth in the lobby of the Chateau Parkview after a heated talk with Arlene Forster. It seemed that Arlene was about to leave her hotel and wouldn't tell Phil where she intended to go. There wasn't time for Phil to race as far as the Plaza Central to flag the blonde before she started.

So irked was Phil that he didn't realize he'd done a very odd thing. Stepping from a phone booth in the Chateau Parkview was a novelty. You usually walked into them and wound up somewhere else. So Arlene had claimed and Phil vaguely remembered a similar experience.

Right now, Phil was wondering if Thara Lamoyne was around. She was a person who might answer some pointed questions, if Phil could only find her. Not seeing Thara, Phil had another idea. He'd go up and call on old Niles Ronjan, who seemingly had some remote connection with matters involving Arlene. At least the blonde had mentioned Ronjan as a go-between where Cranston was concerned.

Phil caught an elevator too soon. If he'd waited for the next car, he'd have met Thara Lamoyne coming out of it. As it was, the cars passed and when Thara did appear in the lobby, she looked relieved when she didn't see Phil there. However, Thara didn't leave the lobby; she merely went to make a phone call in one of the alcove booths.

By then, Phil was knocking at Ronjan's door.

The man who opened the door was Dom Yuble. The captain from the Caribbean shook his head when Phil asked for Ronjan, whereupon Phil became persistent. Thrusting himself into the room despite Yuble, Phil looked around as though expecting to find Ronjan hiding somewhere.

Yuble's scars turned very white. It was a bad sign if Phil had noticed it, for it meant that Yuble's face was purpling invisibly under his peculiar tan, the scars staying white because they weren't included in the process.

Yet Yuble's tone was still a purr, polite and persuasive.

"Mr. Ronjan has gone out to Skipper's Rock," Yuble informed. "If you wish to know why – look there!"

By "there" Yuble didn't mean the Rock. He was gesturing to the huge tank in the center of Ronjan's main room. For the first time Phil saw the model ships and the peculiar articulated tunnel, formed in miniature, that was designed to give safe passage to a treasure hunter.

"It is very interesting," purred Yuble from beside Phil's shoulder. "You may study it closely if you wish."

Phil's training as an engineer was coming to the fore. He leaned to take a better look at the device. In turn Yuble leaned forward and made a gesture as if to point out certain features of the invention. Only Yuble's hand didn't stop.

With a hard downward thwack, Yuble's flattened palm struck the water with the violence of a beaver's tail, hoisting a regular geyser right into Phil's face. Before Phil could recover, Yuble gave him an arm clamp that somersaulted Phil over the tank, clear beyond the water and across the other side to a hard landing on the floor beside the window.

Yuble didn't pause. Like a pirate boarding a merchant ship he clambered onto the tank, sprang across it and landed at Phil's side with a drawn and lifted knife, like those that Phil had seen in the fists of the leopard men. But Phil, leaned back against the tank, was too groggy to attempt any warding of the stroke that was to come.

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It didn't come quite yet.

With a leer, Yuble gestured to the window, outside which the distant blinks had ceased.

"Maybe you have understood the first message?" The scarred man sneered. "If so, what should matter? You have not yet found out the important thing." Yuble paused, as though hoping Phil would revive enough to comprehend. "You have not learned it, fool! You have not guessed that I, Dom Yuble, can receive a special message at any time."

Turning to the window, Yuble let his eyes betray an expectant glitter.

"Look!" Yuble gloated. "I shall let you live long enough to see how a confidential message arrives!"

Maybe it was Phil's swimming head, but he was sure he saw blackness loom suddenly up into the window. No longer sheer fancy, that blackness became a growing creature with great, outspread arms that looked like webbed extensions of its body.

Yuble's manner was a greeting, as he waved a hand as if to gesture the creature upward, so it would dwindle from the light; then, so suddenly that Phil was jolted out of his mental whirl, Yuble gave a piercing scream of horror.

Instead of melting, that creature from the great outside flung its arms around Dom Yuble as though enveloping him in the folds of a death-delivering cloak.

To Phil Harley, the action of Yuble's unknown foe symbolized The Shadow!

CHAPTER XVII

FOR the next few minutes, the fantastic ruled. To Phil Harley, what he saw was unbelievable, or at least half so. Yuble's antagonist made it that way.

As Yuble reeled in front of the window trying to shake off his dread attacker, the changing position of the light produced remarkable tricks. At times, Yuble seemed overwhelmed by a huge, shadowy antagonist; there were moments when the attacker disappeared, leaving only Yuble, gasping, jabbing his knife wildly into thin air.

