

THE CURSE OF THOTH

Maxwell Grant

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THE CURSE OF THOTH

Maxwell Grant

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CHAPTER I

HARRY VINCENT swung from the subway exit and turned southward toward Columbus Circle. Blocks ahead he saw a distant electric sign that was spelling a word in running letters. The sign said:

HURRY!

Walking briskly, Harry kept watching the sign. Another word unraveled itself across the broad strip. It was a repetition of the first, but exclamation points rendered it more emphatic.

This time the sign said:

HURRY!!

Instinctively, Harry quickened his pace. Somehow, the message seemed intended for him. He had taken the subway because he hadn't been able to find an empty cab and besides, there had been a traffic jam around Times Square. And now the electric sign was delivering another silent shout.

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There, in running letters that fairly screamed its brightness, appeared a third word:

HURRY!!!

Now Harry was doing a dog-trot He was really taking this message literally.

And why not?

Often, Harry Vincent had received strange messages from his chief, The Shadow; orders that had come at unexpected times, in unexpected places, and from unexpected sources. Perhaps Burbank, The Shadow's contact man, had found some way to rig the wording of that sign and flash through a last minute command.

It was Burbank who had started Harry on this mission to the Alvara Apartments, the big building just around the next corner. Maybe Burbank had found it necessary to speed up Harry's arrival there.

Suddenly, the whole notion dispelled itself. The sign was explaining itself. Riding across it were other words, suggesting the customers order their post-war automobiles before the supply was exhausted. That was why the sign had first given triple emphasis to the word "Hurry!"

Harry slackened pace.

He wanted the next block to think over why he had come here and what he was going to do about it. Basically, his situation was very simple, as simple as A B C, except that those letters weren't as simple as they sounded.

A, B and C stood for Albersham, Barstow and Curvin, three gentlemen who had taken advantage of their initials to form a corporation called the ABC Industries, which had suddenly loomed into importance. Only this afternoon, the ABC Industries had become front page news in the New York journals for a most remarkable reason.

According to report, ABC was ready to produce a new form of alloy that was so ancient that it was really new. Their product was the sort to rouse the jealousy of modern metallurgists. Through an eccentric professor named Rufus Parrish, the ABC syndicate had acquired the greatest secret of legendary Egypt, that of annealing bronze so it would have a hardness superior to the finest steel.

Nor could this story be considered fanciful.

Authorities agreed that the ancient Egyptians had possessed such a process. Of all the men in America who might have uncovered that secret, Professor Parrish rated tops. Time after time, Parrish had probed into the secrets of the Pharaohs, violating the tombs of the high priests of the Nile, defying the curses of the whole Egyptian pantheon.

If Professor Parrish owned such a secret, he would be a fool to part with it for anything under half a million dollars. It happened that half a million dollars was the price that Albersham, Barstow and Curvin had paid for the professor's secret.

There was more to the story, however; more money behind it, to be specific.

So anxious were the members of ABC to acquire all data covering their precious purchase, that they had offered to pay cash in plenty to anyone furnishing them with data that they could add to Parrish's information. Whoever else held the real riddle of the Sphinx would also be in the money.

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There were certain men who qualified. One such man was Hugo Zerland who lived at the Alvara Apartments. Unquestionably Zerland would take up the offer, which was why Harry Vincent had been deputed to interview him. For behind this business of reviving an old Egyptian secret for modern use, lay influences sinister and baleful – should anyone admit their existence.

HURRY!

HURRY!!

HURRY!!!

The sign flashed its triple shout again, as Harry turned the corner, a reminder, even though a mere coincidence, that weird influences from the Land of the Nile might still be at large, even in this mechanized age. Hand in coat pocket, Harry fingered an envelope containing clippings that related to the subject and despite himself, he began to wonder.

Harry was walking with long, rapid strides, a compromise between his brief jog, and a natural gait. Then, almost at the door of the Alvara, a sudden thought struck him. If there was no need to hurry, this sort of pace was foolish. Should haste be necessary, it would be equally unwise to give away the fact.

If danger lurked, it would be human; of that, Harry felt certain. So when he strolled nonchalantly into the lobby of the Alvara Apartments, he took a satisfactory glance across the street. No furtive figures lurked in the darkness there, so far as Harry could see; still, he wouldn't have sworn that there were none. It was very dark across the street.

To get anywhere in the Alvara Apartments, it was necessary to stop at a combination office and switchboard that was under the control of a dapper young man who at the moment was very busy operating switchboard plugs beyond a window that bore the statement:

MAKE INQUIRIES HERE

This was emphasized by a blocky elevator man standing at the open door of his car. Harry's first steps were toward the elevator and the operator responded by gesturing toward the office, with an upward thumb motion that indicated the sign.

There was a girl already waiting at the office wicket. Her back was turned toward Harry and was mostly fur, in the form of a mink coat. Apparently she was negotiating with the dapper chap behind the window, so Harry took his turn in line with no show of impatience, knowing too well how such symptoms could start an argument around New York and thus delay matters further.

They moved fast in Manhattan if you didn't block them; if you did, they'd take their own time and yours with it.

The switchboard character manipulated a few plugs, tangled himself with some insulated wires, then announced as though that settled it:

"Mr. Zerland isn't seeing anyone this evening."

It couldn't be meant for Harry, because he hadn't yet mentioned Zerland. So Harry took it that it was meant for the girl. She pivoted away from the wicket on a pair of high heels, taking a turn in the opposite direction so that Harry didn't see her face. All Harry did was crowd half through the wicket window and put the

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confidential query:

"Just who is Mr. Zerland seeing?"

The fellow at the switchboard tried to swell into importance, but it didn't work with a keen-eyed questioner like Harry. Through the window, Harry added:

"Just who is up there with him now?"

The clerk hesitated, then gave a sly look at a sheet of paper beyond his opposite elbow.

"A couple of men seeing him on business," the clerk admitted. "Their names are Barstow and Curvin. Guess I can tell you that much. Nobody said I couldn't."

"That's being civil," approved Harry. "Now take a side-slant at that list and see if you don't see my name topping it, as one of the privileged few. The name is Albersham."

The fellow looked, turned his head up toward the wicket, and nodded.

"That settles it from A to Z," acknowledged Harry. "Mr. Albersham sees Mr. Zerland. Give me the apartment number and a pass or whatever else that elevator man needs to make him act human."

"It's 6B," the switchboard tender supplied. Then, rising to gesture through the window: "It's all right, Kirky," he called. "Mr. Albersham can go up."

Keeping a poker-face to hide his triumph, Harry Vincent turned about as he entered the elevator. The switchboard man had gone back to duty, but Harry's expression wasn't entirely lost, where a witness was concerned. If anything, that witness had something of an edge on Harry.

Said witness was the fur-wearing lady who had preceded Harry at the window. She had started from the lobby, but she hadn't gone beyond the door. She had turned too, to learn what a visitor to Zerland's looked like.

It wasn't easy to guess a fur coat's contents from the back, but Harry had rather suspected that the girl in the mink was of lithe construction. She was indeed, as he saw her now with the coat spread loose; she was slender, tall, but stately rather than willowy. But it was the expression of her face that riveted Harry.

The features were truly exotic, as though sculptured from softened marble. Their complexion was creamy, but reminiscent of cream lying thick upon the surface of coffee. The girl's eyes, peering from beside a high-bridged nose, caught the light and showed a sparkle of a color that represented the exact shade of Nile green.

A lovely face, yet as haunting as something from a dream, and fixed in mold. It was a face that could have come from afar, either in terms of space or time. Not a semblance of a smile, not even a flicker of an eyelash disturbed the serenity of that countenance.

But it wasn't until the door of the elevator shaft had clanged and the car was starting upward, that Harry Vincent realized he'd been looking at somebody as straight from Egypt as if she had been the Sphinx itself!

CHAPTER II

BY the time Harry Vincent reached the door of 6B, he was shaking off thoughts of Little Egypt, down there in the lobby. Harry had other things to think about, as was always the case when he handled a special mission for The Shadow, and particularly when he was staging a bluff, as at present.

The first factor was Kirky, the elevator man. Though the fellow had taken orders directly from the information booth, he still considered that he had a few duties other than simply hoisting the elevator to the sixth floor. For one thing, Kirky gave Harry a continuous scrutiny, all the way up; for another, he kept the elevator at the sixth floor when he reached there, to see to it that the pretended Mr. Albersham went to 6B and nowhere else.

This wasn't exactly what Harry wanted; in fact, it was something far from it.

Seeing the door marked 6B down at one end of the corridor, Harry purposely started in the opposite direction, only to have Kirky boom after him:

"Apartment 6B is the other way, mister!"

So Harry turned the other way and past the elevator noted a side corridor which obviously led to some rear apartments. Hoping Kirky had given up, Harry took to the side passage only to hear the same booming voice carry after him.

"Not around that way, mister! Keep straight along to the end of the hall!"

Further stalling wouldn't have helped, so Harry turned back to 6B, at the same time regretting that he hadn't been able to complete the survey. Getting the general layout of a strange building was always a good beginning, but it wasn't wise to incur the disfavor of the hired help.

One thing, Harry did find out. The fire tower was in the center of the building, around in back of the elevator, which was something rather unusual. The Alvara Apartments consisted of a structure which could be termed all wings, Apartments A and B in one direction; C and D the other; with an unknown quantity of other lettered doors back in the rear wings of the same building.

Right now, the only apartment that mattered was 6B. It had a bell button, so Harry gave it an imperious ring and waited. The door was opened by a bowing man who looked like a secretary. The fellow said: "Step right in, Mr. Albersham" and as Harry did, he heard Kirky close the door of the elevator. A moment later the apartment door too was closed and Zerland's secretary was bowing Harry into a sumptuous living room of a very sizable apartment.

Two men were seated there and Harry could have been blindfolded and still made the correct guess that neither was Hugo Zerland. The secretary didn't introduce Harry to them, but just took it for granted that he knew them. What was more, the secretary continued on through the living room, apparently to speak to someone else who could only be Zerland. Besides, from the surprised mutters the two men gave when they looked at Harry, it was obvious that they must be Albersham's partners, Barstow and Curvin.

"Good evening, gentlemen," declared Harry. "I take it that you must be Mr. Barstow and Mr. Curvin."

"I'm Geoffrey Barstow." The man who spoke came to his feet. "You are right; my friend here" – he gave a sideward gesture – "is Arnold Curvin. But you aren't Edwin Albersham!"

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Barstow was a blunt man, tall when he reared himself as he did now, though his shoulders had a natural droop that hunched him into a rather portly appearance when seated. Barstow's face was broad and he probably preferred to keep it bland, but this business of dealing with an impostor was pulling Barstow out of character.

The broad face was flushed with a show of indignation that carried its ruddy touch clear up to the exaggerated forehead that was partly a bald head, the baldness beginning where the wrinkles ended.

Curvin too was coming to his feet, but more deliberately, a trifle painfully. His hunch wasn't natural, his shoulders looked as though he wanted to straighten them, but couldn't. Curvin was a man with peaked face and small eyes, that seemed sharp despite the droop of their lids. He kept his head tilted as though to favor one shoulder and though he smiled, his expression wasn't too pleased.

However, Curvin didn't speak. He left that to Barstow, whose tone was sharp. But Harry sensed that Barstow was merely forcing himself to a superficial show of outrage.

"Coming here and calling yourself Edwin Albersham!" stormed Barstow. "May I ask the meaning of this, as well as inquiring who you really are?"

"My name is Harry Vincent," acknowledged Harry, coolly. "And speaking of asking, I merely asked for Mr. Albersham. Call the switchboard, if you don't believe me."

While Barstow's flush faded, Curvin let his smile spread and become more pleasant. In a dry drawl, Curvin inquired:

"You mean that fool sent you up here to see Albersham?"

"That about sizes it," returned Harry, "though he may have gotten it wrong. He looked dumb enough and besides, he was all goggle-eyed over the latest thing in mink linings. I believe she was inquiring for Zerland's apartment too, though I didn't hear her give her name."

Harry's remark brought an exchange of glances between Barstow and Curvin and they both looked worried. That scored one for Harry; he made the mental note that these men were bothered by the Egyptian angle of their business. It also paved the way for Harry's next shot, but he waited, knowing the opportunity would soon come.

Getting back to his bland manner, Barstow asked:

"Just why do you want to talk to Albersham?"

"I might say that was Albersham's business," put Harry, bluntly, "but it isn't, entirely. It's your business just as much. Here" – Harry brought the envelope from his pocket – "these clippings will explain it."

Harry spread the clippings on the living room table. They made a story in themselves. One was the front page item declaring that Albersham, Barstow and Curvin, as the ABC Industries, intended to produce a super-metal in the form of hardened bronze. That, of course, was common knowledge.

Other items, however, were somewhat obscure, except when studied closely and together. Here were small ads bearing the initials A B C asking for information regarding Egyptian tombs and hieroglyphics. Also little announcements of tests being made in order to develop a wonder metal, by certain interested but unnamed parties.

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Finally, Harry spread a sizable sheet of paper in the form of a tabloid newspaper page. It was adorned with photographs of the sphinx and pyramids, along with those of rifled Egyptian tombs. It showed a couple of bearded men, famous Egyptian explorers, who had died suddenly after completing excavations.

Dominating the page was a fanciful drawing of those same bearded men, backing away in horror from a weird creature in Egyptian robe wearing a mask like a bird's head, the creature in question holding a huge dagger, poised as though to strike at the bearded pair. In the background was a mummy case, showing the figure of an Egyptian princess, half-unwrapped, while the story bore the provocative title:

WILL THE CURSE OF THOTH STRIKE AGAIN?

Looking up, Harry saw disdainful smiles creep across the faces of Barstow and Curvin, but he wondered how genuine those expressions were. To find out, Harry plucked a little clipping from the rest and showed it to his companions. The story related to Professor Rufus Parrish, mentioning that he had long been absent from New York and raising a query as to his whereabouts. It added pointedly that Professor Parrish had become a fitting subject of investigation for the Bureau of Missing Persons.

Contrary to Harry's expectations, that story brought a bland laugh from Barstow and a dry chuckle from Curvin, who extended a shaky hand to indicate the date on the clipping.

"Old stuff," cackled Curvin. "Of course Parrish had disappeared at that time. He wanted to tuck himself away while he worked on the bronze formula."

"Secret experiments," explained Barstow. "He had to decipher a lot of Egyptian hieroglyphics along with other things. He didn't want to be disturbed."

"Look at today's story," argued Curvin, his forefinger quivering above. "It states plainly that ABC Industries has acquired the Parrish formula."

"And that accounts for Professor Parrish," summed Barstow. "We hear from the professor regularly, so that should satisfy you, Mr. Vincent" – Barstow's tone became terse – "whatever your interest is."

Gathering the clippings, Harry put them back in the envelope. Then, pointedly, he asked:

"It couldn't be that Professor Parrish is trying to dodge the Curse of Thoth?"

Barstow and Curvin tried to laugh that off, but their manner was rather feeble.

"I'd ask Parrish himself," added Harry, "if I could find him. Since I can't, would you mind if I talked to Hugo Zerland – or would it spoil some deal of yours?"

There was a moment of hesitancy, then Barstow broke the ice.

"Talk to Zerland if you want," Barstow decided. "We don't mind if you discuss this Thoth-and-nonsense with him."

"We'd be bringing it up anyway," avowed Curvin. "We wouldn't want to do business with Zerland if he believes such rot. We can't talk business until Albersham arrives, so we can clear the Thoth question first. You're welcome to be in on the discussion, Mr. Vincent, if you'll bow out when we begin to talk bronze."

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Harry gave a nod that was quite timely, for at that moment, the secretary returned to the room. Not yet acquainted with the fact that Harry wasn't Albersham, the secretary spoke to the group as though all three represented ABC.

"Mr. Zerland will see you now," the secretary announced. "This way, gentlemen."

As the secretary turned, Barstow gestured for Harry to come along. Curvin emphasized this by placing a trembling hand on Harry's arm, though whether Curvin intended to urge Harry or simply steady himself, was a question, since Curvin's palsy was an ailment that made it difficult for him to get in locomotion.

Intent upon meeting Zerland, Harry didn't think of looking out the front window that they passed. If he had, he would have spotted his old friend, the electric sign, blazing above Columbus Circle.

That sign was no longer declaiming a running message. It had stopped on the last of three repeated words and was holding that slogan, as though for Harry's express benefit:

HURRY!!!

CHAPTER III

ZERLAND'S study was as surprising a place as the man himself.

The room was large – all of this apartment was on an ample scale – and the walls were covered with enlarged photographs depicting all parts of the world, with Hugo Zerland prominent in every scene.

Zerland predominated the photographs because he was a tall, rangy man whose height accentuated his thinness. He belonged to the beanpole classification and in one picture, where Zerland was riding a mountain burro, it looked as though he were walking, with the creature trying to crowd its way beneath him.

For a steed, Hugo Zerland needed an elephant or a camel to reduce his six feet seven inches to something resembling normal size. There were photos of him on both and Harry Vincent was particularly interested in the camel because it savored – at least pictorially – of the Egyptian desert.

Mixed among the photographs were actual weapons, such as African spears, Australian boomerangs, and Oriental swords. The room was furnished with taborets, elephant tables, teak wood chairs, and pedestal couches. There were books in odd shelves and racks, but all of them were curious old volumes bound in vellum, parchment, or even metal.

Zerland himself lived up to the photographs except that he looked older and more haggard. His face was as bony as his form and seemed as much parchment as some of the book bindings. His eyes, however, were very much alive; they were a watery gray, that seemed to flow wherever he turned his gaze.

At present, Zerland was seated on one of the couches; he wasn't reclining, he'd simply chosen the couch instead of a chair because it was more ample. As a result, his proportions were easily gauged and if anything, looked more exaggerated than the photographs.

Apparently Zerland still thought that Harry was Albersham, for he included him in the quick, flowing survey that he gave all three visitors. Odd, Zerland's way of looking at people. That flowing glance of his seemed to freeze like ice, but only momentarily. Then it would swim further along.

Barstow began negotiations with Zerland.

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"We are here, Mr. Zerland," declared Barstow, "to discuss certain findings that you made in Egypt, during your extensive tours of the globe. But first –"

"But first," interrupted Zerland, sharply, "suppose you introduce yourselves. Which of you is which?"

"I'm Barstow," the speaker acknowledged. "This" – he indicated the man beside him – "is Mr. Curvin. We are expecting our partner Albersham –"

Before Barstow could go further, Zerland was up from the couch, suddenly and nervously, waving his hand at Harry.

"Then who is this?"

Harry stepped forward and introduced himself. Then:

"I came here at the request of a mutual friend," Harry stated, deciding that this was the time to play a trump card. "A gentleman who has traveled as extensively as you have, Mr. Zerland. In fact, I am quite sure that you must have met him during the course of your travels, as well as here in New York. I refer to Mr. Lamont Cranston."

It was something of a shot in the dark, for Harry's instructions had been simply to see Zerland, warn him about some unknown peril, and keep him under something resembling surveillance until The Shadow could take over in person.

Of course in naming Lamont Cranston, Harry actually signified The Shadow, because Cranston was the name and personality that The Shadow usually operated under when he appeared publicly. The link between The Shadow and Lamont Cranston was well covered, therefore was no give-away. But that was not the reason why Harry had played the Cranston bet.

Noted as a globe-trotter, Cranston was almost certainly an acquaintance of Zerland's, if only an acquaintance of a passing sort. The name certainly registered with Zerland but not in a way that Harry expected. Folding back on the couch, Zerland turned quite pale and his odd eyes became shifty. When Zerland recovered composure, his tone was hoarse:

"What did Cranston want to tell me?"

Again, Harry played what he thought was a good shot.

"I think he wanted to talk about the Curse of Thoth."

Instead of producing alarm, Harry's words caused Zerland's lips to bare his teeth in a grin that would have done credit to a skeleton. The ungainly man gave a hard laugh that carried a genuine note. For some reason, he was pleased because that was all Cranston wanted.

"A foolish legend," sneered Zerland, rising again from the couch. "The myth that anyone who violates the tomb of a high priest of Thoth will suffer death from the hand of the ibis-god himself. Tell me" – he wheeled to Barstow and Curvin, letting his icy gaze fix on each – "has anyone else given credence to this folly? I mean anyone else familiar with the data that you want?"