Half rising, Phil gained the impression that he saw flowing blood, which didn't make sense, since Yuble, the man with the knife, wasn't managing to carve anything. Then, before Phil could gain his feet, Yuble took a heavy sprawl, rolled over and lay still.

A moment later, something stirred from beside Yuble's body; a patch of blackness flung itself up into the light, cut off the glow and became that same, gripping monster that had just done with Yuble and was in thirst of a new victim, Phil Harley!

Out of the blackness, Phil saw tiny, demoniac eyes and caught the glitter of sharp white teeth. He heard a sound that was like a high-pitched war shriek as he fell back, flinging his arms to ward off the unknown terror.

It was then that Phil was sprawled by an arm that swung from beside him. Landing backward, looking up toward the half-blotted light, Phil saw the literally incredible.

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There were two of these monsters. One was making a furious downward swoop, as if from the wing while the other was lunging upward. For the moment, both seemed fantastically human. The swooping figure blocked the glow and therefore looked all out of proportion to its size, which didn't apply to the shape that came up to meet it.

The illusion faded with a gun blast, delivered by the form that made the upward surge. With that, there were two Shadows no longer, but only one.

In fact one was all there ever had been.

The creature that had zoomed into the window was the thing that The Shadow had blasted in mid-air, an enormous vampire bat, a killer imported from the tropics!

A killer indeed, for it had slain Dom Yuble. How near it had come to doing the same to Phil was enough to send his head swimming. Relaxing, Phil went limp and felt the sweep of total blackness which gradually disseminated when hands shook his shoulder and splashed water lightly in his face.

Instead of The Shadow, Lamont Cranston was helping Phil into a chair. Revived, Phil stared at the body of Dom Yuble, its throat gory from the vampire's deadly work. Near Yuble lay the killer, also dead, of huge size for a bat, but lacking the mammoth proportions that it had seemed to gain when cutting off the light.

Then Phil, his own throat tingling, even though untouched, was voicing hoarse details of all that had occurred, hoping that Cranston could interpret the rest.

"I saw the thing last night," stated Phil, "or maybe something like it. Only Yuble couldn't have been expecting this. He thought he was going to get a message, a confidential message."

Sounds like little "eeks" attracted Cranston to the window. He beckoned Phil there and together they looked up beneath the eaves. Hanging there was a row of tiny bats which couldn't compare in size to the vampire killer. In fact the little bats were frightened by the oversized visitor; hence their complaint.

"Carrier bats," stated Cranston, very calmly. "It's not uncommon for bats to have the homing sense. At short distances they are perfect message bearers, particularly at night, since it is impossible to see them except against the light."

Both Margo and Arlene could have testified to that last-named fact along with Phil. As for Cranston, he was learning something that he had sought while playing the role of The Shadow; how strange prowlers in the park had managed to get back word to the person who maneuvered them. Here was the answer, these carrier bats that Dom Yuble received and from the messages they bore was able to pass the word along.

"I get it," armed Phil, tersely. "When Ronjan is out, he can send word back to Yuble. Tonight Ronjan must have seen me coming up here. He figured I was wise, so he sent the killer bat, hoping it would get me –"

Cranston interposed with a headshake.

"You were not expected," he told Phil. "Yuble was intended as the victim."

"But why?"

"Because he knew too much about a certain treasure long sought on a sunken brig called the Good Wind."

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From his pocket Cranston brought a sheaf of photostats and spread them for Phil to see. As he went over them, Cranston kept glancing from the window, watching for distant twinkles from somewhere in Central Park.

"The Good Wind treasure rightfully belonged to a man named Thales Van Woort," explained Cranston. "He sent a smuggler named Caleb Albersham out to bring in the treasure. Unfortunately, Albersham's sloop, the Rover, was lost in the same storm that sank the Good Wind."

Phil nodded. He had heard the treasure story.

"I've been tracking down the records of the Albersham family," explained Cranston, "in hope that I might find some important data. Oddly, they seem to feel that their old ancestor Caleb was a hero, not a rascal.

"Here's a picture taken in the early days of Central Park. It shows the slab marking Caleb's grave. A lot of those markers still remain, particularly in the Oval, near the Willow Arch."

Those terms struck home to Phil, but he was more interested in deciphering the picture. About all he could see inscribed on the stone were the words:

HERE LIES

CALEB ALBERSHAM

ADVENTURER MARINER

ESTEEMED BY HIS

FAMILY DESCENDANTS

Cranston was bringing out some other items, which he laid on the table.

"I checked on the Van Woort family too," he explained. "They go further back than the Albershams. There was an old hunting shack owned by Thales' grandfather Doorn. It was tucked right under two cliffs."

Phil studied the crude drawing that showed the rude cabin. He nodded approvingly.