Both Barstow and Curvin shook their heads. Then Barstow spoke.

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"We have only talked to Professor Parrish," he declared. "Of course the professor is eccentric and might believe anything. But you are the first of three others, besides Parrish –"

"I know," interrupted Zerland. "We all have information that you regard as valuable, which it is. My prize is a papyrus, direct from the tomb of the high priest El-Taab. It was translated for me by a man now dead" – again, Zerland's lips spread in a smile as happy as it was ugly – "and you can have the translation verified, after we have arranged the price."

Both Barstow and Curvin nodded eagerly. Then Barstow curbed himself with the comment:

"Perhaps we had better wait for Albersham. I can't understand why he is so late."

"It's because we are so early," inserted Curvin, crisply. "Albersham is always punctual, but we arrived ahead of time. My suggestion is that Zerland show us the papyrus so that we can be discussing terms when Albersham joins us."

Curvin looked at Harry as he spoke, indicating that this was the right time to get rid of the unwanted visitor who had concluded his discussion of the Thoth Curse with Zerland. Catching the idea, Barstow nodded and Harry decided to accept the hint. He strolled toward the living room and Zerland's ever-ready secretary bustled over to conduct him out.

At the door, however, Harry paused in well-faked style. He was taking a cigarette from his case, but he couldn't find a match and was glancing, about for one. The secretary saw Harry's dilemma and produced a fancy lighter in the shape of a little bronze statuette that was on a corner taboret. A cute lighter, but it didn't work, which pleased Harry all the more.

Waiting for the lighter to click, Harry was watching Zerland open a pair of brass gates that Harry had so far mistaken for the back wall of the study. Stepping into a small rear room which was furnished in Chinese style with garish tapestries, Zerland stepped to one side wall and opened a large Oriental cabinet, where he stooped forward to produce the papyrus that he had mentioned.

At the opposite side of the room stood a large Chinese screen, the sort guaranteed to block the route of wandering demons. The guarantee either didn't hold, or it wasn't applicable to devil-creatures of a nationality other than Chinese.

For at that moment, the screen toppled forward to disgorge a most hideous creature wearing an ancient Egyptian robe, topped by a bird-mask covering its entire head. The thing was a perfect replica of the famed ibis-god Thoth, whose mythical Curse had awakened Zerland's sneer.

In one upraised hand, covered with a glove that resembled a bird's claw, the horrendous figure clutched a long bronze dirk that glistened in the light. Clearing the screen before it even struck the floor, this incarnation of Thoth reached Zerland before anyone – Harry included – could make a move to help the victim.

For Hugo Zerland was a victim almost upon the instant. With stretching arm and driving hand that seemed a continuation of its leap, the robed thing called Thoth buried the thin bronze blade deep in the back of the man who had scoffed that such things could not happen!

CHAPTER IV

IT was like a weird dream, the maddened sequence that followed.

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Unable to halt murder, Harry Vincent stood rooted, watching events unravel in slow-motion style, wondering why he wasn't hurling himself to Zerland's aid, no matter how belated. The least that Harry could do would be to grab the killer and he was puzzled by his delay at that task too.

It was the sort of riddle that would clear itself later. Actually, Harry was tightening for an instinctive spring, but his eyes were taking in events faster than his muscles could respond. Those events seemed slow, because they were packed into instants that made a pair of seconds seem like that many minutes – almost hours.

Zerland's body doubled backward the moment the blade pierced it, as though the knife had struck a hidden spring. Thoth's other hand made a clawing sweep to clutch the papyrus that Zerland's hand automatically flung back across his shoulder. The robed figure was twisting away, prize in hand, as Zerland's body telescoped toward the cabinet into which his hands plunged, as though seeking something to fill their death grasp.

Those details were close to simultaneous and before they completed themselves, Harry Vincent had begun his forward lunge. How swiftly he really came to action was proven by the fact that Zerland's body had not flattened by the time Harry reached the brass gates.

Yet all during those moments, Zerland was sprawling, though in a slow, corkscrew style. From the drawer in the old Oriental cabinet, he had clutched and brought along an antique pistol made of heavy brass with a mouth like a blunderbuss. Whether the thing was loaded didn't really matter at this moment, for Zerland's finger had lost sufficient strength to tug the trigger.

As Zerland finished his spiral sag, the brass weapon slipped from his loosening fist and jounced across the floor, where Harry scooped it, at about the center of this little room that formed an extension of the study.

Other men were surging forward: Barstow and Curvin. Harry almost passed them in his rush, but they forged ahead when he stooped to gain the brass gun. Thus Barstow and Curvin were the first to reach that living terror known as Thoth. Simultaneously they began a grapple with the masked monstrosity.

Thoth wasted little time on these attackers. He flung his claw-gloved hands at Barstow's throat, half-choked him with a single clutch, then flung him back to the middle of the room. Barstow made a wild grab for Thoth's neck, but all he caught was a loop of beads, one of several adorning the Thoth costume. Then Barstow landed on hands and knees in very cumbersome style.

Such fling-about tactics on the part of Thoth proved too great a handicap for Curvin. Clutching for the murderer's neck, Curvin's shaky hands couldn't do better than grip the collar of the Thoth robe. Now Curvin's hands were slipping as Thoth wheeled hard about, but they held frantically to a robe sleeve, near the elbow. Then, as Thoth completed his whirl, Curvin was flung like the last man in a game of crack-the-whip, rolling across the floor as Thoth reached the window.

Harry had to sidestep Barstow and hurdle Curvin as they cluttered up the scene. By then, the living Thoth had flung open the casement window and was perched on the sill like a bird preparing for a take-off. But Harry wasn't gullible enough to credit this impostor with the ability to take to wing.

For one thing, the Thoth costume hadn't any wings; nor was there such a thing as a four-footed bird, which Thoth to a degree resembled, since Harry could see that the costume included soft shoes that were fashioned like bird-claws in the manner of Thoth's gloves. The hands were more important, for they were grabbing at something on the window sill and a moment later Thoth gave a flip that took him backward and outward.

It was simple enough.

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The killer was hooking his hands to a cable with a little trolley, to take a swift, short ride across to the rear extension of the apartment building. It would have to be at about the same level, that other window, or Thoth wouldn't have been able to coast here by the same route. But there wasn't any use in dealing in ceremonies or theories where a murderer was concerned. Having three witnesses who would testify in his own behalf, Harry Vincent decided to end the killer's flight and discuss the technicalities later.

So as Thoth's head and shoulders swung over and beyond the sill, as they had to do so that the man could start his dangling ride, Harry reached the window with a final lunge, shoved the big-muzzled pistol through in an exact copy of Thoth's dip, and pulled the trigger hoping the gun was loaded.

The gun was loaded all right.

It went off with a report like a thunder-clap and the charge ricocheted from the wall below the opposite window, bringing a clatter of brick and plaster with it. Then Harry was staring at the void beyond.

The figure of Thoth had vanished!

Where?

Harry stared downward and listened for a crash. He didn't expect a trailing scream, because if Thoth had taken that full load, he wouldn't have been able to give one.

But there was no crash from below; and if Thoth had been riddled by the gunshot, why had the same charge taken such devastating effect on the brick wall?

With those questions popping through his brain, Harry looked for the cable, saw it, and realized how he had guessed wrong. That wire line didn't go straight across to the rear extension; it was set at a sharp angle, leading inward, to the center of the building which was like the body of a letter "I," with Zerland's apartment and the rear extension placed like the ends of the letter's bars.

Even now, Harry could see a window slapping shut in the middle of the building and he couldn't do a thing about it, the blunderbuss pistol being strictly a one-shot weapon. Turning quickly back into the room, Harry rallied Barstow and Curvin who were coming dumbly to their feet and told them to come along.

"Thoth is making for the fire tower!" Harry didn't go into further detail. "Come along and maybe we can overtake him!"

Barstow was numbly fingering the beads that he had snatched from Thoth's robe, while Curvin's hand was gripping a chunk of cloth torn from the killer's sleeve. Harry told them to place those exhibits with Zerland's secretary who was still standing rooted, his goggling eyes fixed on the bronze knife handle that projected from Zerland's back.

Out through the apartment and around to the interior fire tower, Harry was the first to hear a rumbling sound of an elevator which couldn't be the smooth-working lift that Kirky handled. Turning to Barstow and Curvin, Harry gestured toward a sliding door adjacent to the fire tower.

"It must be a service elevator!" exclaimed Harry. "Thoth has gone down in it! He'll be going out the back way! Come on!"

By "come on" Harry meant to use the fire-tower, so they did. Again Harry was in the lead when they reached the bottom, but Barstow wasn't far behind. Curvin, though, had been unable to maintain the pace, even on the

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downgrade. Rather than wait for him, Harry and Barstow rushed outdoors to look for Thoth.

Harry was armed with the big pistol, brandishing it as if it were reloaded, and Barstow was carrying a big cane that he had picked up in Zerland's vestibule. Boldly they both began to look for Thoth, but to no avail. Nor was there much mystery in the fact they couldn't find the killer.

In the time that he had gained, Thoth could have reached either corner of the block before his pursuers arrived. Furthermore, there were passages between buildings through which he might have ducked. Whether or not Thoth had chucked his regalia somewhere became the next question, or would have taken precedence, if Curvin hadn't raised another proposition, the moment he arrived.

Summing the situation with a quick though wide glance that took in the whole block, Curvin steadied his wobbly knees by gripping the arms of the other two men; then turned to Barstow and wheezed:

"Thoth may have gone to murder Yelvin!"

The name of Yelvin registered to Harry, but remotely, until Barstow explained.

"Curvin means Roger Yelvin," stated Barstow. "The famous engineer who made so many surveys of the pyramids, hoping to solve the secret of their construction. He was the next man that we intended to see."

Harry put the prompt query:

"Where is Yelvin now?"

"Living in an old house off West Side Avenue," replied Barstow. "There's no telephone, but I have the address."

"And you have your car," added Curvin, pointing to an automobile parked a short way down the street. "You had better get to Yelvin's and warn him right away, while Vincent and I handle matters here."

Hesitating, Barstow finally nodded. Pulling his keys from his pocket, he hurried to his car, clambered into it and got started. But neither Harry nor Curvin waited to wave Barstow on his way. By that time, they were back in the Alvara Apartments, working their way through to the lobby, to spread the news of Zerland's death among the switchboard tender and the elevator operator.

An argument was already in progress there, but it had nothing to do with the Thoth question. It centered about an imperious man who was drawn up with self-importance as though he fancied himself a commanding officer. His thin face, long and drawn, was flushed to his gray-streaked hair as he stormed with righteous anger:

"I tell you, I am Edwin Albersham! I demand that you call Hugo Zerland at once and tell him that I am here!"

The switchboard operator was gesturing through his window and Kirky, the elevator man, had begun to shove himself into the argument.

"Leave it to me, Homer," boomed Kirky. "And listen you" – this was for Albersham – "we know you ain't Mr. Albersham, because he's upstairs – see?"

"And if it wasn't Mr. Albersham who went upstairs, why ain't they chased him down again? Thought you'd be smart, didn't you, to come walking in here, saying you were Mr. Albersham, not knowing he was here

already."

Albersham wagged a fist Kirky's way.

"Phone Zerland's apartment!" insisted Albersham. "Let me talk to my associates, Barstow and Curvin. They will know my voice" – he paused, abruptly, with a stare – "why, here's Curvin now!"

"And there's Albersham!" put in Homer, pointing through the window at Harry. Then, in answer to a buzz from the switchboard, Homer popped back there, plugged in a wire and announced:

"Alvara Apartments... Mr. Zerland? Who is calling please?... Sorry, I'll have to know your name, or I can't connect you..."

Harry was at the window, wig-wagging through to Homer, offering to help the fellow from his dilemma.

"Switch it to the house phone," suggested Harry. "I'll take it and find out what it's about."

"All right, Mr. Albersham."

Hurrying to the booth before Homer could find out who was really Albersham, Harry picked up the telephone that was located there and announced:

"Harry Vincent speaking."

There was a pause; a brief click across the wire and a voice came through.

Harry Vincent was talking to his chief, The Shadow!

CHAPTER V

IT wasn't the weird, sinister voice of The Shadow that came across the wire, but the calm, precise tone of a gentleman who called himself Lamont Cranston. What Harry had to say in reply would have ruffled the calm of anyone but Cranston.

Briefly, but rapidly, with the skill acquired through years in The Shadow's service, Harry detailed how Hugo Zerland had been murdered by a killer disguised as Thoth. Following those facts, Harry stated that Albersham had arrived to join Curvin while Barstow had left to warn another potential victim named Roger Yelvin.

The name Yelvin registered distinctly with The Shadow. Then came Cranston's even tone:

"Interesting news, Vincent, to hear that Yelvin is living here in town. Ask Curvin for Yelvin's address and let me have it immediately."

Harry didn't have to go far to talk to Curvin, for at that moment, the shaky man was rapping at the door of the phone booth. Holding the receiver, Harry opened the door.

"We've settled matters, Vincent," explained Curvin. "About your posing as Albersham, I mean. I explained everything and Albersham is quite satisfied."

"For the present, yes." It was Albersham who spoke testily, thrusting his long face over Curvin's hunched shoulder. "Right now it is more important to find out who posed as Thoth and murdered Zerland; since

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Curvin has told us of that matter too. Later" – Albersham was glaring – "we can take up the question of your lesser imposture, Mr. Vincent. Am I right, Curvin?"

"Yes, of course," began Curvin, trying to be tactful. "But Vincent was a great help, a great help. He hasn't done anything suspicious at all, not at all."

"Not at all?" repeated Albersham. "Would he mind telling us whom that phone call is from?"

So sharp was Albersham's query that Curvin's suspicions were roused. From his genial pose, the shaky man gave Harry a narrowed stare, with tiny eyes that verged upon accusation.

"A fair question, Vincent," clucked Curvin. "Who is on the phone?"

"The police," rejoined Harry, promptly. "They want to know about the Zerland case."

"The police?" echoed Curvin. "But how did they find out about Zerland's death so soon?"

"Because I told them," returned Harry. "You see, they were calling to find out if I had arrived yet. They knew I was working for Zerland as a private op."

"A private – what?"

"Op for operative," explained Harry. "Detective to you. You see" – Harry was fabricating neatly, but was careful not to let it sound too glib – "Zerland wasn't the sort to trust anybody too far, not even your ABC Industries. When anybody comes around offering a half a million dollars for some ancient secret, it's not a bad idea to find out something about them – or isn't it?"

"We didn't intend to offer Zerland a half million," snapped Albersham, across Curvin's shoulder. "We've already bought what we wanted from Professor Parrish. We felt that Zerland's supplementary data might be worth a fair price – say fifty thousand dollars."

"Or a hundred thousand," corrected Curvin, turning his head toward Albersham. "We don't have to bargain about the matter, Albersham, now that Zerland is dead."

"Yelvin isn't dead," reminded Albersham. "We will have to bargain with him or any others who can sell us what we want to buy. So there you go, Curvin, giving facts away too soon."

Curvin winced at that one and Harry took advantage of the fact.

"Zerland was my client," remarked Harry, "and right now I'm only interested in finding out who murdered him. I won't be bothering Yelvin or anybody else you may have business with. Right now it's the police who want to find Yelvin, so they can put him safely in camphor until you have a chance to talk to him. They don't think Barstow is good enough protection for Yelvin. What's that address over by West Side Avenue?"

Curvin's shaky hand fumbled in his inside pocket for an address book. Meanwhile, Albersham put another objection.

"Before you give Vincent the address, Curvin," argued Albersham, "make him prove that he's a private detective."

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Harry's hand went to his own inside pocket and brought out a wallet before Curvin could produce the address book. The wallet had interior flaps containing cards that showed through cellophane and Harry flicked a few in front of Curvin's eyes.

There wasn't a private detective's license in the lot, but Curvin didn't find that out. Harry kept the wallet tilted so the cards weren't readable in the dim light. Also, he moved his hand so Albersham, the really keen man of the pair, couldn't see the cards at all. However, the array was imposing enough to convince Curvin and as soon as the shaky man began to nod, Harry pocketed the wallet.

Then Curvin read the address from his little book and Harry repeated the location of Yelvin's residence across the phone. It brought a slight, restrained chuckle that distantly resembled The Shadow's laugh; then came Cranston's monotone:

"Excellent work, Vincent. Tell them that Inspector Cardona is already on his way."

The other receiver clicked, leaving Harry wondering how a police inspector could be coming here without knowing that there'd been a crime committed. Indeed, Harry was quite as puzzled over that as Curvin had been a short while earlier.

However, Harry announced the fact to his companions and while they were riding up in the elevator to Zerland's apartment, the simple answer dawned.

During Harry's palaver with Albersham and Curvin, The Shadow kind simply buzzed Burbank, his contact agent, and ordered him to phone police headquarters regarding Zerland's death. With murder done at the Alvara Apartments, there was no doubt that the ace police inspector, Joe Cardona, would be coming there in one great hurry.

Cardona did hurry.

Within ten minutes after Harry had reoccupied Zerland's apartment along with Albersham and Curvin, a summary ring was answered by Zerland's secretary, who had now recovered enough of his wits to answer to his name as well as answering a door bell. The secretary's name happened to be Roscoe and he stammered it to the swarthy, stocky man who entered, who in turn happened to be Inspector Joe Cardona.

Before studying Zerland's body, Joe Cardona gave a nod to Harry Vincent, who in turn threw a triumphant glance at two gentlemen named Albersham and Curvin, respectively. It looked as though Cardona was certifying Harry to be the private detective that he wasn't. Actually, Cardona was recognizing Harry as a friend of Lamont Cranston, who in turn was a friend and confidant of the police commissioner, Ralph Weston.

It was from Harry that Cardona took the details of Zerland's death and jotted them in a notebook. Then, after tallying the testimony of Curvin and the secretary, Roscoe, Cardona inquired:

"You say Barstow went to warn another man named Roger Yelvin who might be in danger like Zerland was. Where does this Yelvin fellow live?"

"Curvin has the address," replied Harry. "I phoned it to headquarters after you'd left."

Cardona put the blunt query:

"Why not before I left?"

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"Because I objected," inserted Albersham, crisply, not giving Harry time to answer for himself. "Mr. Vincent came here representing himself to be me, although he now claims there was some mistake about it. While he was using the telephone, I had no proof that he was calling the police. In fact, I regarded him as a questionable character."

"I see," snapped Cardona. "Maybe you even thought that Vincent had come climbing through a window wearing a bird mask and calling himself Thoth."

"That would have been impossible," returned Albersham, spreading his hands. "I have Curvin's word for that much. Barstow was here too, when the murder happened –"

"But you weren't," interjected Cardona. "Only you showed up mighty quickly, so I hear. Perhaps you were staging the Thoth act."

Albersham's face went pained.

"How preposterous!" he exclaimed. "Why, my partners were waiting here for me to join them and conclude our transaction with Zerland. Would you accuse me of double-crossing my own partners?"

"A few people have done it," retorted Cardona. "In fact, in some circles, it seems to be the common thing. So don't be too critical of others, Albersham, while your name still tops my list of possible suspects."

"This is an outrage!" Albersham's face was furious. "Why, anyone who wasn't here might have been the murderer! To put me first on the list –"

"You're there alphabetically," Cardona interrupted. "A for Albersham. A stands for alibi, too. If you have one that's good enough, I'll cross you off."

Albersham's erect shoulders delivered a hopeless shrug.

"I was keeping an appointment," he declared, his rage completely subsided. "I was practically on time, but just unfortunate enough to arrive right after a murderer left. Should that incriminate me?"

"It shouldn't," admitted Cardona, "but unless Thoth shows up somewhere else, you're still a candidate, Albersham. Of course if somebody stowed that Egyptian costume somewhere around this building, you'll have more explaining to do. If it was stowed, we'll find it, because it would be tough to hide that bird head very deep. I brought a squad along and they're scouring the neighborhood right now."

Harry observed that Albersham looked quite uneasy, in fact actually pale, but the latter factor could simply be the contrast with the angry flush that had so recently governed the man's long face. Nevertheless, Albersham braced himself and managed a deprecating laugh.

"Meanwhile Thoth may have gone to Yelvin's," argued Albersham. "What if he plans to do murder there?"