"A nice safe place."

"It was until the Indians dropped down on it," declared Cranston. "Right here on Manhattan Island. That was the end of Doorn. After that, the family wished they'd lived in a cave."

"Why didn't they?"

"Because they moved down to New Amsterdam proper, where land was more expensive but safer. Of course they still made expeditions way up into the wild lands which are now Central Park."

"What happened to their old location?"

"Gone, long ago. It's difficult to trace old landmarks in Central Park. The whole area was landscaped back in the Eighteen-fifties, a tremendous project for that day. Of course it followed the contour of the land, wherever possible."

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Pausing, Cranston studied some twinkles that appeared from the darkness of the park. Then, bringing an envelope from his pocket, he handed it to Phil.

"Getting down to date," stated Cranston, "look those over Harley. They're some photographs I managed to acquire. One may be Ames, another Older. Tell me if you recognize anybody else."

The photos were rather poor prints, but one man did look like Ames, as Phil recalled him. There were other pictures, one of which brought a smile to Phil because it reminded him of an old uncle he remembered from childhood. Then:

"Why, this looks like Arlene Forster!" Phil exclaimed. "The girl I told you about. By the way" – Phil's tone became apologetic – "I'm sorry I kicked up such a fuss about Arlene. Since she knew Ronjan, I'm beginning to think she was the girl who worked the banshee hoax."

Cranston gave a slight nod from the telephone that he was using. He pointed to another picture.

"Look at that one."

Phil studied a crude photo of a haughty old lady while Cranston was completing the call. Then:

"Who is she?" he asked. "Say – I have it! I've seen this face in the newspapers. It belongs to old Sylvia Selmore!"

At that moment, Cranston repeated the same name:

"Sylvia Selmore!"

With those words, Cranston ended the call, gave another look out into the dark, where twinkles no longer were visible. Then:

"I've just heard something," declared Cranston, "that means tonight will be the big pay-off. Our business will be to make it pay the way it should!"

CHAPTER XVIII

LAMONT CRANSTON had just heard from Margo Lane and she had told him some amazing news.

Old Sylvia Selmore was taking a sincere group out to Central Park to await the appearance of the banshee, which in her language was spelled Gwrach y Rhibyn.

When Cranston told this to Phil, the latter didn't believe it.

"The police would be crazy to allow it!" exclaimed Phil.

"On the contrary, they think otherwise," expressed Cranston. "I just talked to the commissioner."

Phil's eyes went nervous as they looked toward Yuble's body.

"I didn't mention what happened here," stated Cranston. "The commissioner was too busy. He's letting Miss Sylvia have her fling on the chance the banshee will appear. The police will have a cordon formed about the place."

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Phil began to grasp the idea. Then:

"What gave Miss Sylvia her present notion?"

"She went to another medium," Cranston explained. He was picking up the telephone as he spoke. "The result was what they term a direct voice message, telling Sylvia to visit the banshee haunt and take her friends."

"Somebody bribed the medium to pipe that yarn?"

"Very probably," acknowledged Cranston. "It seems to be the custom. All done anonymously, though."

A voice was answering from the number that Cranston had dialed and the voice belonged to Margo Lane. Glad that Lamont had called, Margo gave a breathless report which Cranston then relayed to Phil.

"A friend of yours is going along," said Cranston. "Arlene Forster. Somebody phoned her and gave my name, inviting her to join the party. She phoned Sylvia and Margo was there to learn about it."

"So that's the stunt!" exclaimed Phil. "It will give Arlene her chance to work the banshee game. I get it now; somebody is after old Sylvia's money!"

"That's what the police think," agreed Cranston. "The commissioner is so keyed up that he's forgotten Ames and Older. He just won't believe they're linked with Central Park."

"It's Ronjan's work!" expressed Phil. "I'm going out to that banshee pool myself –"

"You're going along with your friend Vincent," interposed Cranston. "He dropped by to see me today and told me how he'd helped you out last night. A capable chap, Vincent."

Forced to agree, Phil gave a nod meaning that a team-up with Vincent would suit him.

Cranston was making another phone call, this time to an old carriage factory, to ask them if they'd finished a repair job on an old hansom that had been sent there. Learning that they had, Cranston ordered the vehicle sent to the Chateau Parkview.

Going out with Phil, Cranston locked the door of Ronjan's suite leaving it for the police to find Yuble's body in due course. Downstairs, however, Cranston scorned the usual lobby door. Instead, he guided Phil to a telephone booth in the alcove.

"From things that you and Arlene mentioned," said Cranston, "I thought it a good idea to check on this. Watch."