"He won't get very far with it," stated Cardona. "Since Vincent called headquarters, you can be sure they've sent patrol cars there. And now, Albersham, if you'd really like to help the law, tell us this:

"Is Yelvin likely to be at that house off West Side Avenue?"

"I wouldn't really know." Albersham gave his head a serious shake. "He is likely to be out of town – isn't he, Curvin?"

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A nod from Curvin, whose eyes, narrowed and tiny, were regarding Albersham with something like suspicion.

"We have all of Yelvin's correspondence at our office," continued Albersham, "and I'm sure he stated he would see us by tomorrow. If you want to see the letters –"

"Do any of them mention Zerland?" demanded Cardona, quick with his interruption. "Or anyone else who might be menaced by this Thoth Curse?"

"Not specifically," recalled Albersham, "but I am sure there are some indirect references that might help."

"We'll go there then," asserted Cardona. He picked up the broken beads and the piece of cloth that had been ripped from the murderer's robe. "If we meet up with Thoth, we'll ask him to match these for us."

Nobody appreciated Cardona's quip, Harry Vincent least of all. As they left the apartment, Harry felt really worried, even though he saw the big electric sign streaming a new message that didn't include the word "Hurry."

A visit to the office of the ABC Industries seemed a tame thing indeed, compared for instance to a house near West Side Avenue. If Thoth had started there to find Roger Yelvin, he would certainly arrive ahead of his lone and rather incapable pursuer, one Geoffrey Barstow.

But in Harry's estimate, founded on personal observation, Barstow just didn't count.

What worried Harry was whether Thoth would reach Yelvin's ahead of The Shadow!

CHAPTER VI

WHILE Inspector Cardona was convoying a suspect and a pair of witnesses to the downtown office of ABC Industries, an old house near West Side Avenue was taking on the aspects of a vast dark mausoleum, just waiting for a visit from some living symbol of the dead, such as Thoth.

The windows of the old brownstone were lighted and that made it all the worse. So deep-set were the lights, so inadequate for the large interior, that they looked like the flicker of those peculiar lights called corpse candles, often seen in marshy land.

In fact, the house itself seemed symbolic of a quagmire, for it looked like a place that would swallow all arrivals and never give them up.

One person could appreciate the insidious aspect of that house. She had been watching it for some time from a doorway across the street. Occasionally a cab would swing the corner from West Side Avenue and flick its headlights into that doorway. On those occasions, the girl withdrew deeper, but not so deep that the reflection from the side of the doorway failed to show her face.

It was the same face that Harry Vincent had noted when he entered the Alvara Apartments but had temporarily forgotten during the excitement that came later. A face of beautiful mold, exquisite in its deep-cream complexion, but as cryptic and unsmiling as the features of the sphinx itself.

A singular setting this, like a strange, uninhabited island in the sea of Manhattan, for the girl was too much a statue to be regarded as an inhabitant. The setting was most singular, because the bright lights of West Side Avenue were so close by.

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A perfect place for a perfect crime, this deceptive side street where a person might step unwittingly from the brilliance of the avenue and be swallowed, never to return. The house, curiously, looked like a thing with eyes and mouth, as represented by those dim windows, but a house couldn't be expected to gulp wayfarers despite their wish.

Or perhaps it could!

All that house might need was a presiding demon and from a dark passage beside it was coming a figure that answered to the specification, as it turned toward the gloomy steps of the house itself.

The figure of Thoth!

He looked intact, robe and all, this bird monster, for there wasn't sufficient light to reveal a missing bead string from the group about his neck, nor to show the gap in one of those robed sleeves which in color resembled the very papyrus that bulged slightly beneath Thoth's costume.

A quick trip by car or cab could have brought Thoth to this rather remote address in the time that had elapsed since his flight from Zerland's apartment. Good riding time, but it might have been clipped by some three minutes, if traffic had broken nicely.

The question was: how many such minutes could Geoffrey Barstow have clipped, granting Thoth about the same amount of leeway? Certainly Barstow could not have overtaken Thoth and it was dubious what good he could accomplish if he appeared on the scene any later than the monstrous murderer.

These factors did not seem to concern the silent girl who stood across the street; perhaps she was totally ignorant of them. Her sphinx poise remained unruffled, even at the sight of Thoth, even though she did draw deeper into the doorway. But that could have been because of a cab's lights that were veering from the avenue, rather than that this Lady of the Nile had any fear of Thoth incarnate.

The house had swallowed Thoth when the cab completed the swing. It had swallowed the bird-god so suddenly that any observer – except perhaps the Egyptian girl – would have thought that Thoth had walked straight through the closed door. Perhaps Miss Sphinx took it for granted that he had, since Thoth was reputed to move in and out of tombs without so much as disturbing a cobweb.

Remarkable enough, Thoth's entry to the brownstone house, but it was trifling when compared to what was happening on the side street. That veering cab had opened and closed a door, with no more than the slight slackening of speed that was customary with a cab that had made a sudden swerve and needed to straighten out before jouncing the curb or bending a fire plug.

With the maneuver of the door, the cab had disgorged a living figure more evanescent than Thoth if not so fantastic. What had come from the cab was a lithe form cloaked in black, with a slouch hat to match, a shape so swift and sure of time and action that it didn't need an oversized house to swallow it from sight.

This new arrival, The Shadow, required only patchy darkness with which to merge from view and there was plenty of such stuff along this side street. Once he became part of surrounding blackness, The Shadow remained so, giving himself the equivalent of invisibility. Not even the sphinx itself – let alone the girl who played the part – could have traced the course that The Shadow therewith followed unseen.

Keeping to the darkness that spread across the street, The Shadow made his silent way to the very brownstone steps that Thoth had taken. Blended with the gloom of the great front door, he turned the knob of that barrier, at the same time stretching a cloaked arm upward to cut off any light that might filter through above his head.

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The door was unlocked, which explained how Thoth had entered so easily and rapidly. The Shadow's arm lift was unnecessary because there was no light in the vestibule just inside. The door itself was dark enough to give no trace of its closing after The Shadow's cloaked form had twisted through a space so narrow that nobody would have believed it if they'd seen it.

Past the inner door of the vestibule, however, the house was slightly brighter and even alive, in a dreary sort of way. It was still illuminated by gaslight, this ancient mansion, which accounted for the deep-set lights away from windows where a breeze might extinguish the jets. As for life, there was an old lady dozing as she rocked in a parlor chair, the locomotion kept continuous by a cat that kept clawing at the lady's skirt in an effort to reach a ball of wool that was lying in her lap.

There was an old manservant who was walking around with a long rod with which he could turn off some of the higher gas-jets sprouting from the chandeliers, while a younger man in uniform was coming from the kitchen, his particular brand of regalia marking him as a chauffeur.

These two might have observed The Shadow, but they didn't. They were just a trifle too late, something rather customary when The Shadow prowled.

The Shadow was well in from the lighted fringe of the hallway when both men began to turn and so rapidly that the action seemed instinctive, the cloaked form whisked to the deeper recess of the hallway.

Anyone other than The Shadow would have retreated back to the door, rather than be boxed in the cramped area of darkness that The Shadow chose beside the stairs. But it was always The Shadow's way to adopt the unexpected, on the theory that it was also the unsuspected. What he gained in this instance, was considerable.

The brief conversation that The Shadow overheard between the servant and the chauffeur could also have been heard from near the vestibule. The servant simply said that Mr. Yelvin hadn't yet phoned, at which the chauffeur grumbled and retorted that he wasn't paid to wait all night. The servant suggested that the chauffeur go in the library and read awhile, and when the chauffeur questioned if Miss Yelvin wouldn't object, the servant said she wouldn't, because she was asleep.

This small talk indicated plainly that Roger Yelvin was not at home and therefore might have given The Shadow the idea that his visit was useless, if he'd heard the conversation from back beside the vestibule. But at his present vantage spot The Shadow was hearing something else that didn't jibe with the statements of the hired help.

Distinctly, creaking sounds were coming from above the stairs, sounds that indicated someone moving about with stealthy footsteps that the carpet muffled, but which old joists and floorboards failed to conceal.

Next, The Shadow was following those footsteps but on a different level. The servants had turned away, so they didn't see the cloaked figure that moved boldly across the hall and toward the kitchen. Above the kitchen ceiling, The Shadow heard the creaks take another turn, move along and pause. Keen eyes, gazing up from beneath the brim of the slouch hat, traced the exact line that the footsteps had taken on the floor above.

With a whispered laugh, The Shadow turned, picked a stairway door by the fact that it opened one step above the floor level, and made a back-stairs trip to the floor above, where he found a dim hall taking the exact line that the creaks had gone along.

At the end of that door was a closed door. The Shadow approached it, eased the knob imperceptibly and found that the door yielded.

A bad habit of Thoth's, not locking doors behind him. It was bringing the masquerader who represented murder to a meeting with crime's Nemesis, The Shadow!

CHAPTER VII

JUST inside that door, The Shadow arrived amid brilliant light and for a most curious reason. He was in a room that could hardly be called a room at all, but rather a cramped closet, barely large enough for a person to turn around.

The closet had a single gas-jet on one wall; that jet was lighted and turned on to the full, thus producing the strong illumination. The reason for such an arrangement was plain enough; the other wall of the closet was banked with shelves that had been turned into drawers, all marked as containing plans of Yelvin's engineering projects.

There was a far door to the tiny closet, obviously leading into a larger room. Thus the closet had been converted into a sort of ante-room, which in turn served as a filing department for Yelvin's old – and less important – documents.

Not just the time-yellowed labels of the drawers convinced The Shadow that the files were old stuff. Yelvin certainly wouldn't have kept them here if they were valuable, because he had a strong room for anything of value. Where was that strong room? Beyond the next door, and the proof lay in the doors themselves.

Two doors, each with a combination lock if needed. The Shadow had noted one on the outer door; the inner door was similarly equipped. They were old doors, but very stout, the kind they used to build back in the nineties, when this house was probably in its prime. The doors had old fashioned keyholes, larger ones, as evidence of their age; but now the combinations had supplanted these.

Why had Yelvin gone away and left the double door of his strong room unlocked? It must be, as the man who had preceded The Shadow had disappeared beyond the inner door.

There were a variety of answers, one being that Yelvin trusted his servants. But there was another question more of the moment. It was:

Why had the man who entered Yelvin's strong room left the gas-jet burning full blast?

That could be answered too.

If anyone opened the door into the strong room, the final door at the inner wall of the closet, the stronger glow from that little ante-chamber would instantly reveal the fact.

It brought a whispered laugh from The Shadow, that evidence of the scheming mind of the person who represented his opposition. Though the laugh was almost inaudible, its quivering echoes brought a waver from the gas flame, so confined were The Shadow's present quarters.

Schemers usually were stupid. This case offered no exception.

To foil the little game, The Shadow had only to turn down the gas-jet or extinguish it entirely. Then the light from the ante-room would not play tattle-tale if The Shadow opened the inner door.

So The Shadow did not even touch the gas-jet. In dealing with a stupid opponent it was good judgment not to let him know that he was encountering someone smarter than himself. The Shadow preferred to play his

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former trick of chinking the door with his cloaked form while opening it. So in his usual imperceptible fashion, he tried the door ahead.

The Shadow was right; the door led into a strong room. It was a sizable room, its ceiling high, unlike the little closet that served as ante-room. In the strong room were metal filing cabinets, locked ones, but not as strong as they had been advertised. Those cabinets were ripped open and all over the carpeted floor lay a strew of papers, showing in the milder light of a gas chandelier. All the work of only a few minutes, and fruitless.

In the midst of the chaos stood the masked monster, Thoth, surveying his unlovely handiwork and realizing that he hadn't found the papers that he'd come to get. Beyond Thoth were barred windows with great metal shutters closed outside them, more proof that this was a real strong room and thereby adding to the anger that Thoth must feel at completing a dead-end quest.

Under the glow of the chandelier, Thoth's costume looked weird, but tawdry, obviously a masquerade. His bird mask was almost ludicrous in too much light and the whole costume fitted him badly, in fact a little tightly. The Shadow observed a broken string of beads, a jagged gap in one sleeve, as further defects in the costume.

It was chance alone that caused Thoth to look up toward the door that The Shadow was just entering; chance, too, that made the ibis man realize that a challenger was present.

The Shadow hadn't entirely obscured the light from the closet that connected with the hallway. It wasn't necessary, because the very slight glow that filtered past The Shadow's form was no greater than the glow within the strong room. But there was one difference, a difference upon which The Shadow for once had not calculated, since even he could not be expected to discount all the remnants from the gaslight era.

From the breeze created by The Shadow's cloak, swaying as he negotiated the doorway, the light behind him flickered.

Thoth saw that waver. Either he was gifted with foresight as uncanny as his looks, or his nerves were as taut as a hair-edge. Sensing a menace, he swung upward from his crouch, whipping his fist into an underhand sweep, all in the same motion. From Thoth's hand sped a bronze blade, the mate of the weapon that the same claw-glove had left between the shoulders of Hugo Zerland.

He'd taken it right from his jeweled belt, Thoth had, and the dirk was whizzing straight for The Shadow!

All The Shadow did was turn. He had no time to fade from the weapon's path and a mere shift wouldn't do. The Shadow had seen the thing called bad luck work too often, to put himself in line for a dose of it. Thoth's tricky fling was hasty, likely to go wide. If The Shadow veered the wrong direction, he'd be putting himself in the blade's very path.

So The Shadow turned, merely to be edgewise rather than expose his full breadth to the arriving knife. The bronze missive skimmed so close that it took a tuck in the back of The Shadow's cloak, pinning it to the doorway.

By then Thoth recognized his formidable adversary. Grabbing the first missile handy, he flung it as he charged. The object was a candle in a china candlestick, common in houses of the gaslight period, since gas-jets couldn't be carried on extension cords, like electric bulbs.

The Shadow dodged the candlestick while wrenching his cloak free. The chinaware crashed the doorway and the candle bounced across the floor. But Thoth still had a weapon; his path was blocked by a small,

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single-legged table that he gathered up as he came. Arm swinging hard and high, Thoth drove the table like a mammoth bludgeon toward The Shadow's head.

Like Thoth, The Shadow was adept at drawing weapons with a single sweep. His was an automatic, gathered from his cloak, and it spurted an upward shot. The tug from The Shadow's cloak shortened his aim, but the bullet at least curtailed Thoth's weapon, for it literally blasted the top from the swinging table.

Thoth's stroke went short, but he kept on coming, back-swinging with the table leg. The Shadow faded and made a sudden swerve from a new direction, to grapple with the phony Egyptian myth. Thoth was grabbing to reclaim his bronze knife from the woodwork, trying at the same time to beat away The Shadow with the clumsy club. Thoth was making himself a set-up for the Shadow at that moment.

Except for one factor: flight.

That was the thing paramount in Thoth's mind and it caused him to do the unexpected. With the knife blade only partly free, he realized it was yielding and abandoned his other weapon by flinging it. A wild gesture that The Shadow hadn't quite anticipated and this time Thoth was very lucky.

Spinning from the side fling that he gave it, coming at an odd angle due to its unbalanced weight, the table leg flipped around in air and its flying legs hooked The Shadow's neck. All that The Shadow could manage was a partial ward with his gun hand, then he was sprawling along the wall, rolling groggily to elude Thoth's knife and bring his automatic around and into play.

Just to stave Thoth off, The Shadow fired a few shots that came surprisingly close to the doorway, but Thoth was no longer there. His knife regained, he had dived through to the ante-room where with one claw-gloved hand he snuffed the flame from the gas-jet, then wheeled about and grabbed the door to pull it shut.

On his feet, The Shadow reached the closed door just as Thoth shot the combination lock from the other side. While trying the knob, The Shadow heard the far door slam and knew that Thoth would turn its combination too. Thoth had turned the trap on The Shadow, and neatly, for the only man who knew those combinations was Roger Yelvin.

What Yelvin would think when he returned and brought the police to help investigate his premises was one thing; what the police would say was another, but they would coincide in all their important details.

Those details wouldn't be helpful to The Shadow. To be found in this ransacked room would incriminate him and even worse would delay his pursuit of Thoth. This was one time when The Shadow did not care to be delayed, since murder in the shape of Thoth, might again be on the wing.

Grim came The Shadow's laugh, with a sibilant trace resembling a hiss. An actual hiss responded, more than an echo, it was prolonged. The Shadow tilted his head and listened, then laughed again.

No longer grim, The Shadow's laugh carried a note of prophecy, signifying that this strong room would soon lack its cloaked prisoner!

Not only did The Shadow know; he was about to prove his knowledge!

CHAPTER VIII

MAD though his flight, Thoth had begun to include The Shadow in his plans. Coming down the great front stairs, the bird-masked fugitive was stowing his knife away. Instead of lunging at the servant who appeared

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below, Thoth paused near the bottom of the stairway, beckoned, and pointed upward.

The gesture was graphic. It conveyed the idea that something worse than Thoth was still upstairs; which was enough to frighten anyone. Seeing a telephone, Thoth grabbed it, extending it toward the stupefied servant in pleading fashion, telling him in dumb show to call the police.

At that moment, the chauffeur came from the library and seeing Thoth in such a frightened mood, decided to capture the nightmarish creature. One claw-glove went to Thoth's knife-hilt; then, on smarter thought, Thoth dropped the telephone from his other fist and darted out the back way.

All that the chauffeur saw from then on was a succession of slamming doors, the last one, the back door, meeting him squarely in the face. When the chauffeur came to his feet half-dazed, he found that the old servant was helping him up and furnishing advice with the good deed.

"We'd better phone the police," the servant insisted. "There's someone else upstairs, more dangerous than the man who fled. Didn't you hear the shooting?"

The chauffeur nodded, dumbly.

"I heard the doors slam too," the servant persisted. "The doors of the strong room, I mean. That odd creature must have locked his enemy in there!"

That was enough for the chauffeur.

"All right," he agreed. "Call the police."

It wasn't necessary to use the telephone. Already a patrol siren could be heard outside. The servant hurried for the front door to see if he could flag that car. All of which certainly wasn't helping The Shadow, though it was advantageous to Thoth.

Outside the house, the thing that appeared a combination bird and man was creating consternation near a lighted corner of the rear street. People spotted him and shouted as Thoth doubled back for shelter. In the great outdoors, the Thoth costume handicapped its owner, for it branded him a curiosity rather than a menace, at least at first glimpse.

Hearing the police siren, the corner loungers of West Side Avenue decided they'd better square themselves beforehand with the law. Maybe the police were after that bird thing; anyway, it was a safe bet to play. So the hue and cry was about to start, when a car hauled up to the corner, coming from the side street, and an anxious man thrust out his broad face to inquire:

"Have you seen him? Thoth, I mean?"

The man was Geoffrey Barstow, as excited as when he had left the Alvara Apartments. Perhaps he had calmed during his ride, but the proximity of his goal had certainly stirred him to his former mood. Barstow was taking about anything for granted, even that the bystanders knew what the term Thoth meant, which they didn't. Therefore they stared blankly.

"I mean the bird man," explained Barstow. He brushed his hat from his head as he pushed his face further through the window. "He wears a mask as big as this" – Barstow displayed a pudgy pair of hands and spread them as if describing someone afflicted with mumps – "and it has a beak as long as that."

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Here Barstow pushed a hand forward and made a curving gesture; then reached for his hat, smoothed what hair was on his head and planted the hat on it.

"That describes Thoth," Barstow added, "except that he wears a robe too, a brown robe, with a lot of beadwork, but part of it is gone. I mean part of the beadwork – and part of the robe too."

Mention of the mask and robe brought responses from the listeners.

"Sure we seen the guy."

"What did you say his name was – Tooth?"

"We figured maybe he'd busted out of a nut house."

"Unless he was advertising something."

"You saw him then," affirmed Barstow. "But where did he go?"

The loungers gestured along the rear street in the general direction of Yelvin's house.

"Back where he came from," stated one, "wherever that was."

"The old house, maybe," put in another. "The big one, a little way down the block."

Barstow recognized whose house they meant. From a wallet, he produced business cards that he began handing out like tickets to a strawberry festival.

"That's where Roger Yelvin lives!" exclaimed Barstow. "Don't let Thoth go in there! Find him – seize him – I'll pay a thousand dollars reward to anyone who captures him! There's my name, down in the corner of those business cards!"

The corner big-shots studied the cards eagerly. Those cards bore the name of ABC Industries, with Barstow's full name, Geoffrey Albertus Barstow, engraved in the lower left corner. Barstow looked like a man who might have an odd thousand dollar bill in one of his vest pockets. That was enough for the corner crew.

"We'll find him for you, mister."

"Don't worry about him going in that house. We'll be in there first."

"Do we get the dough if we grab him separate from that uniform he's wearing?"

"Sure we will. We'll stick him in it if we have to."

More anxious than ever, Barstow was staring down the avenue toward which the nose of his car projected. He saw a cab starting half a block away and caught a passing glimpse of the figure that was closing the door.

"There goes Thoth now!" bawled Barstow. "I'll follow him, but if he comes back, the reward still stands. Remember – a thousand dollars for the capture of Thoth – dead or alive!"

The term "dead or alive" applied to a few pedestrians who were starting to cross the street as Barstow bucked the traffic light. Barstow missed them by a wide swerve and then took to the avenue. Again, he was speeding

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along the elusive trail that represented Thoth, but as Barstow had said, his offer still stood.

That fact still impressed the neighborhood boys. Among them they agreed that Barstow's business cards were sufficient passport to the old brownstone house where a man named Yelvin lived, though they'd never heard his name before. Besides, more sirens were whining their way and the locals decided they needed a good excuse for their presence here.

So they started for Yelvin's house, keeping a continued lookout for anyone resembling Thoth. Spotting a cruising cab, a couple of them flagged it, but the cab proved to be empty. By way of explanation they showed the driver one of Barstow's cards.

"This gent is looking for a guy named Thoth," stated one of the Avenue boys. "He's wearing a funny outfit with a dummy head that has a big beak. I mean Thoth, not this guy Barstow. If you find this Thoth character, haul him around and we'll pay you a century for the job."

The driver, a wise-faced hackie, nodded; then shifted his cab into gear. Just as he started, he called back:

"So long, reefers. You'd better go easy on the marijuana. Old birdie-puss will get you yet!"

That left the corner boys in doubt. The implication didn't apply to them, but they began to wonder about Barstow, the chap who had talked about something called Thoth. Still, they couldn't deny that they'd seen something answering to the exact description. So they started for Yelvin's to find out more.

Thoth was gone; Barstow was gone; only The Shadow remained. Up in Yelvin's strong room, he could hear the shrill sirens too, despite the thickness of the barred and shuttered windows. But there was something else The Shadow still heard; that continuous hissing that came from the tiny closet that served as an ante-room between the two strong doors.

The Shadow was busy. He was shaving the candle that had bounced when the china candlestick broke apart. He's shaved it down until it had a wick about four inches in length. Lighting the end of the wick, The Shadow approached the inner door and very carefully pushed the wick through the old key-hole, flame and all.

Noting that the light still burned, The Shadow pushed the remainder of the candle against his side of the keyhole so that it stuck there. Then, moving to a corner nicely away from the door, he awaited results. They wouldn't take long, those results, but time was growing precious to The Shadow – time in terms of Thoth.

Muffled by the candle, the hissing sound from the tiny ante-room could no longer be heard. Its cause was obvious enough; the sound came from the gas that was escaping from the jet that Thoth had snuffed out. By now the ante-room should be very nearly filled with gas. So The Shadow waited, ticking the seconds until they neared a minute and a half.

That was enough.

A great chug sounded and with it the house shook on its old foundations. The ante-room opened up and the doors blew with it. Chunks of the inner door littered the debris already strewn over the strong room floor. The outer door went the opposite direction and The Shadow could hear its relics rattling down the front stairs.

The candle flame had ignited the gas that choked the ante-room and this was the result. The Shadow arose from his corner and walked through the open passage that now lacked anything resembling doors and their combination locks. From the head of the stairs, he saw four patrolmen in conference with the servant and the chauffeur, all of them looking quite dazed.

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So The Shadow went down the back way to find a quota of neighborhood characters sitting around the kitchen which was as far as they had gotten before the house bounced their legs from under them. Going out through the back door; The Shadow reached the rear street and blinked signals with a tiny flashlight.

A cab pulled to a stop, the same cab whose driver had made the wisecrack about marijuana. The driver's name was Shrevvy; he'd brought The Shadow here and had been cruising around, knowing he was going to take his chief away again.

"I figured you'd be showing up, boss," informed Shrevvy, speaking to the invisible passenger who was in the darkness of the rear seat. "The way everything went 'pow' all of a sudden, like in the comic books, I said to myself 'That's it!' – and was right.

"No sign of this Thoth guy, boss, but there was a gent named Barstow trailing him. This Barstow was handing out cards and offering a grand to anybody who could find Mr. Thoth. I got Barstow's address and if you want, I'll take you there, only it's going to be tough."

When Shrevvy said "tough" he meant it! Nor was he lingering to prove the point. Spurting the car down the avenue, Shrevvy had already attracted the interest of new patrol cars whose urge for a chase had been stimulated by the sound of an explosion in the neighborhood.

"Regarding Barstow's card," spoke The Shadow as Shrevvy sped along. "It must have given his business address –"

"It did," returned Shrevvy, taking his chief's pause for a query. "It had the name of a company called ABC."

"Take me there."

That was an order, so Shrevvy followed it, hoping it would prove as simple as A B C, which it would, if he could only shake off those patrol cars.

If he'd been alone, Shrevvy wouldn't have believed that he could do it, but somehow he always did when The Shadow was a passenger!

CHAPTER IX

IN the office of the ABC Industries, Inspector Cardona was going over the correspondence from Roger Yelvin and finding it very vague. Yelvin seemed to have a habit of writing letters that said little and promised nothing. Somewhat annoyed, Cardona bundled the letters on the corner desk where he had studied them and turned to his companions.

"So what?" demanded Cardona. "Yelvin buys nothing, sells nothing, says nothing. How do you expect to do business with a guy like that?"

Edwin Albersham stroked his long chin and said nothing in return. Arnold Curvin gave a droopy stare and shook his head. As for Harry Vincent, this was none of his business, so he simply stayed in the background.

Cardona took Albersham as his focal point.

"All right, Albersham," snapped Joe. "At least you can tell me what it's all about."

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"Of course," acknowledged Albersham. "I suppose I am free to speak, even without Barstow here. Curvin and myself represent a quorum."

"Go ahead," urged Cardona.

"We've already told you much of it," insisted Albersham, "and it's all been in the newspapers. ABC has bought the secret of manufacturing ancient bronze from a professor named Rufus Parrish."

"And where is Parrish now?"

"We'd like to find out," admitted Albersham. "Parrish has a way of disappearing every now and then, to escape the Curse of Thoth."

"He believes there is such a thing?"

"Implicitly. Having given us the secret formula for the manufacture of such bronze, Parrish feels that the curse is full upon him."

"Then it ought to be coming your way too – or shouldn't it?"

"It shouldn't," asserted Albersham, decisively. "The curse has nothing to do with knowledge of the ancient formula. It applies only to those who have violated the tombs of high priests who were under the protection of Thoth."

"And those were the tombs that contained the hieroglyphs," put in Curvin. "In giving us his translation of the formula, Parrish had to admit that he had removed the sacred slab from the sarcophagus of Amrok, high priest of Thoth during the reign of Rameses the Second."

Thinking that over, Cardona queried:

"Where do Zerland and Yelvin fit into it?"

"They have similar formulas," explained Albersham. "Possibly better than Parrish's, or suited for purposes that his does not fulfill. Then there is another man named Louis Rendorff –"

"We'll get to him in due time," inserted Cardona. Then, grimly, he added: "If Thoth doesn't get to him first. But regarding Zerland and Yelvin. Why were they willing to admit they'd been breaking into those tombs, too?"

"Because Parrish admitted what he'd done," stated Albersham. "It made the Curse of Thoth seem silly, until tonight. After all, any deaths of archeologists in the past might just have been by accident. Or –"

"Or what?"

"Being under suspicion," returned Albersham, frankly, "I do not think it right that I should state as fact something which may be no more than idle rumor."

"What Albersham means," piped Curvin, "is that the Thoth Curse may be the work of modern Egyptians who are trading on ancient superstition. A secret society, for example, originating in Egypt, but having agents many places, including New York."

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Cardona gave an approving nod.

"For the first time," he decided, "you two gentlemen are hinting at something which makes sense in my language. I suppose I should start a general round-up of all Egyptians living in New York."

Curvin looked at Albersham, who promptly declared:

"It wouldn't be a bad idea, inspector."

Reaching for the telephone, Cardona conveyed the impression that he intended to order the round-up then and there. But when he talked to headquarters, Cardona merely inquired if there had been any report from Yelvin's neighborhood. What Cardona heard about that neighborhood really startled him.

"Thoth showed up at Yelvin's!" exclaimed Cardona as he clattered the phone on its stand. "He didn't just tear up the place, he blew it apart – and maybe Yelvin with it, though the servants claim that Yelvin wasn't there!"

A hush followed Cardona's announcement. All became tense, with the exception of one man, Albersham. For the first time, Albersham's long face relaxed, for this news was his vindication. Then:

"This Thoth guy gets around," Cardona said gruffly. "For all we know, he might be coming here next –"

Joe broke off as though the words had choked him. He'd heard an interrupting sound, the click of a latch, the groan of an old door that was the entrance to this office, the best office that the ABC company had been able to find, because of the rental shortage.

"Don't worry," declared Albersham, calmly. "It's probably Barstow. When he didn't find us back at Zerland's, I suppose he came here."

It wasn't Barstow.

The man who stepped into the office was of blocky build which made him look squatly, though he was fairly tall. Even in the artificial light, his face showed a tan that could only be attributed to the work of the desert sun. He had a strong jaw and tight lips that smiled when he saw looks of half-recognition flicker on the faces of Albersham and Curvin.

"I think you are guessing right," the man announced in a deep tone. "I am Roger Yelvin."

Albersham and Curvin promptly introduced themselves, stating that they'd recognized Yelvin from old photographs. Then, after being introduced to Harry and Cardona, Yelvin looked around and inquired:

"Where is your partner Barstow?"

Neither Albersham nor Curvin replied. Instead they looked at each other and their faces were troubled. Cardona, whose business it was to be blunt, began to speak for them, only to receive hasty objections before a word came from his mouth.

"Can't we wait, inspector?" pleaded Albersham. "Don't you think Barstow can give the details better?"

"Mr. Yelvin is here on business," insisted Curvin. "I think it should take precedence over other matters."

Evidently Yelvin didn't think so, for he turned abruptly to Cardona.

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"You said you were a police inspector," stated Yelvin. "That fact would indicate that some crime has occurred. What was it?"

"Hugo Zerland has been murdered," returned Cardona, steadily, "by a killer described as the ancient ibis-god, Thoth. The instrument of death was a bronze knife, apparently from an old Egyptian tomb."

As Yelvin stared, Albersham and Curvin began their protests, revealing for the first time why they hadn't wanted Cardona to speak.

"It was an imposture," began Albersham. "I wasn't there to see it, but from all descriptions –"

"I saw it," broke in Curvin, "and so did Barstow. He went to warn you that a crazy masquerader was loose."

"Probably some personal enemy of Zerland's," added Albersham, "using the costume to disguise himself."

"It couldn't have been the Curse of Thoth," insisted Curvin. "Such a thing is all superstition!"

By then, Yelvin was smiling broadly, but in the hard-set style of a man who has been around without being pushed. His smile was so forceful that both Albersham and Curvin silenced.

"I appreciate your solicitude, gentlemen," asserted Yelvin in a deep but easy tone. "It is true solicitude – toward yourselves. You think that I believe in the Curse of Thoth and would therefore be unwilling to go through with our business. Am I right?"

Sheepish stares from Albersham and Curvin, followed by their slow nods, proved that Yelvin was right. The blocky man retained his hard, fixed smile.

"I do believe in the Curse of Thoth," announced Yelvin, his tone serious despite his smile. Then, in a cold, decisive voice he added:

"But I am still ready to do business!"

CHAPTER X

ALBERSHAM and Curvin lost no time in bowing Yelvin into the seat of honor, which happened to be the swivel chair behind the corner desk on which were lying Yelvin's own letters along with other correspondence.

All the while, Yelvin smiled as though he liked the little surprise that his decision had produced. He drew a large pipe from his pocket and began to stuff it with a brand of very flaky tobacco that he poured from a well worn pouch.

From either side of the desk, Albersham and Curvin were sorting the letters, telling Yelvin that they would like to know more about his background, as surety that he could provide them with the data that they wished. Meanwhile Harry Vincent was watching Roger Yelvin closely.

Either Yelvin was very wise and self-sufficient, or he was staging some very clever bluff. Of which, Harry was not yet sure.

Nor was Inspector Cardona.

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To sound out Yelvin, Cardona picked up the telephone, paused with a hand above the dial, then inquired:

"What's your home number, Yelvin – or do you have one?"

"I have one," replied Yelvin, "but it isn't listed in my name. We only moved back into the house a month ago."

"We?"

"My sister and myself and of course the servants."

Yelvin finished scrawling the phone number on a pad and tossed it to Cardona. Then, keenly, Yelvin asked:

"Why do you want to call my home?"

"Because Thoth was there," rejoined Cardona, bluntly. "He must have headed there straight from Zerland's. He ransacked your strong room, blew its doors apart with a gas explosion, and fled the place about twenty minutes ago."

If Cardona expected Yelvin to wilt with consternation, he had a long wait coming. Instead of being harrowed, Yelvin leaned back in the swivel and gave voice to a steady, metallic laugh.

Cardona's face clouded.

"What's so funny about it, Yelvin?"

"The twenty minutes," chuckled Yelvin. "I couldn't possibly have gotten here that quickly, could I? No, it would have taken me a half hour at least."

Cardona pondered over that nice little problem. He was trying to find flaws in it. First, whether it would be possible to clip a half hour trip to twenty minutes, from around West Side Avenue to this downtown office. Second, Cardona was wondering if the time element had been correctly stated. Maybe Thoth had fled from Yelvin's mansion sooner than had been reported.

"I've started you thinking, haven't I, inspector?" queried Yelvin, in a half-mocking tone. "Or were you thinking already? Thinking that maybe I personally played the part of Thoth?"

Despite himself, Cardona nodded. Having mentally crossed Albersham off his list of suspects, Cardona was looking for another and had logically considered the next man to crowd into the scene, namely Yelvin.

"I'd have been very cute," conceded Yelvin, "if I'd murdered Zerland, then gone to my own place and made a fuss there, wearing that Thoth regalia. Except that I didn't."

"No?" snapped Joe. "Funny you left the place wide open for somebody else then."

"I left it as a trap," acknowledged Yelvin, "hoping that my servants would be smart enough to clamp those combination locks on anybody who sneaked in there."

"You told your servants that?"

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"No. They'd have been jittery if I had. I preferred to let them act their best in an unexpected emergency, as most men do. Besides" – Yelvin gave a deprecating shrug – "it didn't much matter."

"Why not?"

"Because I brought along all the documents that counted." From his pocket, Yelvin produced a large envelope and from it spread some typewritten pages on the desk. "Here is everything that has to do with the formula for ancient annealed bronze."

Albersham and Curvin were anxious to see those papers, but Yelvin spread his hands upon them.

"Wait until your partner Barstow arrives," he told the two. Then, looking straight at Cardona, Yelvin held his hard smile and suggested: "Meanwhile we can talk about murder."

Cardona's nod meant that Yelvin could begin.

"First, forget the Curse of Thoth," said Yelvin. "Like all that stuff, it's nonsense. But don't forget that there are modern Egyptians who do resent the stealing of ancient relics from their homeland.

"Such people would consider any measures legal to reclaim what they regard as their property, but why they should deal in vengeance also is another question. They might deal in death, mysterious and sudden, to deter people from invading tombs in the future, but that is more likely to happen in Egypt than here."

There was logic in what Yelvin said, but Cardona wasn't too impressed. This might all be a cover-up for something else. Before Cardona could say so, Yelvin expressed it for him.

"It is a crime to rob an ancient tomb," declared Yelvin, his smile belying his solemn tone. "A man guilty of such a crime in Egypt might be guilty of another crime here in America – even murder.

"Take any of us: Professor Parrish, Hugo Zerland, myself – or another man I've heard of, Louis Rendorff. We, each of us, uncovered a million dollar secret while in Egypt. Naturally, someone would like to kill us to get at it."

Pausing as though that explained everything, Yelvin received a stolid stare from Cardona.

"Nobody would do any killing for something he couldn't use," objected Joe. "Your theory would make the murderer somebody who already had the secret and didn't want to share it."

"Quite true," agreed Yelvin. "That's why Parrish disappears so often; it's why I'm hard to find; it explains why nobody ever sees Rendorff. We were all afraid of somebody."

"Of whom?"

"Hugo Zerland."

That was too much for Cardona, to hear Yelvin fling an accusation against the one man who had already become a murder victim. For the moment, Joe acted as though he intended to take Yelvin into custody. Then:

"Of course we were wrong," conceded Yelvin. "What we were really doing was dodging each other without realizing it. We all thought Zerland dangerous because he was once a Nazi agent. He'd gone to Egypt before the War to help plant secret bases for a German invasion. That's when he uncovered the tomb containing the

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papyrus relating to ancient bronze."

To Harry, analyzing while he listened, this made sense. Because of his past, Zerland had been the logical man for the others to avoid. Harry was wondering though, about the continued rivalry between the various men who held the secret until Yelvin explained further.

"I said a million dollar secret," repeated Yelvin. "We were all holding out until Parrish broke the market by selling for half price. Of course the rest of us could only bargain from then on, offering what we knew to ABC, just to let them have the thing exclusively. That should be worth something, shouldn't it?"

Yelvin was turning his head from Albersham to Curvin, then back again. Darting a sharp look toward Harry, Albersham centered on Yelvin again and offered:

"Fifty thousand dollars."

"Come now," laughed Yelvin, lifting his hands and gesturing to the papers. "You'd better make a real deal before Thoth comes popping out of nowhere to run off with these." He turned to Curvin this time: "What say?"

"I'd say one hundred thousand," replied Curvin, "only I don't think Barstow would agree. We really ought to wait for him"

"A quarter million is the price!" broke in Yelvin. "I ought to get half as much as Parrish. Breaking the market was nothing to his credit and it certainly shouldn't reduce the value of my data, gauged on a million dollar scale. Of course if you don't want to buy –"

Yelvin was beginning the old bargainer's routine of picking up his goods to put them away, when a sudden knocking began at the office door, accompanied by a muffled voice that Harry recognized as Barstow's.

"Albersham! Curvin! Let me in –"

Curvin was already on his way to the door, in that shaky style of his that could be rather rapid when it got under way. Barstow's summons was rather excited, but it didn't yet broach the notion of any menace in the offing. Maybe though, that was because the scene between Albersham and Yelvin was demanding full attention.

Angrily, Albersham was telling Yelvin to be reasonable, insisting that fifty thousand dollars was more than a fair price. Albersham wanted to see the papers before Yelvin put them away and Yelvin was sneering at any such idea.

Then the rattling at the door had ended and Curvin was loping back, making shaky gestures as he came.

"Something is wrong with the lock!" Curvin exclaimed. "I can't get it open from our side and Barstow can't from his. He's gone to look for the janitor, but he says for us to watch out for Thoth! Barstow trailed him from Yelvin's house down here and he thinks he managed to pull ahead of Thoth, but not by much."

Albersham came to his feet with an oath and started toward the door, looking for some object that would serve as a handy weapon and finally choosing a small, weighted ash-stand. Cardona drew a stubby revolver and pushed Albersham aside. About to follow, Harry paused in the middle of the room, deciding that this was Cardona's party and that if Joe wanted assistance, he'd call for it.

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Back at the desk, Yelvin was fumbling with his precious formula sheets, trying to stuff them in their envelope. He was nervous, rather than fearful, this man who had first given credit to the existence of a being called Thoth, then had laughed it off.

At least Yelvin could feel safe here, since the law was in charge and a door with a jammed lock was better than one with no lock at all. Except that the troublesome door wasn't the only one in the room.

There was another, just back of Yelvin's elbow, a door he hadn't noticed because the light was turned away from it. The door connected to somebody else's office and it should have been locked, but wasn't.