Stepping into the booth, Cranston vanished. Unable to believe his eyes, Phil came alert, tugged at the door and found the booth quite empty. Crowding in for a better look, Phil heard the door jar behind him. There was a sharp click and Phil was reeling through the wall, into an empty corridor of a narrow building next door to the hotel.

It was Harry Vincent who stopped Phil's stagger. Finding that Phil was quite undamaged, Harry nodded and said:

"The gas load wasn't there tonight."

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"You mean that's what happened the other time I came through?" queried Phil. "Why I was so groggy and didn't wake up until I was out in the park somewhere?"

"That's right."

"Smart of Arlene," decided Phil, with a grim nod. "She faked the stunt the night before. Just a buildup so when the thing happened to me, I'd look back and think she had the same experience. Say – do you think Ames and Older each got a whiff of that stuff?"

"One in a taxi," stated Harry, "the other in a hansom. Let's start out and see if we can find them."

"Where do we begin?"

"At the old Watch Tower, up about the middle of Central Park. That's where the flashes came from tonight. They thought they had us licked; that we'd go moving all around the park, thinking the glimmer was from one side or the other. But we did some quick triangulation and located the source. Maybe the big shot is there in person tonight."

Eager to go, Phil followed Harry out through a door that opened on the street, but had no outside knob. He realized then how easily someone had shoved him in a waiting carriage for there were several along this curb.

Phil was thinking too of Thara and how she had tried to help him. Perhaps that was why he didn't notice the hansom cab that was right now pulling away from the curb. In that hansom was Lamont Cranston, lighting another of those long thin cigars.

Other eyes though must have noted Cranston, for it wasn't long before signals blinked, away out in the park, in answer to some relayed message.

Meanwhile the hansom was proceeding deep into the park, its driver lounging sleepily in the high box, where he couldn't see what was going on within. Prowlers among the bushes were following the hansom's slow curve. Lamont Cranston leaned forward, looked out and blew some clouds of cigar smoke. Then, leaning back into the hansom, he became The Shadow.

Therewith, The Shadow vanished.

Great speculation existed about The Shadow's vanishing methods. Men of crime had seen him disappear from their very midst. People like Madame Mathilda claimed that The Shadow had the faculty of literally dematerializing himself. Of course there were times and occasions when The Shadow could cloud men's minds, as was done in Tibet where he had learned hypnotic methods from the Lamas, but in usual practice, The Shadow's way was to simply blend with blackness.

He had blackness in plenty, here within the hansom, and now being fully cloaked, The Shadow was capable of using it. But that brought up another moot point. If Cranston became The Shadow and then vanished as such, would anything that typified Cranston vanish with him?

Of course it would, when enveloped within the cloak that merged so fully with the dark, but the rule could hardly apply to one of those very fine panatella cigars that were Cranston's favorite smoke, even when he was The Shadow.

To the question of whether the cigar would vanish with him, the answer was it didn't.

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Like a tiny beacon, the tell-tale cigar showed its glows from within the hansom. As the hack went between the two halves of a low embankment, moving figures saw the light which told them that The Shadow was still there. Four of them, two abreast from each flank, came headlong through the air, like leaping leopards, which they indeed resembled, thanks to the spotted costumes that they wore.

The cigar glowed a greeting as they arrived in a cluster that shook the hansom deep down to its springs. A moment later they were clawing, knifing for the man at the end of the cigar, only to find the end of a curved metal pipe instead!

The Shadow was gone and completely, but from behind the cab came the sharp outside click of a bolt closing a special trap door, which the carriage shop had built into the seat. Up on the high box, Burbank, his face hidden beneath a hack driver's plug hat, gave a tug at what looked like a brake lever.

Down from the top of the hansom's open front rolled a blind that looked like a rain curtain, but wasn't. This was a steel curtain that locked solidly when it hit the bottom. At the same time, Burbank removed a pipe stem from his mouth, along with the length of rubber hose that he had been drawing through, to complete the illusion of a smoker inside the hansom.

Burbank simply plugged the pipe stem into a little tank resting in the driver's box and turned the knob that released a hissing flow of compressed gas. Four tight-packed leopard men took the full benefit of that knock-out vapor, inside what was now an airtight cell.

A weird laugh stirred the darkness from behind the hansom. From where he had dropped through the self-acting trap, The Shadow came erect and moved into the moonlight, packing away the automatics that he hadn't needed.

Burbank would take that leopard crew into some port where the police would duly find them. Having extracted four fangs from the very jaws of crime, The Shadow was bound elsewhere, with other work to do!

CHAPTER XIX

UP where the lilacs grew, Miss Sylvia Selmore, attired in shimmering white, was acting as the high-priestess of a fanciful woodland cult that was the product of her own deluded brain. Surrounding Sylvia were cult members who included fanatics like herself, plus a few who weren't.