The door proved that when it creaked. Yelvin heard the sound and turned too late. Above him loomed the ominous figure of the bird god, Thoth, bronze knife in claw fist.

As Roger Yelvin gave a hoarse scream, the hand of Thoth struck!

CHAPTER XI

IT was like a strange game, the way the figures in that room responded in rapid progression. Thoth, of course, was the one who started it and his deed was short, but swift and deadly. He'd started the knife for Yelvin's back and needed only an added hook to land it there before the victim could wheel around.

Yelvin did come around, but it was the force of the knife that lurched him the rest of the way, heaving him sideways over the edge of the desk where he flattened face downward, the knife handle bulging from between his shoulders.

As Yelvin rolled away, Thoth plucked the envelope and the papers with it, thrusting them under his brownish robe, but by that time the other figures were in action, bobbing all along the line.

Harry Vincent had launched himself at Thoth once before tonight. He did it again, with greater speed and fury. Harry literally dove across the desk from which Yelvin's body had been swept and caught Thoth's robe near the shoulder with a tight, two-fisted grab.

Further toward the main door than Harry, Albersham at least had the benefit of a shorter angle and he took advantage of it. Perhaps the fact that he'd been under suspicion earlier urged Albersham; at any rate, he proved faster, more efficient than either Barstow or Curvin had been at Zerland's.

Picking the space beside the desk, Albersham cleared Yelvin's body and started a hard grapple with Thoth, beating aside the murderer's swinging arm. Further toward the door, Cardona swung about with his gun, but couldn't fire at Thoth because other figures intervened. At the office door itself, Curvin was again at the key, trying to get the lock open while shouting for Barstow to help outside.

Cardona reached the desk and gave it a hard shove away from Yelvin's body, to clear a path to Thoth. The man with the ibis mask lashed furiously about, trying to shake off Harry and Albersham at once. His swing pinned Harry between the wall and the desk, while Albersham came around to block Cardona. The situation was momentarily in Thoth's favor and he made the most of it.

A wrench brought him free of Harry's clutch, the tough robe slipping through Harry's fingers. Thoth was luckier this time than at Zerland's, where he had lost a chunk of sleeve to Curvin, a jagged gap still testifying to that fact.

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Body swinging with his fist, Thoth cuffed Albersham before the latter could grab the strings of hanging beads and keep a sample, the way Barstow had managed earlier this evening. What Albersham did grab was Thoth's arm, as it whipped away. On each arm, Thoth wore a broad, gem-studded bracelet, a division between the claw-glove and the sleeve above it. As Thoth's arm slipped away, Albersham caught the jeweled band on that particular sleeve and kept it.

Thoth didn't worry about the loss. He was free and Albersham was welcome to the bracelet. Having his hand free, Thoth was able to grab the desk lamp and fling it at Cardona, who for the first time was taking clear aim with his gun.

Cardona dodged the lamp as he tugged the trigger. His police positive spoke with the short bark peculiar to that type of revolver. The lamp blanked off as Cardona fired. Joe thought he'd smashed it with a bullet. He was wrong, because there was no clatter until a quarter-second later.

The lamp had reached the end of the cord, otherwise it would have hit Cardona. The tug of the cord had extinguished the light. Thoth's throw had missed, but Cardona's aim had been wide, which left the score even.

There was only one place where Thoth could have gone, through the connecting door to the next office, which opened out into another hallway. As quickly as his gun had stabbed, Cardona sprang in pursuit of the man who wore the bird mask, confident he could find the connecting door, despite the darkness.

Cardona found the door, head on.

Thoth had slammed it and was thrusting home a bolt from the other side when Cardona met the barrier. Retiring groggily, the inspector blundered into Harry and Albersham and they paused to steady him on his feet. Then, seeing the light from the hallway, to which Curvin had finally opened the door, Cardona took a new grip on his gun and started that way, shouting for the others to follow him.

There was shouting from the hallway too, along with sounds of a scuffle. Two voices were howling: "We've got him!" One was Barstow's stormy tone; the other Curvin's higher pitch.

Then came the calls:

"Look out, Curvin!"

"Help me, Barstow!"

A man came sprawling toward the doorway as Cardona swung out into the hall, Harry and Albersham close behind. The man was Barstow; he crawled to hands and knees, to wave excitedly toward a corner from around which scuffling sounds could still be heard.

"He grabbed Curvin!" panted Barstow. "Thoth did – I tried to help – I was too late –"

Evidently Thoth had handed Barstow some of the usual Thoth treatment, but that didn't deter Cardona. All Joe wanted was a crack at Thoth and he'd welcome a grapple as a starter. Cardona had grappled with the toughest of them and always his stubby gun had decided the issue. You could do a lot of close work with a police positive. Here was just another chance to prove it.

Around the corner were the elevators and the door of one was in motion when Cardona saw it. The car itself was dark; maybe Thoth was trying to kid Cardona into thinking that this was an empty shaft. Joe knew differently, however, for you couldn't keep opening an elevator door if the car wasn't there.

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Without ado, Cardona plunged into the elevator, swinging his gun hard, but high. He wanted to clout that bird head that belonged to Thoth, knowing that Curvin was in the murderer's clutch, Joe wasn't taking any chances on socking the captive instead.

The high swing was too high. A hand stopped it in mid-air. Cardona tackled his adversary hard and received a twisty grapple in return. Then, powerless in the clutch of a foe who swayed him helplessly, Cardona came reeling from the elevator, his opponent with him.

Harry Vincent stopped short.

Here was a transformation indeed. Cardona had gone into the elevator after Thoth. He had come out with The Shadow!

The thing was quickly explained. There were two elevators. Thoth must have carried Curvin down in one, while The Shadow was coming up in the other. But Cardona wasn't analyzing matters that way. Battling blindly, he didn't yet realize who his opponent was.

Cardona alternately vanished and reappeared as The Shadow carried him away in a whirl, for with every revolution, The Shadow's cloaked form obscured the man beyond. Sooner or later, The Shadow would jounce Cardona back to his senses, making Joe realize that he'd grabbed someone other than Thoth.

Meanwhile, Harry was springing to the chase of the murderous ibis-god. Harry hopped into the elevator and as he was closing the door, both Albersham and Barstow crowded in after him, anxious to rescue their partner, Curvin.

This was an old office building, with its door on a side street. When the pursuers emerged, they found the street empty. Again, Thoth had gained too good a start and carrying Curvin as a hostage could not have proven any handicap. Of all three members of the firm of ABC, the one incapable of putting up a struggle was Arnold Curvin.

Though Curvin had twice attacked Thoth, his efforts had been spasmodic and the palsied man was unquestionably incapable of sustained resistance. However, Harry was hoping that Thoth had flung his human burden somewhere by the wayside, but this didn't prove to be the case. As Harry, Albersham and Barstow spread to look for Thoth, they found no trace of Curvin either.

The wild hunt was under way when The Shadow arrived from the front door of the building, having planted Cardona in the middle of the ABC office and left him there. Listening intently, The Shadow caught sounds of muffled traffic which included the rumble of a not-too-distant truck. Starting swiftly around a corner, The Shadow contacted Shrevvy's cab with another flashlight signal and started off on a chance search.

That quest was to prove too late. Even the Shadow would be needing other measures to cross the trail of Thoth again tonight.

CHAPTER XII

LAMONT CRANSTON was at the Cobalt Club.

This wasn't surprising, considering that Cranston rated as one of the leading members of that very exclusive organization.

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In fact, the Cobalt Club seemed to have lost something on evenings when Cranston failed to appear there. Cranston's calm face, immobile and reserved; his tall form, always immaculately attired; his quiet, self-sufficient manner, were all representative of what the perfect club member should be.

Tonight, however, Cranston wouldn't have been at the Cobalt Club if his friend the police commissioner had not called him and asked him to come there. A phone call to Cranston's New Jersey home had finally been relayed to him somewhere in Manhattan and he had complied with the commissioner's request.

There were two reasons why Commissioner Weston needed Cranston. First, Weston was violating the club rules, and badly; therefore Cranston's presence was the thing that would square him. Again, Weston was tangled in the midst of a singular crime case involving murder, robbery, arson, explorers, engineers, archeologists, financiers, ancient legends, and a kidnapping to boot.

It all had to do with Egypt and since Cranston had been to that country, his advice might prove most timely.

Frequently, Commissioner Weston used the grill room of the Cobalt Club for conferences concerning crime. Naturally, he never brought uncouth characters there for a quiz. But when dealing with persons of respectability and refinement, the Cobalt Club was a proper place.

Tonight, Weston was dealing with such parties. Two of them were named Albersham and Barstow, members of the ABC corporation, while in place of Curvin, the missing member of that group, was a chap named Vincent who happened to be one of Cranston's friends.

Of course Inspector Cardona was present too. He had brought along a collection of very unusual exhibits, the sort that would interest Cranston. So Commissioner Weston felt that he was justified in bending the club's rules against too many visitors.

Arms folded, Cranston listened intently to the details of two murders wherein Thoth had eliminated Hugo Zerland and Roger Yelvin in turn. The ibis-god's side trip to Yelvin's home was an added factor that had a bearing on the case.

As for the witnesses of murder, only Harry Vincent had witnessed both deaths. Barstow, however, had seen Zerland slain and could therefore tally his testimony with Harry's. Similarly, Albersham was a key witness in the Yelvin case and gave a very exact description of its details.

Zerland's secretary, Roscoe, had been brought to this conference as a witness of his master's death. Cardona, of course, was present and could tell about the Yelvin murder.

Yet a human void still existed.

That void was Arnold Curvin. The shaky man's prolonged absence was more than a source of worry; it was a cause for alarm. At the present moment, police were scouring the city in search of anyone answering to Curvin's description. Train gates, ferry slips were being watched; cars were being stopped on every bridge or tunnel leading from Manhattan; bus stations and air terminals were under strict surveillance.

This was a reason why The Shadow had abandoned his own hunt and had come to the Cobalt Club as Lamont Cranston. In Shrevvy's cab, The Shadow hadn't been able to trace the truck that he had heard depart from somewhere near the building where the ABC office was located. The police could do all that on a much larger scale, particularly as they were questioning all truckers. Meanwhile, though, The Shadow had put Shrevvy and several capable agents on the job of tracing the truck's course, if possible.

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Time would certainly bring results. So far, it was not yet midnight on this night when Thoth and his Curse were rampant. In fact there was more than an hour to go before midnight arrived. With two murders already to his discredit, Thoth might even be contemplating a third, or more!

These were the points that impressed The Shadow behind his calm frontage of Cranston!

It explained why Cranston was going through sheaves of correspondence and records that had been brought from the ABC office, instead of paying attention to what Inspector Cardona was saying. For Cranston, though he had unfolded his arms to reach for the papers idly, was actually becoming very busy. He was leaving it to Harry Vincent to hear what Cardona said.

Cardona's discourse concerned exhibits of murder lying on the table.

"Who Thoth is, we don't know," Cardona conceded. "But we do know that he started at Zerland's, went to Yelvin's, and arrived at ABC. I've checked the time element and it fits, but that isn't all. These things fit, too."

Cardona lifted a string of broken beads with one hand, a chunk of a coarse cloth sleeve with the other.

"Barstow and Curvin ripped these from Thoth's robe," announced Cardona. "The servants up at Yelvin's house saw enough of Thoth to notice that his beads were broken and his sleeve torn. His robe was in the same condition when he showed in the ABC office."

Placing the beads and the cloth back on the table, Cardona picked up the curious, ancient bangle that had served as one of Thoth's bracelets.

"Albersham added this to the collection," declared Cardona, "when he grabbed Thoth after Yelvin was murdered. If we find Thoth and fit these pieces to his costume, we'll incriminate him one hundred percent."

Replacing the bracelet with the other items, Cardona introduced some new exhibits.

First was a parlor car stub, bearing today's date, on a train from New Haven, Connecticut.

"This stub was found near the window at the back of Zerland's study," asserted Cardona. "Thoth must have dropped it there. Roscoe found it afterward."

Next came another stub, the seat check to a matinee that afternoon, at a play called "White Blossoms" which was a current Broadway hit.

"This was in the strew of papers in Yelvin's strong room," continued Cardona. "Some of them caught fire, but the servants were in time to save the rest. Yelvin was at home this afternoon; hence we're quite sure that this belonged to Thoth."

Finally, Cardona produced a reservation card bearing the name of the Lotus Restaurant. The card, however, was not filled out.

"I picked this up myself," declared Cardona. "It was in the office next to ABC, the one past the connecting door. Thoth must have lost it in his rush. It's the kind of thing that would have fallen from his pocket, the way we'd been yanking him around."

Maybe Cardona had forgotten that Harry and Albersham had done the real yanking; that Joe's business had been dodging a flying lamp and getting a door slammed in his face. However, the three clues offered

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something in the way of a tangible trail, except that it hadn't yet jelled.

"We're checking with the Pullman Company," declared Cardona, "and the same with the theater and the restaurant, but we haven't received any reports yet. Meanwhile, there's one man I want to find. His name is –"

For the first time, Cranston seemed to catch what Cardona was saying. Looking up from his papers, Cranston calmly inserted the name:

"Louis Rendorff."

That brought a stare from Cardona. Then:

"How did you guess that, Mr. Cranston?"

"From these papers," replied Cranston. "They don't state much, but they do tell enough to prove that Rendorff is another man who knows as much about Egyptian secrets as either Zerland or Yelvin."

"That's right," nodded Cardona, "and that tags Rendorff as Thoth, the murderer."

"Or as Thoth's next victim."

It hadn't struck Cardona that way, but now it did. Cranston's words were bringing another stare from Cardona, who promptly rallied to the situation.

"That's two reasons instead of one!" expressed Cardona. "Two reasons why we have to find Rendorff!"

"Then find him!" stormed Weston. "Why are you mulling over this, inspector, instead of locating the key man in the case, as it now stands?"

This time it was the commissioner who received one of Cardona's stolid looks.

"We've been trying to locate him," declared Cardona. "If we hadn't, I wouldn't be mentioning him."

That made sense, considering Cardona's methodical ways. Cranston had recognized it all along, for he knew that Cardona, too, had gone through this batch of letters in which Rendorff had warily hinted at his knowledge of ancient Egyptian bronze.

"We've checked every hotel in New York," added Cardona, "but there's nobody checked in anywhere who answers to the name of Louis Rendorff. We don't even know what he looks like, because we can't find a picture of him, nor anybody who has seen him. If we could only get a lead to somebody who knew him!"

The same thought could have been in the mind of Lamont Cranston, at least so Harry Vincent judged, when he glanced at the man he called chief. Foolish though it seemed, Harry was trying to conjure up a picture of some face that would logically answer to the description of a man named Rendorff, when a person's image did come to his mind.

Harry wasn't as good at hiding his sudden impulses as was Cranston. His chief must have caught Harry's change of expression for Cranston rose and gave a slight beckoning gesture, before Harry had time to wonder how he was going to pass along the idea that had struck him.

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Leaving his chair, Harry reached the foyer a few moments after Cranston. There, Harry exclaimed in undertone:

"The Egyptian girl!"

Cranston's eyebrows raised in slight inquiry.

"I forgot I hadn't mentioned her," said Harry. "She was outside of Zerland's apartment house. For all I know" – this was a guess, but a good one – "she may have gone up to Yelvin's house, to watch there, too. Anyway, if we could find her, we might locate Rendorff."

"Describe her."

As Harry gave a very vague description, from which only Cranston could have formed a reasonably accurate picture, the club radio kept coming in with a newscaster's voice, detailing two mysterious murders involving a killer disguised as an Egyptian god called Thoth. Combined with what Harry had to say, the broadcast gave Cranston an idea.

"If Rendorff is hearing that" – Cranston gestured toward the radio – "he won't stay long in town. It's nearly midnight, so he's more likely to leave by train than any other way. If the girl is watching for him –"

"She might be at the station!" broke in Harry. "Or she might follow him there! But which station?"

"I shall take Grand Central," decided Cranston, "while you cover the Pennsylvania Station. Here's the number where you can reach me if you see the girl."

Cranston was jotting the phone number on a slip of paper as he drew Harry toward the street door, where a waiting limousine was ready to take them to their respective destinations.

A slight trail, so slight as to be scarcely a trail at all, but the best that present opportunity could offer, even to The Shadow!

CHAPTER XIII

THE newscaster was still spiling about crime when Cranston's limousine was pulling away from the Cobalt Club. The news of murder done by Thoth was being broadcast throughout New York and plenty of people were hearing it.

One listener was a man who was packing a suitcase in a hotel room. He was a man with a massive face with an undershot jaw. He looked like a bulldog and he liked bulldogs, for one was squatting beside the door listening to the broadcast too.

When the man gave a deep, gruff laugh, the bulldog responded with a growl. The man seemed pleased; it showed that his pet understood his moods.

"You're right, Rex," the man said to the dog. "It's meant for us, that broadcast."

He pulled out the radio plug and closed his packed suitcase.

"Zerland first, then Yelvin," the man said gruffly. "They'll be looking for Rendorff next, but they won't find him, will they, Rex?"

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From his growl, Rex seemed to think they wouldn't, but the growl could be interpreted as threat to anyone who did find Rendorff. The man reached out and gave the dog a pat, then drew a wallet from his pocket.

There were cards in the wallet, that the man carefully transferred to an inner fold. All the cards that he selected for that special hiding place bore the same name:

LOUIS RENDORFF

"Just to be on the safe side, Rex," Rendorff told the dog. "If they questioned me and found out who I was, they'd think we were getting out of town, wouldn't they?"

"Well, we are getting out of town" – the man gave a basso chuckle – "but it's all according to schedule. I said I'd wait no longer than midnight tonight. What I know will keep, because I'm the man to keep it."

Hooking a leash to the bulldog's collar, Rendorff left the hotel room, taking Rex along. When he reached the elevator, he told the operator to send the porter to his room for the bags. Arriving in the lobby, Rendorff hitched Rex to a post beside the cashier's office and paid the bill.

The bill, however, was not made out in the name of Louis Rendorff.

The name that Rendorff gave was Robert Elgin; he had a calling card to go with it, bearing an address in Chicago, which he left in case any mail would need to be forwarded. Rex's growl told that the porter had arrived with the bags and Rendorff grabbed the leash from beside the cashier's window just in time to keep the bulldog from tearing it loose, window post and all.

It happened that the porter had stepped a trifle too close to Rendorff to suit Rex. That suited Rendorff, however, and won Rex another pat when they reached the cab, where the porter dumped the bags in the front seat, rather than get too near Rex again.

"Penn Station," ordered Rendorff. Then as the cab started, he said to Rex: "Nobody's going to sneak up on me while you're around, are they? Well, that's what I carry you along for. They'll keep their distance, or else."

With that, Rendorff looked back from the cab to see if any enemies were about, but by then the cab had swung the corner. Rendorff didn't see another cab that was pulling up in front of the hotel, nor the person who was getting into it.

That person was the same Egyptian girl who had been outside of the Alvara Apartments and later across the street from Yelvin's brownstone residence!

Reaching Penn Station, Rendorff began having complications with Rex. There were too many people that the bulldog didn't like, and he would have sunk his teeth into a few if Rendorff hadn't kept him under full control. When Rendorff told a station porter he was going on the Southern Special, the red-cap furnished a suggestion.

"If you're taking that bullpup," the red-cap said, "you'll need a muzzle for him, mister. He'll be wanting a chain, too, or they won't have him in the baggage car. That leash don't look strong enough to hold him very permanent."

Rendorff gruffed that he had both muzzle and chain. He produced them when he neared the train gate and rigged Rex with both. Then the porter took Rendorff down a special flight of stairs, to reach the baggage car. Meanwhile, passengers were pushing through the regular train gate, where the sign stated that the Southern

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Special was due to leave at 11:45.

The big clock in Pennsylvania Station registered twenty-five minutes after twelve. Rendorff had made his train with a comfortable twenty minutes to spare, but he hadn't passed unnoticed. Two men who were obviously station detectives were giving the eye to everybody who went through the gate and they spotted Rendorff when the red-cap took him down the other stairs.

But they were on watch for a stooped man who had the shakes and who would be taking the train against his will, probably urged by somebody with a pocketed gun; such was the plight in which they expected to see Arnold Curvin. Hence a burly man with a bulldog was something they didn't connect with the Thoth murders, past or future.