Margo Lane belonged to the normal contingent as did Arlene Forster. Perhaps that was why they studied each other so askance. In fact their mutual suspicion was so great that neither noticed another girl, who wore a long dark cape as black as her glossy hair. Thara Lamoyne was very capable at making herself inconspicuous when she wanted.

From far away, tiny twinkles of light appeared through the lilacs above the gray rock which formed the stepping off place to the pool below. The cult members were here, in the little glen that sloped gently down behind the rock.

A happy shriek escaped Sylvia:

"Canhywllah Cyrth! Canhywllah Cyrth!"

Everybody crowded forward, especially some portly mediums who wanted to claim a share in the uncanny manifestation. Margo and Arlene were both elbowed well apart. Thara however expected the forward shove. She was already edging away, stooping as she started a circuit through the trees.

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Thara was clever. As she neared the last low shrub that flanked the moonlit rock, she lowered her head and gave her hair a forward sweep that sent it in a shaggy mass across her face. A downward motion of her hands slipped the cape from her shoulders; then, as the cape hooked the shrubbery, Thara's hands rose to sweep her hair into a temporary fluff. Drawing the cloak like a curtain, Thara let it fly back with the branches that gripped it, as she made a pirouette upon the rock above the pool.

"Gwrach y Rhibyn! Gwrach y Rhibyn!"

Miss Sylvia shripped the happy news while others stood amazed. So cleverly had Thara worked her arrival, it seemed that she had really sprung up out of the rock, or had materialized herself from among the floating moonbeams.

She lived up to Reilly's descriptions, this shimmering, lithe creature from nowhere. In the moonlight, her olive hue could not be distinguished; the glow, coming through her hair, gave it a blonde effect rather than brunette. No ancient goddess, materializing before mortal eyes, could have appeared more amazingly.

The cult crowd weren't the only ones to be amazed. From the rustic bridge below the pool, Commissioner Weston and Inspector Cardona were learning first-hand that no Reilly was ever a liar and Officer Reilly was there in person to witness the proof.

"'Tis the banshee," confirmed Reilly, "and whatever she is wearing, 'tis scantier than regulations allow."

Neither Weston nor Cardona was worrying whether Thara had encased herself in one of the skin-tight bathing suits that used to feature the diving acts at the old Hippodrome. This was a question of banshee or no banshee. If a spirit form, Thara couldn't be arrested; if mortal, she could have introduced herself in pantalettes and hoop-skirt and still be liable to arrest on a charge of conspiracy to defraud.

The worthies of the law wanted to break up the cult racket in Central Park and then head elsewhere to solve the still unexplained disappearances of Messrs. Ames and Older. Rather hasty, Weston and Cardona, considering that they were to witness an even more remarkable evanishment before their very eyes.

Finishing a tantalizing twirl, the amazing Thara finished a long sweep of her lovely arms, swerved toward the pool and tilted her head forward so that her hair flung downward like a curtain as she doubled her figure to the rock, arriving there gently on her knees. Then, her crouched form performed a somersaulting motion that carried it in a doubled-up tumble down into the pool.

That was what Weston and Cardona saw, with Reilly there as witness. But it was only an illusion of the moonlight. What went across the brink was a loose clump of stone, just Thara's size, that she had set in motion with her knees and sped with a further shove of her hands.

As the men on the bridge let their eyes follow what they thought was the tumbling form of a humanized banshee, the cult members in the glen were treated to another phase of Thara's neatly timed disappearance. The girl simply let herself follow into the cavity that the chunk of stone had left; there she twisted sideward and upward, into the shelter of the bush where her cape was hanging. Enveloping herself in the garment with a single motion, Thara stepped into her slippers and was skirting back around the lilacs while she slicked her hair close against her head.

Thara's trip was shortened by the fact that everybody, Margo and Arlene included, had crowded up to the brink where the Gwrach y Rhibyn had vanished.

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Whistles were blaring from the bridge and police were appearing from all angles in response to the call. Weston's shouts sounded still louder:

"She's under the ledge! That's where she ducked! Stop her when she comes out of the pool!"

Margo was groping madly among the cult members, to come face to face with Arlene, at whom Margo gave an almost accusing stare, which the other girl returned.

"I thought –"

Both said it at once, then laughed. "Let's hunt the banshee together," suggested Margo. "But we'd better get started while the cops are still coming from the copse."

"Have you any idea who she is?"

Margo thought that Arlene asked the question and began to nod, only to see Arlene do the same. Then they were both looking into the face that wore the Mona Lisa smile above the severe cape, the face of Thara Lamoyne.