The person who checked on Rendorff was the same girl who had followed him by cab. Her sphinx features and her exotic complexion passed unnoticed among the crowd, as did her sharp eyes with their jewel-gleam. Yet anyone looking for just such a face would have picked it from the throng on sight.

That was proven when the girl turned away from the gate and started toward the main waiting room. A young man caught sight of her and followed. The Egyptian girl would have recognized him if she had looked back, for they had seen each other earlier this evening.

Harry Vincent had found the chance trail. How brief it was to be, he didn't guess.

The girl stopped at the telephone desk, gave a number that Harry didn't catch and went into a booth. Harry followed, faked a call in the next booth, long enough to overhear the girl's first words before she fully closed her door.

"This is Thelba..." The girl spoke with an odd but precise accent. "I have watched Rendorff take the train... Yes, he had the dog with him... They have gone on a train called the Southern Special... No, I saw nobody else..."

The girl switched suddenly to a language that Harry decided was Egyptian and a moment later tightened the booth door. What Harry didn't realize was the reason for her use of another tongue. It lay in the fact that the little windows in a phone booth door reflected angles like a mirror, when the door was not fully closed.

That was why Thelba hadn't closed the door at first. She'd gained a neat backward glance at Harry's face, peering from the edge of the next booth.

Now Harry was gone, to make a quick call of his own. He used the number that Cranston had given him, which happened to be the number of a pay booth in Grand Central Terminal. Cranston must have finished a tour of the train gates there, for he answered immediately.

Harry's rapid report brought Cranston's prompt instructions:

"Contact Rendorff. Have him leave the train at Newark. Meet me there."

A neat plan, considering that Cranston couldn't reach Penn Station in time to take the Southern Special too. Getting Rendorff off the train in Newark would frustrate any murderous designs that might be scheduled further along the line. It wouldn't take Cranston long to reach Newark, either by car or another train, and arrange for Rendorff's protection from that time on.

Unless Rendorff happened to be Thoth!

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That thought was striking Harry as he left the phone booth, but he dropped it. Thelba's booth was empty and Harry was no longer willing to give the Egyptian girl the benefit of the doubt. He felt sure now that the man she had called was Thoth, but that at least meant that Thoth couldn't be on the train.

Perhaps the call had been to Newark, where Thoth in his turn could pick up Rendorff's trail!

It would be Harry's job to find Rendorff and convince him of such prospects. Since Rendorff had a dog with him – according to what Thelba said – Harry was sure he could trace the man by inquiry in the baggage car. There would still be time before the train started; or so Harry thought as he was hurrying through the train gate.

Then the gateman's arm stopped him and Harry heard the blunt inquiry:

"Ticket?"

"I'll be right back," replied Harry, glibly. "I have to give a message to a friend, who's leaving on this train. Very important."

It would have worked ordinarily but not on this occasion. Two men closed on Harry and looking at their faces, he realized they must be station dicks. Before Harry could really protest, they'd hauled him around so that a red-cap could stare at him.

One dick asked:

"Is this the fellow?"

"Must be," nodded the red-cap. "Brown hat, brown suit, no bags, kind of good looking; that's what the lady said. She figured he didn't have a ticket."

Thelba's work! She'd spotted Harry after all and had told the red-cap to give a message to the station detectives. And what a message it was!

"So you're Thoth," declared one of the detectives. "What did you do with Curvin?"

"Don't start reaching for another knife," the second dick warned. "We're ready for you."

Harry merely tried to wrench away but the detectives thought he was planning more. The man who had said he was ready, really was. A short, weighted billy tapped Harry alongside the head and he faded out. Sagged in the arms that gripped him, Harry heard a confusion of sound that included a faint voice calling "All aboard!" and a very distant clang that could have been the closing train gate.

It was the train gate.

Some distance away, a girl with a sphinx face let it relax into a smile as she turned to lose herself in the throngs of the huge depot.

Louis Rendorff was started on his journey without the protection of either The Shadow or his proxy, Harry Vincent!

CHAPTER XIV

THE Southern Special was an all-Pullman train that began with a combination baggage-club car and ended with an observation lounge, with about a dozen sleepers in between. Some of the passengers had gone back to the observation, but Louis Rendorff was heading toward the club.

Rendorff had left Rex in the baggage section; then had gone back to see that his bags were put in the proper berth of the proper car. Now, with the train hardly under way, he wanted to see how Rex was making out.

For one thing, Rex was a skittish dog, who disliked trains intensely and was particularly annoyed by tunnels. Right now, the train was dipping through the tube beneath the Hudson River, which was the worst possible start of a railroad trip for Rex.

What was more, the baggage man didn't like Rex, which pleased Rendorff immensely. In fact, he'd trained Rex to be particularly nasty to baggage men. The tunnel would make Rex even nastier and therefore Rendorff was further pleased, though he sympathized with Rex's aversion for tunnels.

What Rendorff planned was a deal with the baggage man. For five dollars, Rendorff might be able to smuggle Rex back to his own car. Of course he'd say later that he'd taken the dog there in the first place, if the conductor came across Rex. But Rex would be very quiet in Rendorff's berth; at least he'd stay quiet unless anyone shoved in there by mistake.

It would be very tough for any such person, because Rendorff never kept Rex muzzled.

Even with a muzzle, Rex could be quite tough. He was helping Rendorff's prospective deal with the baggage man by proving it at this very moment.

Above the hollow roar that accompanied the train's swift passage through the tunnel, the baggage car echoed Rex's fierce growls and the clanging of his chain. Already the baggage man was worried.

"Easy now, old boy!" he called. "Your boss is coming along any minute. That's right, he said he'd be here. He wants to feed you; that's what he said."

Rex acted as though he intended to feed himself with the baggage man as fodder. Clawing his muzzle with his paws, he loosened it, then gave a lunge that nearly snapped the chain.

"Easy now!"

The baggage man was backing away, up against two wardrobe trunks that were in a corner of the car. He'd be climbing over those trunks if Rendorff didn't show up soon. Rex was chewing the muzzle as he pawed it, and now his growl became a ferocious bark as he gave the chain another yank.

Reaching for the top of the trunk, the baggage man clutched it. The effect was very odd, as if the two trunks had some connection. For as the baggage man pressed down on one trunk, the lid of the other came upward.

Finding that the chain wouldn't snap, Rex squatted on the floor of the car and concentrated on the muzzle. The rushing roar ended as the train whizzed out of the tunnel and the baggage man felt relieved. He leaned back in a new direction and his head jarred the rising trunk lid. Surprised, the man started to turn around.

Out from the trunk came a gloved hand fashioned like a claw. It brushed past the baggage man's eyes and glued them with terror. The curious gauntlet clamped the fellow's neck and as he struggled, something

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thwacked out of the trunk and felled him. It was the same treatment that Harry had received from the station detectives, only harder.

The train was speeding smoothly now, with Newark only a few miles across the Meadows; but Rex, his muzzle chewed away, was barking furiously. Despite his disregard for baggage men, Rex didn't like what had happened to this particular specimen. Maybe the bulldog thought he had a priority in putting a quietus on baggage men.

Up on all four feet, Rex gave the chain another jolt as the door from the club car opened; then squatted back with a whine. It was Rendorff and as usual, he was sympathetic. He came over and petted Rex, then turned to impress the baggage man.

"See?" said Rendorff. "When the dog is with me, he's quiet. Now if I took him back to my car –"

Rendorff broke off. There wasn't any baggage man, at least Rendorff didn't think so until he looked again. Then, sight of the man sprawled in front of the trunks gave Rendorff quite a start. He looked at Rex and the dog growled; gauging the trunks, Rendorff thought he knew what had happened.

"You overplayed it, Rex," gruffed Rendorff, with a short laugh. "Scaring that fellow so he tried to climb those trunks. But why didn't he make it?" Puzzled, Rendorff frowned. "Maybe the pressure of the tunnel –"

The thought worried Rendorff. Tunnel pressure, plus a weak heart, wouldn't be too good. Forgetting Rex, he came back and stooped above the baggage man, his frown increasing when he found the fellow senseless. Coming half to his feet, Rendorff gave an annoyed grunt.

An unseen listener couldn't have wanted a better signal. The top of the trunk lifted again, but the figure that rose from it was obscured by Rendorff's form, for he was rising, too, to deliver a savage order at Rex, who was barking at the trunk lid.

"Quiet, Rex!" stormed Rendorff.

Then, as the dog's bark became mingled with a whine: "What do you want to do – bring somebody here? You'll have us both put off the train if anybody finds this out!"

Blackness became Rendorff's background, ominous blackness that might have been The Shadow's, but wasn't. For the figure that was rising from the open trunk represented a personage who dealt in crime; not one who fought it. The proof was the silhouetted hand that traced a pattern high on the car wall.

With that hand was the outline of a knife; a hand whose silhouette was so bulky when clenched that the tracing of the knife looked needle-thin in comparison. But there was nothing clumsy in that hand as it came into actual sight, slightly out and above Rendorff's shoulder.

The hand looked large because it was encased in a long gauntlet, resembling a claw; the knife seemed thin because its blade was of unusual length. It glittered dully, that blade, because it was fashioned of old bronze.

Rex ripped at the chain so hard and furious that even his master was startled. Rendorff drew back despite himself and simply shortened the stroke that was coming his way, rendering it swifter and more certain – if such terms could apply to the hand of Thoth!

Rendorff went back clear to the dagger hilt, then plunged forward, across the prone form of the senseless baggage man. With him, Rendorff carried a bronze trophy, another of those Thoth knives, extending up from

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his back as a token of almost instantaneous death.

The only witness to the things that followed was Rex, the bulldog, who was the sort of witness who could never give verbal evidence. Rex saw the figure that came from the opened trunk to stoop above Rendorff's body and make sure that the victim was dead. The dog made a super-canine effort to break the chain, but failed, although his ferocious lunge carried him almost to the stooping murderer.

What Rex received in return was hard cuff from the same gloved hand that had driven the bronze knife into Rendorff. The dog snapped at that glove and got his teeth into it, but the hand whipped safely away. Then the dog was worrying a gauntlet with jagged edges of the sleeves from which it had been ripped.

Whatever other sounds occurred in the baggage car were drowned by the train's loud clatter as it slackened while crossing the huge steel draw bridge over the Passaic River, just short of Newark Station. The great superstructure of the bridge clanged the hideously echoed message that Thoth, Master of Doom, had won again!

CHAPTER XV

TEN minutes after its arrival at Newark, the Southern Special was still stalled there. A group of men were gathered at the platform beside the baggage car, a group that included members of the train crew, station personnel, and railroad detectives.

Some were trying to revive the still stupefied baggage man, others were studying Rendorff's body, while all were staying a respectful distance from a growling bulldog, who was crouched at the full length of his chain, his forepaws pressing an object that looked roughly like a ragged glove.

A few of the train crew were further back, chasing away curious passengers who had come out on the station platform. During that business, a man strolled past. He was a tall man, calm of manner, who would probably have convinced the train crew of his importance, if they'd challenged him.

But they didn't challenge him, because they didn't notice him. Even with The Shadow's cloak folded in disguised fashion across his arm, Lamont Cranston had a way of rendering himself inconspicuous when he chose. One brakeman who was arguing with some passengers thought he heard footsteps pass on the concrete platform; but when the brakeman looked, there was nobody there.

The brakeman should have turned to look further, though it might have made no difference if he had. It could be that Cranston's secret – and The Shadow's – was based upon Tibetan training, for Cranston had often visited that land. Maybe people could turn themselves invisible in L'Hassa, the greatest city in Tibet and if someone knew the trick, there was no reason why he couldn't work it in Newark, the largest city in New Jersey.

However, Cranston wasn't invisible when he arrived at the baggage car. There, he appeared in the front rank of the human cluster and his quiet but important air marked him as someone who belonged. The baggage man had come from his coma and was beginning to recall what had happened.

"He clouted me," declared the baggage man, rubbing the back of his head. "Clouted me hard – right here."

"Who did?" A railway dick put the query, then gestured at Rendorff's body. "That guy?"

The baggage man stared. He didn't see the bronze knife because Rendorff's body had rolled slightly the other way. What he saw was the bulldog face, turned into the light, with its massive jaw that looked like a large

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edition of Rex's.

"Not him!" exclaimed the baggage man. "He's the guy that owns the bull. He went back to his car before we pulled out of Penn Station. Said he was coming front to see about the dog, though. Only he wasn't around when I got clouted."

"Who clouted you then?"

"Somebody with a big mitt, and when I say mitt, I mean it was like a mitten. It was a glove, only it was striped like a claw –"

The baggage man broke off as he heard Rex growl. Stepping forward, pointing to the floor, he added; "That's it! The thing the dog has!"

At the baggage man's approach, Rex retired, but only to gain slack in the chain. His subsequent lunge was intended as a prelude to mayhem, but fortunately the chain held, before he could reach the baggage man. Rex's barks, however, were truly vociferous and brought an exchange of glances among persons present.

Maybe the dog was going berserk because he had recognized the murderer of his master!

Such suspicion of the baggage man lasted very briefly. Rex was quite as violent when a couple of the station employees approached him. One found an umbrella in the car, shoved the point at Rex, and opened the umbrella very suddenly. That backed Rex away, long enough for the other man to snatch up the gauntlet.

"Say!" exclaimed a detective. "That looks like it belonged to that killer they call Thoth, the one they were mentioning on the air tonight." He turned to the baggage man. "Where did he come from before he grabbed you?"

The baggage man gestured to one of the big trunks. The dick found that it was open, gave it a quick pull forward. The trunk came tumbling to the floor, its lid flying wide.

Empty!

There was a reply to the detective's exclamation. It came in the form of a groan, rather weird until it was located. What located the source of the groan was the fact that it was repeated twice in gasping fashion.

"Somebody in that other trunk!" exclaimed the baggage man. "Yank it open!"

The trunk wouldn't yank open; it was locked. Now, muffled taps were coming from its interior; hasty, nervous thumps. Some men were moving forward to break the trunk open, when the baggage man produced a large set of stock keys.

"One of these ought to do it," he said. "Try them."

The fifth key did it. While Rex snarled and chafed at his chain, the trunk was unlocked and tipped forward with guns trained, ready for its occupant's surge. Only the occupant didn't surge. He flopped like a fish out of water, gasping through a handkerchief that gagged him, wrenching at ropes that he had managed to work off, at least partially.

They helped this prisoner to his feet, but even when his hands were released, they proved too shaky to hold the arms that supported him. The gag removed, his face looked very peaked; his eyes, drooped almost shut,

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seemed unable to open while he panted for the air he needed so badly.

Although Cranston had never seen this man, he recognized him from his description. Calmly, Cranston spoke the name:

"Arnold Curvin."

Those words electrified the group. They recognized the name as belonging to the kidnap victim for whom all Manhattan had been searching. Curvin corroborated it with a weak nod; then gasped:

"Thoth – he put me there – in the trunk – on the truck – later it was on a train –"

Painfully, Curvin opened his eyes as he paused and managed to query:

"Where am I now?"

Before anyone could answer, Curvin's tilting head had brought his eyes on a line with Rendorff's body. From his side, Curvin could see the dull gleam of the knife handle. His voice rose almost to a shriek:

"Thoth's work! The Curse of Thoth – again – a third time!"

Rex was beginning to bark anew, as though recognizing that the reference related to his master. Looking first at the dog, then at the victim, Curvin exclaimed:

"Louis Rendorff!"

Then Curvin was explaining, as best he could, how Rendorff had been checked as the most likely victim to follow Zerland and Yelvin. He wanted to get back to New York to join Albersham and Barstow, so they could urge the police to resume the trail of Thoth. Other matters were important, though; for one thing, Rendorff's bags. Somebody was dispatched back to look for them.

But most important was the disappearance of Thoth, the killer whose glove had now been added to the list of items torn from his Egyptian robe. A search of the baggage car revealed no sign of the killer, the only clue being a cardboard slip, representing a garage receipt for a parked car. The garage was located in Harrison, the town on the east side of the Passaic River.

Rendorff certainly hadn't dropped that slip and Curvin, with his shaky, feeble hands, didn't even drive a car. The ticket didn't belong to the baggage man, so there was only one conclusion; it had been dropped by the infamous Thoth himself. Thus was another link added to the chain of clues that might prove the undoing of that monstrous murderer!

Now it was obvious that Thoth must have dropped from the train before it crossed the Passaic, an easy drop-off, since all trains slowed when coming across the draw. The ground was dark and neglected on the Harrison bank of the river, with an open field through which the killer could easily have scurried unseen.

Word was given to start the pursuit of Thoth from there. Meanwhile, Cranston introduced himself as a friend of the New York police commissioner and arranged to take Curvin back to Manhattan. With Newark detectives accompanying them, they rode in on a train to Pennsylvania Station.

Already, lights were bobbing all over the field that lay beside the tracks on the Harrison side of the river. Other lights were gleaming when the train passed through the Jersey Meadow, big searchlights, probing for

suspicious cars, or hiding places where a fugitive might have gone.

The hunt was on for Thoth, that master of ancient murder, but the ibis-god had slipped away as utterly as if he had stepped back into forgotten centuries from which he had emerged!

CHAPTER XVI

THREE days had brought an end to the trail; a dead end.

The riddle of Thoth still remained.

This was being proven in the grill room of the Cobalt Club where Commissioner Weston had invited a group of guests to witness the private showing of a special movie.

The picture showed a squad of men with tommy-guns approaching an old house out in the country. One suddenly arose and called a warning; when it apparently was unheeded, the rest drove for the house, riddling its windows with a hail of lead that their repeating weapons spurted ahead of them.

It was a silent film and the effect was like a pantomime. Any audience would have mistaken the film for a cutting-room reject of a rehearsal for a Grade-B thriller. But this whole scene was very real.

The sequence showed the men entering the bullet-riddled house. Then there were pictures of various rooms, all empty. The film flickered to a finish.

"And that," announced Commissioner Weston, "is all the F.B.I. found out about the old house in Connecticut. The place was empty."

At least, Weston had a guess as to whose house it was.

"One man now has full control of the most famous of Egyptian secrets," declared Weston. "That secret is the formula for hardening bronze to the extent of steel. The man who holds that secret is Professor Rufus Parrish. The house shown in the picture was rented by a man who answers to the description of Professor Parrish."

The lights were turned on while the commissioner spoke and he was facing three men: Edwin Albersham, Geoffrey Barstow and Arnold Curvin. Upon these three depended the corroboration of Weston's statement.

"You are right, commissioner," stated Albersham, in his crisp fashion. "Right insofar as Parrish is the one man who plucked the secret from an Egyptian tomb and still lives to prove the fact."

"But he sold the formula to us," reminded Barstow, his booming tone emphatic. "We have full rights to it, where Parrish is concerned. We paid half a million dollars to Parrish for that formula."

"We offered a full million for exclusive rights," added Curvin. "But there were others who knew the same secret. We were negotiating with them when they unfortunately passed beyond our reach."

Beyond reach was correct.

Hugo Zerland, Roger Yelvin, Louis Rendorff, had all vanished from the scene, wiped out by the murderous hand of Thoth.

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"As I understand it," stated Weston, "Professor Parrish could now claim another half million on the basis of exclusive ownership?"

There were nods from the members of ABC Industries. Then Albersham spoke for the group.

"Parrish would have to prove the fact, of course," said Albersham. "We know that Zerland had a papyrus which told the full secret. Yelvin showed us papers that amounted to the same. Rendorff apparently was trusting to his memory of something that he had deciphered in an ancient Egyptian tomb. But all are gone except Parrish."

"Let Parrish try to claim their shares," decided Weston, grimly. "First he will have to state his whereabouts. When he does, we shall question him regarding the Thoth murders."

Exchanging glances, the members of ABC finally shook their heads. Again, it was Albersham who acted as spokesman for the trio.

"We are not sure that Parrish was the murderer," declared Albersham. After all, he did not invent the story regarding the Curse of Thoth. There may be someone in New York who came from Egypt –"

"And I'm looking for someone who came from Connecticut," interrupted Weston. "I mean Professor Parrish. He was seen at that house of his until the day before the Thoth murders and he hasn't been seen since."

Summarily Weston waved for the room lights to be turned off. That done, the projector was focused on the screen and a still picture was projected there. It was a close-up of a face that would have been cadaverous, except for its thick, bushy beard.