"If you know who she is," reprimanded Thara, "you should tell the police. If you have any idea where she has gone, you should certainly try to find her."

The banshee couldn't be Thara, the girl who at that moment rated as Public Banshee Number One in the estimate of both Margo and Arlene. For Thara to return here so immediately without arriving dripping wet, cleared her of suspicion and completely. There was only one fair thing to do; that was to invite Thara on the search, which Margo promptly did.

It was Margo who set the pace, straight to the gully into which she had slipped that first night when she'd gone banshee hunting. Once you reached the gully you were in the groove because there was no getting out of it until the other end.

Finding no banshee, Margo decided they were ahead of schedule. Coming up from the gully, she saw Arlene close beside her, but Thara had dropped behind. Then from the underbrush came an elephantine plodding and Thara arrived, bringing Miss Sylvia, who was responsible for the pachydermic crushing of the shrubbery.

"I brought Miss Selmore," explained Thara, in a cool contralto. "I thought she ought to be the first to discover the banshee."

"If you mean the Gwrach y Rhibyn," protested Sylvia, "I am convinced that she is a genuine sprite. However, if science demands an investigation, I am willing to comply."

It would have taken science to hoist Miss Sylvia across the transverse, even if a rope had been handy. However, Margo was sure the banshee wouldn't take that route tonight. Close by hulked an old building that Margo recognized as the disused goat stable; beyond was the partly renovated merry-go-round.

There would be the place to wait and watch, so Margo waved the way. With Thara bringing Miss Sylvia along they reached the carrousel and saw its partial stock of painted wooden animals huddled in the moonlight.

Only some were neither painted nor wooden.

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They came to life, four of them, all crouching leopards. With one quick swoop they pounced upon the search party and took them prisoners, all except Thara, who happened to be in on the deal.

The Shadow had done well, capturing a crew of leopard men tonight, but that was only half of it. These reserves were making up for the shortcomings of the others. Knowing it would be useless to struggle, Margo let her leopard captor drag her along. Looking back at the blackness of the slope, Margo could only hope that The Shadow was in it.

Things, though, no longer seemed to be shaping as The Shadow planned. At that very moment, a party of his agents, numbering Phil Harley as an extra man, had just reached the old Watch Tower on the middle hill, only to find it deserted!

CHAPTER XX

OUT of darkness that ended when they heard a clang behind them, Margo Lane and the other prisoners found themselves in a most curious place. It looked like the interior of a Dutch oven, but on a much larger scale.

They were in a peculiar subterranean grotto here in Central Park, but the place showed that it had been artificially constructed and long ago.

Phil Harley might have recognized that spot. The peculiar taper of its walls was the clue. This was the defile where Doorn Van Woort had once been unwise enough to plant a crude cabin beneath two overhanging cliffs.

Doorn's grandson Thales had done better by the place. Above was crude masonry wedged between the rocky brows, transforming the defile into a cave. The bridge thus made had been packed with earth above, so it served both as a hiding place and a fortress.

Down through the grotto ran a burbling stream, that issued from among the higher rocks. Below it flowed out through the antique grating that The Shadow had once noticed. That grating had been lifted by the half-squad of leopard men in order to bring the prisoners up through.

There was another route out from this man-made cavern that antedated the landscaping of Central Park. The other route wound upward, by means of crude stone steps. It went out of sight with no sign of its destination.

Other prisoners were already on exhibit. They consisted of two men who answered to the descriptions of Winslow Ames and Claude Older. But they were not the persons who attracted most attention. That honor belonged to one man only, whose face brought a responsive gasp from Margo, the moment that she saw it.

Craig Farnsworth!

The rugged man who had backed Ronjan's treasure hunt seemed very pleased to find someone who appreciated his craft. When he spoke, Farnsworth seemed to be addressing Margo Lane, as proxy for her friend Lamont Cranston.

"You are a stranger here," Farnsworth told Margo. "The others are the same, so they think, but they are wrong. They have simply come to claim and dispose of what belongs to them."

Farnsworth gestured to a pair of men who stood beside him, hard-faced fellows who had served as cab drivers when Ames was abducted. One was baldish and therefore could have passed for Older, the night when the other man had driven a hansom to the Willow Arch.

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The two men stepped aside to prove that they were not meant by Farnsworth's gesture. Farnsworth was referring to the prisoners as persons who had a claim they might not keep. But in stepping aside, Farnsworth's two helpers revealed a huge coffer which they promptly opened.

The dull light of the grotto instantly gained a remarkable intensity from the glitter of the coffer's contents. Gold and silver, lustrous though they were, seemed but a background to the brilliance of massed jewels that sparkled from the coffer's midst.