"Professor Parrish," identified Weston. "We'll know him even if he shaved his beard. Here is another portrait of him, taken a few years ago in Cairo."

The projector clicked and Parrish's picture was revealed without the beard. Unbushy, the professor was a sly-looking customer, the thinness of his features giving a sharp, shrewd look to his eyes.

After everyone had seen enough of Parrish to remember him with or without the whiskers, Weston called for the room lights again. Lights on, he summarized the evidence at hand, beginning with the clues to Parrish's progress during the round of crime, as maneuvered by Thoth.

"A bearded man occupied this seat on the train from New Haven," announced Weston, showing the Pullman stub. "The ticket to the theater matinee" – Weston picked up the seat check – "was called for by a bearded man and it was in the name of Parrish.

"Nobody used the restaurant reservation," Weston continued, "which wasn't surprising considering that Thoth had then begun his rampage. Reservation cards of this type are mailed to out-of-town customers and we find that the name of Rufus Parrish was on the restaurant's list.

"And finally" – Weston was displaying the garage ticket from Harrison – "the car that was left was driven by a bearded man, who never called for it. Parrish must have realized that he dropped the garage receipt in the baggage car. He was too smart to pick up his automobile."

Having thus identified Parrish with the chain of Thoth murders, Weston reviewed the exhibits in each case. First the beads and the chunk of sleeve that had been ripped from Thoth when he murdered Zerland; next, the bracelet grabbed when Yelvin was killed; finally, the claw-glove that Rex, the bulldog, had acquired over the

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dead body of Rendorff, his master.

There was one more exhibit that Weston regarded as highly consequential. It was the trunk in which Curvin had been found helpless, locked inside by Thoth.

"This trunk was purchased by Professor Parrish," asserted Weston. "It was delivered to an address only a few blocks from the ABC office, about a week ago. It was left in a room where there already was an older trunk, the one in which Parrish later traveled as Thoth.

"Obviously this trunk was intended to carry some victim. Our theory is that Parrish originally planned to stow Rendorff's body in it, after murdering him in the baggage car. Then, Parrish – I suppose that technically we should still refer to him as Thoth – could have continued his journey in the other trunk.

"Plans were changed because of Curvin. Obviously Parrish could not have left him in that place so near the ABC office. A truck was supposed to pick up the trunks and did. The truckmen might have seen Curvin or we might have found him while searching the neighborhood. So Parrish took Curvin along."

From a table, Weston took a candle, lighted it, and used it to show the interior of the trunk. Why the commissioner preferred a candle to a flashlight was to be demonstrated later. For the present he was using the candle to prove that the trunk was of standard pattern and entirely solid. Its interior hinges were strong; its lock was bolted to the trunk in the usual fashion.

Lowering the candle, Weston used its wax to stick it upright in the bottom of the trunk. Leaving the candle lighted, he closed the trunk lid. Then Weston announced:

"We have checked the time at which that trunk was delivered at the Pennsylvania Station for shipment on the Southern Special. From that time it was not opened until it reached Newark. Within that period the candle flame will be extinguished for lack of oxygen, since this trunk is air-tight.

"My demonstration will therefore prove that Parrish intended to dispose of Curvin as ruthlessly as his other victims; that only through good fortune did Curvin survive. It will go far, this test, to support our claim that all of Thoth's crimes were premeditated."

Stepping to another table, Weston pointed to the three bronze knives of Thoth, lying in a row, each labeled with the name of the victim it had slain. Beside the knife marked Zerland lay the beads and portion of sleeve cloth torn from Thoth's costume. With the knife that showed Yelvin's label was the bracelet that Thoth had lost. Finally, the knife that had killed Rendorff was accompanied by the claw-decorated glove that Rex had worried.

The knives, however, concerned Weston more than their companion exhibits.

"These daggers," declared Weston, "are all fashioned from ancient Egyptian bronze, of a quality as hard as steel. That is, they are composed of the very alloy with which Professor Parrish experimented and they were manufactured by the process which he discovered. We need only to compare them with samples of ancient bronze which were actually supplied by Parrish and our case is complete."

Albersham, Barstow and Curvin had such samples, brought from the ABC safe.

There were cups, bowls, curious coins and medallions, even a bronze hand mirror that gave an excellent reflection from its polished surface.

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"The mirror was not given to us by Professor Parrish," stated Albersham. "It was loaned by Doctor Tabrok of the Egyptian Museum. We went to the museum with Parrish and asked for some sample of ancient bronze, for purposes of comparison. You have heard of Nilgon Tabrok, of course. He is curator of the museum and an authority on Egyptian antiquities."

While Weston was nodding, his friend Cranston took the mirror and turned it over. On the reverse, Cranston saw a hieroglyphic inscription. Cranston's interest in the symbols intrigued the others.

It was Barstow who asked:

"Can you decipher it?"

"Something about the wisdom of Isis," translated Cranston. "It states that the wisdom of Isis will be spoken to Thoth on the night when the moon is banished from the Nile; that, as in this mirror, all truth will be seen and told."

"If it has to do with Thoth," decided Weston, "we should talk to Doctor Tabrok about it. How late is the museum open?"

"Until nine o'clock," recalled Barstow, "but Doctor Tabrok will probably be there later."

"We can go to the museum after we complete the candle test," decided Weston, looking at the trunk and consulting his watch. "We should arrive there just about nine."

Cranston was out of the conversation now and his eyes had taken on a reflective stare, though not toward the bronze mirror. His gaze was far away.

Only one person present observed that distant stare. That person was Harry Vincent. A moment later, Harry's eyes met those of Lamont Cranston.

While Commissioner Weston continued his harangue on crime and the way it could be solved, the members of the ABC corporation listened patiently and respectfully, as did Inspector Joe Cardona.

But now the commissioner had two less listeners. Lamont Cranston and Harry Vincent were gone.

CHAPTER XVII

OUTSIDE the Cobalt Club, Lamont Cranston gave an idle gesture toward the corner and Harry Vincent sauntered that direction with him. This was unusual. Generally upon leaving the Cobalt Club, they either took Cranston's limousine or Shrevvy's cab and sometimes one took each.

Both vehicles were handy tonight, but Cranston wanted neither. He undertoned why, as they walked along.

"Your intuition is reasonably keen, Vincent," commended Cranston. "Have you noticed yourself being watched or followed during the past three days?"

Harry almost stopped short.

"Why, no."

"If you haven't been," decided Cranston, "you should have."

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"But why?" queried Harry. "And by whom?"

"Because you were more or less on the trail of the Thoth murders," explained Cranston, taking the questions in turn, "and the person who once put you into temporary trouble might want to know what you intend to do about it."

Harry's thoughts shot back to his altercation with the station detectives at the Pennsy train gate, a matter which had been straightened eventually, but too late for Harry to board the Southern Special and save Louis Rendorff from the fate that awaited him.

"You mean the Egyptian girl, Thelba!"

"Don't look now," undertoned Cranston. "In fact, don't look at all, but Thelba is trailing us from across the street. Specifically, she is trailing you."

That really startled Harry.

"At the corner light," continued Cranston, "stop and pretend to give me something from your pocket. Act warily when you do. Then start back to the club."

Harry nodded.

"Thelba should then switch the trail to me," Cranston added. "I want you to check to see if she does. You can trail her yourself, as long as you are sure she doesn't notice."

"But suppose she doesn't trail you?"

"In that case, go back to the club and report to Burbank, telling him that Thelba is still outside, watching for you. I shall contact Burbank later."

They were at the corner now and Harry was making the pretence of slipping some object to Cranston. Of course conversation was helpful to the little game, so Cranston supplied some.

"And if you do go back to the club," commented Cranston, "you might look through the morning newspapers to check an item regarding tonight's lunar eclipse."

"An eclipse of the moon?" queried Harry. "I didn't read anything about one."

"It won't be seen in New York," explained Cranston. "That's why it was only slightly mentioned. The full eclipse will be visible in the Mediterranean area, about the longitude of Cairo, Egypt."

With that, Cranston strolled away, and Harry turning back along the street, could still hear Cranston's earlier words ringing in his ears. The words that Cranston had spoken when he deciphered the hieroglyphs on the back of the ancient bronze mirror.

"The wisdom of Isis will be spoken to Thoth on the night when the moon is banished from the Nile –"

This was that night!

What it all meant, Harry didn't know, but it almost made him forget about Thelba. Maybe Cranston had intended it that way, for when Harry turned around and took another look at the corner, he found he'd timed it

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just right. A girl was turning the corner around which Cranston had gone and she wasn't bothering to take another glance in Harry's direction, so sure was she that he was really returning to the Cobalt Club.

One glance on Harry's part was sufficient to identify Thelba, even though he couldn't distinguish her ivory face at this distance.

There was something beautifully graceful in the girl's carriage and gait, something that didn't fit with the modern clothes she wore, even though her trim, well-molded dress, shoes with dashaway heels, and beret-hat were considered chic along Fifth Avenue.

Such attire handicapped Thelba, ruffling her natural flow, like rocks turning a smooth, swift stream into rapids. At any rate, it made her easy to pick out. Harry had spotted her at Penn Station and was sure he could now identify her in a crowd at a range of half a block.

So Harry trailed along, and away up ahead he saw Cranston, whose stroll too was conspicuous, but rapid in its own right, for Thelba was needing all her slinky speed to keep up with his pace.

This went on for several zigzag blocks until Cranston finally turned a corner.

Or did he turn it?

Cranston could have turned just short of the corner, but Thelba didn't realize it until she, herself, had taken the turn and come out upon a lighted avenue. Then the girl was scurrying back to the side street again and Harry was glad that he had nearly a half block's distance in this comparatively dim setting. Harry slid behind a big pair of convenient steps and watched.

Thelba was looking into a little basement entry where Cranston must have gone, but she saw no signs of him there. Where she didn't look was across the street where she might have caught a fleeting trace of the vanishing figure that had been Cranston.

Blackness was fading like vapor. Its only visible evidence was the way it streaked the sidewalk where a street lamp glared. A silhouette, roughly resembling a cloaked figure with a hawkish profile, literally trickled off into darkness and merged with the blackness of a house wall.

Lamont Cranston had become The Shadow.

Baffled, Thelba decided to cross the avenue and make a phone call from a drug store. From darkness, The Shadow watched and saw Harry Vincent follow her, still handling the trail cautiously.

A whispered laugh sounded in the gloom, when its echoes faded, The Shadow was gone. No need for him to contact Burbank; The Shadow knew that his agent, Harry Vincent, would be keeping on Thelba's trail.

Returning a block, The Shadow contacted Shrevvy's cab which had come along. A few moments later the cab was bearing its cloaked passenger to a new and intriguing destination. The cab finally stopped in front of a granite building that was bulky, massive, though not overlarge. The place looked like a museum and was.

It was the Egyptian Museum, A few minutes later, The Shadow was moving silent and unseen through a corridor of the museum, passing a few lazy attendants who were getting ready to close the place for the night.

Like human smoke, The Shadow's figure blurred the glass front of a lighted door that bore the word:

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CURATOR

Buzzing voices could be heard from within. They would have drowned the sound of the opening door, if necessary, but The Shadow opened the door in strictly silent fashion. From beneath his slouch hat, The Shadow's burning eyes surveyed the scene within the office.

Two men were seated opposite each other at the curator's big desk. One was the curator himself, Doctor Nilgon Tabrok. From his darkish face and full black eyes, Tabrok looked to be an Egyptian, but his nationality would have been difficult to distinguish, had his face not been so close to the light.

At that, not all of his face was visible, for Tabrok was bearded, and heavily, his beard matching his black hair. When he spoke, Tabrok used a tone that was low, precise, with only a slight trace of foreign accent.

The man across from Tabrok was bearded too, but his bushy adornment approached the ruddy. What was more, his beard did not hide the outline of his face, which showed thin, cadaverous, particularly when he tilted his head so that the light shone through his beard.

There was no doubt as to the identity of Tabrok's visitor. The Shadow, as Cranston, had seen this caller's picture, enlarged to reveal every detail, projected on a screen, only a short while ago.

The man with the ruddy beard was Professor Rufus Parrish, the man who had discovered the formula for ancient Egyptian bronze and until this moment, Candidate Number One for the unenviable title of the murderer, Thoth.

Perhaps Parrish was here to bestow that title upon Tabrok. Whether the latter would accept it was still an open question.

Whatever the answer, there would be one witness to the deal.

That witness was The Shadow!

CHAPTER XVIII

WHATEVER the objectives of this museum conference, the participants were at present mingling their discourse with accusations. Tabrok made one, accompanying his words with a side gesture of his hand.

"I received the Thoth costume," he declared. "It was nice of you to send it back. You will find it hanging in that closet."

"From which you took it," rasped Parrish, "wore it, used it, and put it back. I could not have sent you anything which I never had."

"Someone stole it from the costume room," argued Tabrok. "You said you wanted to wear it, so I gave you the benefit of supposing you had borrowed it."

"I did not want to wear it until tonight," retorted Parrish. "I told you that originally, Tabrok. You promised me the privilege."

"And I shall keep my promise."

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"No wonder, considering that you have personally given that costume a stigma even worse than the Curse of Thoth."

Tabrok gave a slight shrug.

"After all," he decided, "it is the only authentic Thoth costume in America. Someone must wear it during the ritual of the banished moon."

Parrish fairly leered through his beard.

"Why don't you wear it, Tabrok?"

"I shall," declared Tabrok, in precise fashion, "if you do not hold me to your promise. Then I shall be the Thoth who questions Isis regarding ancient science, that I may apply the knowledge that she gives me to the benefit of mankind."

This brought a scowl from Parrish.

"Suppose I play the part of Thoth," demanded Parrish. "How do I know that Isis will tell all she knows?"

"It is part of the ritual," returned Tabrok, solemnly, "but let me assure you, Parrish, this is ritual only. Humans who play the parts of deities do not necessarily share the secrets of the gods they represent."

"Then if Isis can not give me the formula, I can be sure she does not know it?"

"You can be sure."

"But does she know it?" demanded Parrish. "You should be able to tell me that, Tabrok."

"If I could, I would not. No one who ever played the part of Thoth in the ritual of the banished moon can reveal the questions that he asked nor the answers that he heard."

Parrish drove a heavy hand upon the desk. He was becoming impatient.

"I know your real game, Tabrok," Parrish stormed. "You came to America and took this job here purely at the instigation of a group in Egypt that wanted you to reclaim lost treasures from that land."

Tabrok bowed his acknowledgment and rather proudly.

"Believing in the curse of Thoth," continued Parrish, "you put it into practice, murdering three men who had delved too deeply into the hidden tombs of Egypt."

At that accusation, Tabrok's eyes opened until they glistened; but his speech remained calm.

"If such were the case," declared Tabrok, "I would have been wearing the robe of Thoth tonight, waiting with a bronze dagger to strike you down, Parrish. You, too, probed into places where you should not have gone. If you believed me to be a murderer, you would not have dared come here tonight."

"Why not?" sneered Parrish. "Considering how thoroughly you framed me, the very day after I left Connecticut. You can't afford to kill me, Tabrok. I am what in every ancient ritual was called the scapegoat, the man who takes the blame for another's evil. I am to be your scapegoat where the law is concerned."

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This time, Tabrok accepted the outburst quite mildly, almost philosophically.

"At least your argument is valid, Parrish," conceded Tabrok. "I must admit that I did not fear your visit here, because I felt that despite your previous murders, you could not afford to kill me. In order to clear yourself of your crimes, you would have to place the blame on someone. I was to be your scapegoat; in fact, I still am."

Parrish's head tilted very wisely.

"If you think you can prove my guilt," asked Parrish, "why haven't you told the law you expected me here?"

"Because you wouldn't have come if the museum had been watched," returned Tabrok. "Besides, I already promised you the privilege of playing Thoth in tonight's ritual. I can not denounce you until I have fulfilled my promise."

Rising from the desk, Parrish went to the closet that Tabrok had indicated. Opening the door, he found the regalia of Thoth, the damaged costume with its missing beads, torn sleeve, lost bracelet and glove. Hauling it out, ibis mask and all, Parrish stared hard at Tabrok.

"It is worth the chance," decided Parrish. "As Thoth – and mark you, this is the only time that I have ever played the part – I shall speak to Isis. I know you will keep your word, Tabrok, because your loyalty to ancient Egypt constitutes your only law of justice."

"My first law," corrected Tabrok, stiffly. "I recognize my modern obligations, but only after my pledge to ancient tradition has been fulfilled."

There were others who believed as Doctor Tabrok did and one such person was the Egyptian girl, Thelba. Still on the trail, Harry Vincent had observed that Thelba's interest in trying to trace Cranston had been postponed, that the girl, keeping to a rapid pace, was obviously on her way to some more important appointment.

And now she had reached that destination. Without glancing back, Thelba glided up a pair of granite steps into a great bulking building that swallowed her within its gray walls. Without hesitation, Harry followed, and in a corridor that passed an exhibit room, he realized that he was inside the Egyptian Museum.

The question was, which way had Thelba gone?

Eliminating the exhibit rooms, Harry took a side corridor, chose another turn that looked logical, paused at a corner while he watched an attendant go the other way. Proceeding further, Harry found himself in front of a pair of brass gates which represented the entrance of a miniature Egyptian temple.

The gates failed to budge when Harry tried them and looking elsewhere, he saw a narrow flight of stone stairs that led downward. Deciding that Thelba might have gone that way, Harry followed, realizing however that the girl had now gained a few minutes start.

The time Thelba had gained was increased after Harry found himself in a stretch of cellar at the bottom of the steps. The place was a dead end and it was apparently a storage room, but the only object large enough to possibly hide Thelba was an upright mummy case standing against one wall.

Producing an automatic that he had been carrying since the night of the Thoth murders, Harry tried the mummy case. It was locked and trickily, but Harry had learned some of The Shadow's methods of probing for hidden catches. He found one at last and as the door of the mummy case groaned open, Harry sprang back,

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covering the interior with his gun.

Harry half-expected to find Thelba lurking there, but if a mummy had toppled out, he wouldn't have been surprised. What he did discover left him rather baffled. Harry had guessed right about Thelba entering the mummy case but once inside, she had completely vanished.

The proof was that Thelba had disappeared right out of her modern attire, for hanging in the mummy case Harry saw the sleek blue dress, the pert hat, the dashaway shoes and other accouterments that represented a complete modern garb, no matter what the nationality of the feminine wearer, nor her antiquity.

If Thelba had whisked away on a time trip back through the ages, Harry was as wishing her a happy landing in the wardrobe closet of some ancient Egyptian princess. Then the very incongruity of that mental opinion produced a more tangible idea.

That was what this mummy case was, a wardrobe closet. Now that Thelba was identified with the Egyptian Museum, it was logical that she would have some place where she could hang spare clothes. But why she was sparing these, Harry couldn't understand, since so far she'd been connected with matters entirely outside the museum.

Maybe Thelma had decided to wrap herself in a mummy shroud and go around the museum scaring out the patrons, but that seemed ridiculous to Harry on second thought and, besides, Thelba wouldn't have had time to do herself up in mummy trappings. In fact, Harry was beginning to wonder if she'd had time to get out of these modern things let alone climb into something else.

Then Harry was sure he had it. This was Thelba's wardrobe closet, all right, but the clothes were just an extra outfit, similar enough to deceive anyone who discovered them. Thelba must have known that Harry was following her and had purposely decoyed him down to this dead-end, after sliding away somewhere along the route. The idea was to leave him really mystified and in the silence of the museum, Harry realized that the sense of the uncanny was prevalent enough to impress the average person into believing the impossible.

In fact, Harry's own first thoughts had been fantastic, along the lines that Thelba might be a living mummy who had crumbled away to dust in this appropriate mummy case. Harry took hold of the door to close the mummy case; then he noticed something odd.

The mummy case hadn't tilted an inch. It didn't even sway when the door was moved. The mummy case couldn't because it was fixed firmly to the wall; in fact, considering its depth, the back of the mummy case might be part of the wall!

Removing the dress, Harry tossed it over the case and began to probe the interior. Along the back wall, he found another catch that gave and the wall began to turn like a panel. It was quite wide, the mummy case, though rather low for Harry, but he went through the space quite easily, stooping to make faster progress.

The panel finished a full revolution as Harry reached the other side. Immediately he was engulfed in complete darkness. Striking a match, Harry found himself in a stone-walled room, with a pair of narrow brass doors opening at the other side.

This was actually the ante-room to what was technically known as an adytum. Every ancient Egyptian temple had an adytum, or concealed chamber beneath it, but Harry didn't know he was under the upstairs temple. He tried the brass doors and they yielded, pushing inward but under considerable pressure.

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As Harry practically plunged into a much larger stone-walled room, the brass doors clanged suddenly behind him. Ending his stumble, Harry stared through dim light to an alcove at the far wall of the adytum.

There, seated in a vaguely outlined throne, Harry saw an ivory statue in the perfect pose of an Egyptian goddess. Its form was lithe, of human size and the statue's hands lay palms flat on the low arms of the throne at each side of the figure's tight-pressed knees.

The face looked more stone than ivory; in fact as Harry approached, he decided that the statue must be carved from a single block of marble because the face, staring straight ahead, had all the stony expression of an Egyptian sphinx.

Then Harry remembered that the face of Thelba had worn a sphinx expression too!

Perhaps the statue was the girl changed to stone!

As though tuned to Harry's fantastic thought, the strange, dim artificial light began to waver and with it, the whole room seemed to sway. Half way across the adytum, Harry turned and his knees kept sagging under him as he scrambled to gain the brass doors. They had handles, those doors, but though he pulled with all his might, Harry couldn't budge them.

The room seemed to be revolving now – or was it Harry's brain? He could hear a fierce hissing, seemingly from nowhere, and invisible hands seemed to be laying their clamp upon him.

Then something came out of nowhere and thwacked Harry's shoulder with a force that would have flattened him, if he hadn't been flat already. The thing that hit him was the stone floor.

With that, the pressure ended. Reaching up numbly, Harry managed to grip the handles and pull them. The doors yielded inward, drawing him to his feet. As he reeled from this chamber of fantasy and terror, Harry looked back across the adytum.

Apparently, all had been delusion. The singular statue, whether human or stone, had vanished!

CHAPTER XIX

A MUCH tattered and bedraggled Thoth stood in the center of the museum temple, gazing at the alcove at the opposite wall, where clouds of incense were coiling from large burners and joining in fantastic fashion to form a wavering curtain.

Here the lights were stronger than in the room below and Professor Parrish, staring through the eye holes of the bird mask, could view the scene quite clearly, except for the smoke. As Thoth, he looked like someone whose eyes could pierce any veil, but that was merely a superficial appearance.

Out of the swirl of smoke appeared a vague figure around which the clouds of incense trailed, clinging thinly, like a veil. The sharp eyes behind the Thoth mask were watching for the mechanical cause of this, and the slight jarring motion of the figure's arrival explained the source.

A smaller inner throne had come up by elevator through the larger seat standing on the raised alcove. Despite the veiling incense, Parrish saw the figure's hands raise and move slightly to each side, to plant themselves on the wider arms of the larger throne.

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Air currents in the alcove kept drawing the incense clouds, so that the statue gained a wavery effect from the smoke that constantly clothed and obscured it. An average observer would have supposed that the statue was coming to life; but Parrish knew that it lived already.

Parrish, playing the part of Thoth, was meeting Thelba, playing the part of Isis. Boldly, Thoth drew a bronze knife from the belt of his tattered costume and raised it point upward, as a sign of welcome. Both hands of Isis raised, extended forward from the weave of smoke and turned palms upward, as though proffering gifts.

The voice of Thoth spoke. It was Parrish's voice, but it came hollow and deep, due to the mask. In return, Thelba's tone had a peculiar ring, gained from the echoing quality of the half-domed alcove. What they said was in Egyptian, and first these representatives of forgotten deities exchanged the formal greetings customary when their ruling spirit, the moon, was banished from the Land of the Nile.

Then came Thoth's questions.

He was asking Isis for advice in the ways of ancient science and the veiled goddess answered according to accepted rote. Quickly, Parrish came to the important question, the million dollar question.

"Tell me, O Isis," he spoke in the language of Thoth, "how may I teach my artisans to form a metal that will shine like gold, reflect like silver, and be as strong and sharp as steel?"

The mere fact that Parrish already held a dagger made of just such metal had no bearing on the answer that Thelba gave.

"It is thou, O Thoth," came the words of Isis, "who must fashion such a metal for thyself. I, Isis, can tell thee only that it is within the power of thy skill."

That was all Parrish needed to know. It meant that the secret formula of the wonder bronze had never been written into the ritual of the Egyptians. The formalities of Thoth and Isis meant nothing more to Parrish.

Thrusting away the bronze dagger, Parrish wheeled and strode straight to the temple doors, tugging them open as he arrived there. The sudden rush of air caused the incense smoke to sweep outward like a waving sheet and through that thinning film, Thelba, half rising in her astonishment, saw Parrish stop short, confronted by a group of men.

Instantly, the girl dropped her hands to the arms of the inner throne and pressed them. Only for an instant did the invaders glimpse the shapely vision in the alcove; then the smoke swirled back with a great gush, completely obscuring the throne as Thelba descended through the floor. The smoke cleared as the seat of the larger throne closed, since the suction had ended.

The throne was empty, but about the only person who cared was Harry Vincent. He had just arrived by the stairs from below and was learning that the happenings in the adytum were connected with the manifestations in the temple above it.

The other arrivals were thinking in terms of Thoth, not Isis.

Commissioner Weston and Inspector Cardona were the first to confront Thoth. With them was Doctor Tabrok, his bearded face distressed. Behind these were the firm of Albersham, Barstow and Curvin, all represented in person.

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Already Thoth had begun to throw back his bird mask, which was attached only to the back of the robe, like a cowl. He was too late to stop that action and his own face, or rather the face within the mask of Thoth, came suddenly in sight. Everyone recognized it, the glaring visage of Professor Rufus Parrish, his cadaverous cheeks for once showing ruddy, even through the rusty beard.

"They came here, Parrish!" asserted Tabrok. "I did not summon them – I swear!"

Out from his belt, Parrish had whipped the bronze knife. Even unmasked, he fulfilled the character of the murderous Thoth. His robe bore all the evidence; the missing beads, the torn sleeve, one bracelet gone, his right hand completely devoid of the glove it should have worn.

It was in that hand that Parrish gripped the knife and the lack of the Thoth gauntlet made the threat the more vicious. Tabrok spread his arms wide as though inviting a stab in the chest, should Parrish disbelieve his claim regarding the promise he had made.

But Parrish did not choose to stab.

Instead, he gave the dagger a wide sweep to ward off Weston and Cardona. Turning, he met Harry, who was still too wobbly to stop the swinging arm that flung him aside. As his old acquaintances from ABC tried to grab him, Parrish ripped clear away from them.

Albersham grabbed for the other bracelet, but his hands slipped from it. Barstow snatched at the remaining strings of beads and missed. Curvin grabbed the good sleeve and couldn't even get his nails in it. Maybe Rex could have bagged the other glove, but the bulldog wasn't with the party.

Loping down the corridor, Parrish slapped the ibis head back over his own, rather than have it cup the air and slow his progress. In his dash, however, he had too far to go. He was making himself a perfect target for Weston and Cardona, both of whom were drawing guns.

Then, before the commissioner and inspector could do more than aim, the flight of Thoth was halted by a lunging figure that literally appeared from nowhere. A moment later, the ibis-god was performing a mad kaleidoscopic dance with a cloaked fighter who had blocked him.

Cardona's shout echoed through the corridor:

"The Shadow!"

Here was a perfect ending to the murderous reign of Thoth! The Shadow, master of vengeance, taking the killer alive, proving that the Curse of Thoth would no longer hold for Rufus Parrish!

They whirled around the corner, that fighting pair, into one exhibit room and through it to another. Doors were slamming, mummy cases flattening, exhibit stands crashing. More than trifles, such obstacles were blocking the paths of all that followed.

When Weston and Cardona finally reached an inner exhibit room, they found its far door blocked with overturned debris. The Shadow and Thoth must have whirled on out through another passage, or upstairs to the floor above. There was nothing to do but go and hunt for them.

So Weston and Cardona thought, but others were gaining a better impression of how the fighters had fared. Around the corner of another corridor, Albersham suddenly raised a shout as he saw the figure of Thoth loping for another corner.

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Barstow and Curvin responded promptly. As they rounded the corner behind Albersham, they saw Harry Vincent cutting in from another passage. Harry was the first to see Thoth take a dive down a flight of narrow steps. Harry shouted quickly to the others.

"This way! It's a dead-end down there. We'll trap Parrish sure!"

Harry had forgotten that it wasn't quite a dead-end. He remembered the difference when he heard Thelba scream. Having finished the ritual, the girl had returned to the outer cellar to resume her modern garb. She'd put on the clothes that were in the mummy case and she was just sliding into the dress that she had found lying across it, when Thoth, who belonged to antiquity, came barging into Thelba's modern life.

Sight of Thoth, bronze knife waving, nearly petrified the girl who was no longer Isis, but she tried to slide back through the mummy case. Too late, Thelba was overtaken just as she clicked the panel open and Thoth's hand caught the dangling dress and whipped it from the mummy case, Thelba coming with it, before the dress could rip from her shoulders.

Flinging himself into the struggle, Harry wrested Thelba away from Thoth and sent the girl spinning to a corner, where she landed safely, just in time to see Harry receive a flattening jolt from the door of the mummy case as Thoth flung it outward.

Then Thoth was through the panel leading to the little room outside the adytum, while Harry, sagged by the wallop of the door, was groggily watching Albersham, Barstow and Curvin continue the chase that he had initiated.

Echoes of the chase floated out through the mummy case, then were silenced by the clang of the bronze doors beyond the little ante-room. Three pursuers had followed Thoth into the adytum.

There, in the dim light, the strangest of all struggles was under way. Three men were pouncing upon the fugitive Thoth. Albersham had a gun, borrowed from Cardona. Barstow was carrying one on a permit that Weston had given him. Curvin had gained a lucky weapon, Thoth's bronze knife, for three hands had wrenched Thoth's arm all at once, causing him to drop the blade.

Yet out of the triple clutch, Thoth vanished!

Amazing, yet simple.

The big mask dipping forward, Thoth's costume had been over-weighted under the haul of his foemen. They'd peeled the costume right off him, mask and all. As the regalia collapsed, three men looked madly about, but saw no sign of Parrish in the dimness.

A peculiar hissing began to pervade the chamber. Anxiously, Curvin let his partners look about while he went back to open the brass doors, hoping to summon other searchers.

Curvin met with Harry's experience; the doors wouldn't open. He tugged harder, viciously, until Albersham and Barstow turned to look. There was nothing feeble now about Curvin, the man whose hands were usually so shaky, but neither Albersham nor Barstow seemed surprised by the fact.

Nor did the other occupant of the strange room.

Amid the hissing came a sinister laugh that rose and quivered from the echoing walls of that ancient adytum. Three men turned to face the alcove where the throne stood. Instead of the white figure of Isis, they saw a

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black shape, which by its lack of motion gradually developed into the figure of a man who wore a black cloak and slouch hat.

It wasn't Parrish who had been wearing the Thoth costume on the final leg of the flight. The professor had been divested of that outfit somewhere back along the whirling path.

The person who had finally slipped the costume was The Shadow. From the lesser throne of Isis, he was prepared to solve the riddle behind the Curse of Thoth!

CHAPTER XX

THREE men faced the secret throne, two with guns, one with a knife. Albersham, Barstow and Curvin were hearing the judgment of The Shadow, whose voice was carrying, by an ancient system of acoustics, to the strange temple just above.

So would other voices carry, though their owners did not know it.

"The trail of Thoth is ended," spoke The Shadow. "You came here, hoping to overwhelm Parrish and give him a murderer's death. You were confident that the world would justify you, because the world would believe that you had found Thoth.

"On the contrary, I am the one who has found Thoth. The costume that lies before you is the symbol of triple perfidy, which each of you has worn in turn. You sought to divide the blame between two men: Doctor Tabrok, who believed in the Curse of Thoth, and Professor Parrish, who has discovered the secret of ancient bronze and was naturally jealous of it.

"Yet neither Tabrok nor Parrish would deal in murder. Each merely thought the other would. That fact, known to all of you, made it simple for you to build a false trail that would lead to one or the other and increase their mutual distrust."

There was a pause. Not one of the three listeners had budged. They were spread, with Albersham and Barstow at the flanks, each with a drawn gun; Curvin was standing in the center, fronting the brass doors, clutching the only Thoth knife that had not yet done murder.

Perhaps that was why Curvin felt he should become spokesman for the three.

"Parrish has proven his own guilt," sneered Curvin. "After all, he was the only person who could gain by eliminating others who knew his secret. Once he could prove it was exclusive, we were ready to double his price. His was the chief interest."

The Shadow's laugh had a sinister tone that was meant for all three listeners.

"Yours was the chief interest," corrected The Shadow. "The other men who held the secret could demand any price, or else sell out to your competitors. The question of who eliminated those men is as simple as A B C.

"As for Parrish, he could never collect his double price if he became a fugitive or was brought to justice. Better still, you saw your opportunity to treat him as a fugitive killer and dispose of him yourselves."

All this was striking home to the three murderers, but they still felt strong through numbers. It was Albersham who demanded:

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"How could anyone accuse me of murder?"

"Someone already has," reminded The Shadow. "Inspector Cardona suspected you of killing Zerland, which you did. Can you supply an alibi, Albersham, for the exact time when Hugo Zerland was murdered –"

It wasn't a query, that last phrase of The Shadow's. It came with the tone of an accusation. Barstow quickly picked up the argument.

"I was there when Zerland died," began Barstow. "I helped hunt for the murderer –"

"You became the murderer," interposed The Shadow. "Your car was in back of the apartment house so Albersham could plant the Thoth costume in it; you took the car and became Thoth yourself. You went to Yelvin's and ransacked his papers, to make sure he had left no vital information there.

"Then you sped to your own office, after showing yourself as Thoth. You knew that Yelvin had an appointment, something which all of you concealed. You hammered at your office door and while Curvin faked trouble with the lock, you doubled around and murdered Roger Yelvin."

So simply did The Shadow state the case that other factors dropped in line, such as the fact that Albersham and Curvin had seated Yelvin right where he would be ready for Barstow's knife. But The Shadow had another clincher that would settle Barstow.

"It was odd, Barstow," declared The Shadow, "that Thoth should out-race you to Yelvin's home, yet you outdistanced him from there to your office. Your own running time was just nicely better than average, which only emphasizes the discrepancy in Thoth's. When both are checked again, yours will reveal its flaws, once you are considered in terms of Thoth."

Curvin's snarl came straight to the throne.

"Examine my case," challenged Curvin. "You will find it air tight."

"You mean the trunk is air tight," spoke The Shadow. "That alone condemns you, Curvin. Even a candle failed to burn out the time you were supposed to be in that trunk and you would have consumed more air.

"Barstow passed the Thoth costume along to you, there outside your office. You had two trunks in a waiting truck and one of them was for yourself – as Troth. That was the trunk you opened when you murdered Louis Rendorff. That trunk was never locked; while in it, you could get air whenever you needed it."

"But the other trunk was locked," scoffed Curvin. "That was where they found me at the finish. How could I have gotten into that?"

"Quite easily," returned The Shadow. "The lock was fitted to the trunk with a bolt, as with most trunks. You had taken the nut from the end of the bolt inside the trunk. That enabled you to open the lock, bolt and all.

"Once inside, you closed the trunk lid, drew the bolt through with a shoelace already attached, and screwed the nut in place. You pretended to revive at a most timely moment, when people were around to unlock the trunk. But persons stuffed in trunks don't begin to revive until they are taken out. You forgot that, Curvin. Your sham alibi was the weakest of all three."

Curvin's fists were clenching, one around the knife handle. Mention of weakness reminded him of another part that he had played, that business with the palsied hands. He'd done it to make himself look incapable of

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murder.

Now The Shadow was mocking at Curvin's device.

"Strong hands, Curvin," approved The Shadow, "but not strong enough to rip the sleeve of Thoth's costume. Vincent failed, when he tried. You faked that costume nicely" – The Shadow's sweeping gaze was taking in all three culprits – "after you stole it from this museum.

"Beads were loosened, sleeve was cut, bracelet was broken, all beforehand. But the smartest trick was when Curvin hid the costume without even wearing it. First, though, he ripped off one gauntlet, to take along for Rex, knowing that the dog would be in the baggage car, where Rendorff always visited him."

The Shadow didn't have to add that murderers three had simply shipped the costume back to the museum later, knowing that Tabrok would think that Parrish had boldly sent it there. In fact, The Shadow seemed tired from his summary of the case, for his voice was coming slower.

That roused the three to action. They, too, were feeling the oppressive atmosphere of this ancient vault. Now, to a man, they were thinking in terms of murdering The Shadow and packing him back in the Thoth costume, so their story would still stand.

With one accord they launched themselves at The Shadow, Albersham and Barstow veering wide to gain the vantage of the alcove edge, before blasting shots at close range; while Curvin, stooped low, started a straight dart toward the cloaked figure in the throne.

The Shadow did not reach for a gun. It wasn't necessary. He watched while invisible hands seemed to stop the drive of his attackers, rearing them back, so they staggered, clawing the air wildly as they panted, going dizzy like men overpowered by the bends in a compression chamber.

For that was what this adytum was, a compression chamber. Harry Vincent had met with the same experience when he had moved too rapidly under pressure of the packing air. Now three murderers had exerted themselves more vehemently at a time when The Shadow had purposely let the pressure grow even greater.

Like Thelba, The Shadow had remained immobile, gauging his breath carefully, while the air compressed through holes leading in from the walls and ceiling. Common to all ancient temples, those holes were sometimes used as speaking tubes to carry voices through the temple, but this place had a separate acoustical arrangement.

Here, the compression in the adytum was used to operate the mechanism, showing that the Egyptians really were inventors. The Shadow released the mechanism now, by pressing the two arms of the throne.

The Shadow did not arrive slowly amid the temple smoke as Isis had. Under the punch of that greater pressure, he literally scaled from the large fixed throne when the smaller one encountered it and stopped short. Landing on his feet, The Shadow saw figures rushing from the temple.

Commissioner Weston and Inspector Cardona had heard all. With them was Doctor Tabrok, who was showing them the way to the stairs, so that they could gather in the murderers. Only there was no need for rush. The three murderers would be a long time recuperating from the treatment The Shadow had so artfully given them; in fact, there was a chance that one or more might succumb.

At the stairs, The Shadow met Harry and Thelba coming up. He gestured them along a passage to an exhibit room, where he opened the door. They stood outside of the debris which had blocked Weston and Cardona

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during their rush. There, beneath an arch formed by two mummy cases, was Professor Parrish, stroking his beard and wondering what had hit the jaw beneath it.

While Thelba was telling Parrish that his innocence had been established, The Shadow concluded a few instructions to Harry.

"Suggest a complete search of the ABC office," The Shadow ordered. "I think the commissioner will find some extra correspondence, proving that the murderers had gone further than they told us, in negotiations with Yelvin and particularly with Rendorff.

"With Zerland, they only had to rig the cable to his apartment, but they unquestionably had an appointment with Yelvin and they must have known Rendorff's whereabouts as well as the time he intended to leave New York.

"And in the safe, you may even find the false beards that they used when they framed that too-perfect trail leading all the way from Connecticut to New Jersey. Even if Parrish could have proved the trail was planted, the blame would have fallen on Tabrok. He has a beard too."

With that, The Shadow was gone and Harry was reminded of the beards when Doctor Tabrok arrived a moment later to extend a congratulatory hand to Professor Parrish, as the latter crawled up from beneath the debris where The Shadow, by a timely punch, had settled him until he could safely return to circulation.

Parrish was grateful toward The Shadow now and so was Doctor Tabrok. Both paused and tilted their bearded faces with smiles, as a strange laugh echoed back through the museum.

Weston and Cardona heard the weird mirth too, as they were dragging three feeble, helpless murderers up from the museum cellar. If Albersham, Barstow or Curvin heard it, they probably mistook it for some uncanny echo from the past.

In a sense it was from the past, that parting laugh of The Shadow. For it dispelled belief in a thing which had never existed and which The Shadow had discredited from the start, but had needed time to disprove.

That was the Curse of Thoth, a myth that The Shadow's might had banished forever!

THE END