This was the treasure from the brig Good Wind!

Farnsworth's eye followed the circle of silent prisoners. His gaze finally focussed on Sylvia Selmore.

"You were proud of your Welsh ancestry," Farnsworth told Sylvia. "You would have done better to think in terms of Dutch. You might have learned that you were a descendant of Thales Van Woort."

From there, Farnsworth's gaze took in Winslow Ames, Claude Older and finally Arlene Forster, each in turn, signifying that the same applied to them.

"You resemble your ancestors, all of you," declared Farnsworth. "But none of you recognized your heritage. You should thank me for finding it for you and bringing you here to see it."

This explained the pictures that Cranston had shown Phil, all from the Van Woort family album. Not the portraits of the persons present, but those of relatives that they resembled. There had been an added picture, one that looked like Phil's own uncle. It explained what Farnsworth said next.

"One heir is missing," Farnsworth declared. "I expect my other men to bring him here shortly. If they fail, it does not matter. The police will simply arrest Philip Harley for complicity in murder."

Farnsworth pronounced the word "murder" coldly, but did not specify the victim. He postponed that information as his eyes met Thara's. With a broad smile, Farnsworth bowed to the sleek-haired brunette.

"You were an excellent banshee," declared Farnsworth, "or whatever Miss Sylvia would call you."

The dark cape quivered delicately from a shrug of Thara's shoulders.

"It was simple," explained Thara. "I often appeared as a spirit from beyond when I helped Dom Yuble in the voodoo ceremonies. These men assisted in those rites," – Thara nodded toward the leopard crew – "so give them credit too."

"Voodoo rites," laughed Farnsworth. "Simple shams to impress tourists to the Caribbean. It was much more amazing – and more profitable – to transfer the game to Central Park."

Eyeing the leopard men, Farnsworth added a compliment for himself.

"It was simple to release a trained leopard from the zoo," he declared. "You break one lock on a cage and supply another afterward. The keepers never bothered to try those padlocks when they saw that they were locked. But with a real leopard supposedly at large, the police were not impressed by accounts of persons who saw my leopard men."

As Farnsworth paused the glitter of the treasure captured his attention. His large smile spread in a manner that rendered it more ugly.

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"It was Dom Yuble who discovered that the treasure was not in the Good Wind," declared Farnsworth. "He saw that the brig had been blown open by a powder explosion and he told Niles Ronjan, who promptly guessed the truth. Master Glanvil of the Good Wind had transferred the treasure to the sloop Rover and its owner the smuggler Caleb Albersham.

"Where else would Albersham take it, but to the forgotten cavern that was still the property of the Van Woort family? Albersham wanted it for himself, but if his secret trip had been discovered, he could have claimed that he was acting in the interests of his employer, Thales Van Woort."

Gloating as if pleased that there had been double-crossers back in the days of double-deckers, Farnsworth proceeded with his keen analysis.

"Albersham went back to the Good Wind," recounted Farnsworth. "He helped Glanvil wreck the brig and together they left on the sloop Rover intending some day to return and split the treasure that Van Woort never guessed was here. Only the Rover was lost in the great storm that reputedly sank the Good Wind."

Another glance around the group and Farnsworth's stare changed. He was coming back from the past to the present.

"When Yuble discovered that there was no treasure," stated Farnsworth emphatically, "he told Niles Ronjan. In turn, Ronjan ordered Yuble to remain silent rather than have investors demand a settlement. Pretending that the Good Wind project had failed, Ronjan intended to get new backers and hunt for other treasure.

"But Yuble was too clever." Farnsworth turned to Thara. "Yes, he was clever, your friend Yuble. He told me all that had happened and I studied old records which led me here" – he gestured toward the high stone stairs – "by the route which leads from above. I disposed of all the records that might have left a clue."

Dipping his chin into his hand, Farnsworth surveyed the prisoners coldly, all except Margo, who no longer counted.

"To find the treasure here on land was best," declared Farnsworth, "since it eliminated Ronjan's interest. Of course it raises the point that the wealth really belongs to the Van Woort descendants. It was necessary to assemble them of course.

"One was already here" – Farnsworth was looking at Miss Sylvia – "so I planned the banshee hoax to encourage her to stay in New York. As for the others, I coaxed them to New York by means of attractive financial offers that required no great effort on their part.

"Now that you all are here except for young Harley, I shall ask you to assign over your heritage to me. If you refuse" – Farnsworth gave a shrug – "well, it would not be wise."

Glancing about, Farnsworth waited for someone to speak but no one did. From far down the bubbling stream came the muffled clang of the old grating, lifting and dropping back into place.

"The other crew," decided Farnsworth. "They are bringing Harley. Perhaps he will speak for the rest of you."

Turning to look for the newcomer, Farnsworth frowned and his expression graduated into a glare. For the man who suddenly appeared from among the lower rocks was Niles Ronjan, a large revolver pointed ahead of him.

The term eccentric no longer applied to Ronjan. His was the fervor of a fanatic.

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"So you found this grotto!" cackled Ronjan. "You found it, never thinking I was first! Tell me, Farnsworth, why did you think that I delayed the treasure hunt after I found the Good Wind empty?"

"Only because I planned to remove the treasure from here and plant it in the sunken hulk of the old brig. Like a fool, I was willing to let you share, should I be given time. Then I saw Yuble acting strangely and I knew that he had sold out to you. But I never suspected that you had found the Good Wind treasure too.

"Never until tonight, when I discovered Yuble murdered in my own apartment. Then I realized the depths of your game, how you were trying to pin all crime on me. I found the creature that murdered Yuble, the vampire bat from the tropics –"

Farnsworth's interruption was a snarl, a signal for the leopard men to pounce upon Ronjan. They were whipping out their knives so fast that the old inventor's gun could not have coped with them except for Thara Lamoyne.

With a fierce cry for the leopard men to follow her example, Thara flung herself upon Farnsworth. She had all the fury of a sleek, wild, jungle beast, this maddened girl, as she thrust her arms and shoulders from within her spreading cloak so that her hands could use their fingers as death-dealing claws.

The word of Yuble's murder had turned Thara into a creature of mad vengeance. As Farnsworth's other followers tried to haul this living fury from their chief, the leopard men hesitated and momentarily, Ronjan seemed the winner.

Then, at a mad howl from Farnsworth, the leopard crew decided that they owed allegiance to a living master rather than a dead one. They swung to deal with Ronjan, willing to take Farnsworth's orders now that Yuble was dead. Ronjan was already springing at them, gun first, but the weight of numbers would have flattened him, except for the sudden intervention of a factor hitherto undeclared.

The whole grotto filled with the shivering, challenging, titanic laugh that could only be The Shadow's!

As if from nowhere, a cloaked fighter sprang into the midst of the divided fray. His gun-shots spilled the leopard men amid the whirl of their own clattering knives. Clouts from the swinging automatics added Farnsworth's other henchmen to the list of The Shadow's succumbing adversaries.

Finally, The Shadow flung Thara with a whirling spin into the arms of Ronjan. Tangled in her draping cape, the former banshee buried her face in her hands and wept pitifully, not because she felt herself a part of crime, but because she had been frustrated in her attempt to wreak vengeance upon Farnsworth for Yuble's death.

Men were coming down from the high steps that rose above the stream; they were The Shadow's agents, Phil among them, coming by the same route that their chief had used to reach this underground treasure haven. They took over custody of Farnsworth, Thara, and even Ronjan, whose own deeds were on the doubtful side.

When Margo and Arlene looked for the cloaked rescuer who had so fully turned the tide, The Shadow was gone. From high up the steps drifted back the weird, strange laugh that spelled triumph in The Shadow's universal language.

The Shadow was to make a reappearance, but in another guise. This occurred when Commissioner Weston was completing his grilling of a much cowered Craig Farnsworth, down at headquarters, with Inspector Cardona helping in the quiz. Lamont Cranston, casual as ever, arrived to witness the finish.

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Briefly, Weston summed the evidence for Cranston's benefit. Then:

"There's one thing that even Farnsworth doesn't know," declared the commissioner. "He can't figure how The Shadow discovered the upper entrance down to the grotto. Farnsworth destroyed the documents that mentioned it."

Cranston raised his eyebrows quizzically.

"Where was that entrance, commissioner?"

"Under a big flat slab," explained Weston. "The marker covering the grave of Caleb Albersham, the smuggler. It was the blind for the stone stairway leading to the treasure cavern belonging to the Van Woort family."

A slow nod came from Cranston.

"I suppose that Albersham fixed it that way."

"Of course," retorted Weston, "but how did The Shadow guess it?"

"Because he knew the grave was empty," declared Cranston, quite calmly, "and therefore he assumed it must serve some other purpose. There was a peculiar marking on Albersham's slab, wasn't there, commissioner?"

"Nothing peculiar about it," snapped Weston. "Like most other tombstones, it had an inscription that said: Here lies the body –"

"The body of Caleb Albersham?" put in Cranston, blandly. "The skipper of the sloop Rover that was lost at sea with all on board?"

That was all, except that Cranston's smile, alight though it was, had what might have been defined as a visual echo of The Shadow's parting laugh!

THE END