



VOODOO DEATH

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CHAPTER I

THERE was a hunted look in the gray eyes that stared from above the upturned collar of the raincoat; eyes as nervous as their owner, whose manner was that of a man lost in a jungle and a prey to all its terrors.

Yet the scene was Manhattan in daylight, a trifle gloomy from the clouds that were pelting rain along the side street where the scared man halted, but with nothing sinister enough to induce such fright. True, the neighborhood was dilapidated, its houses so old that they seemed to stand only because they were built in a solid row; nevertheless the street lacked hiding places where enemies could lurk.

Nor were there any pedestrians except the hunted man himself. The scared eyes took in that detail as they darted from left to right, but they lost none of their fear. There was something rabbitish in the man's manner, for when he heard a muffled rumble, he bounded up some steps and into the doorway of the house where he had paused.

The rumble came from the East Side elevated, the last relic of such transportation in Manhattan. The elevated structure followed the avenue at the end of this block and just as the scared man hopped from sight an express clattered into view along the central track. At that distance the passengers couldn't have identified the hunted man, but he wasn't taking any chances on being seen. It wasn't until the train had

rattled into the distance that he poked his eyes and thin-bridged nose out from the doorway for another quick look; then, as rapidly, he was back into his chosen burrow.

It was actually dark in that doorway, so gloomy that the man had to strike a match with his trembling hands to read the names that were listed on the board. After three attempts, the flame finally flickered and showed a button above a single, pen-printed name:

MacAbre

Steadying his finger, the man in the muffler pressed the button. As instantly as if someone had been waiting for this visit, there came a clack-clack from the automatic latch. Thrusting the door open, the hunted man hurried to a flight of stairs and ascended them, unmindful of the creaks that followed him like ghostly footsteps.

At the top was an open door, the entrance to a rear apartment. Within stood a dapper man whose mustached face looked very dark in the dim light. When the visitor hesitated, his eyes showing a worried lack of recognition, the dapper man inquired:

"You have come to see the antiques?"

"No." The visitor's tone was low and forced. "I have come to see Professor MacAbre."

"Ah, oui. Le professeur has said that he expected someone. And your name?"

"The professor already knows it."

As with the push button, the response was simultaneous. Across a room stocked with rare old furniture and other antiques, a door opened suddenly to reveal a stooped man whose long hair seemed to crowd his shoulders. In the dim light his face wore what could be mistaken for a smile, since his opening lips cackled a chortled welcome. But that smile was a mask, as the visitor knew from previous experience and could see again as he approached the far door.

In contrast to the watery gray of the visitor's hunted eyes, Professor MacAbre had a gaze that carried a searing force. His eyes, black as coals, were hard in their glisten and so deep in their sockets that they seemed to belong in a face beneath his own.

Indeed, there was a change in MacAbre's chortle as he bowed his visitor into a square-walled inner room and closed the door. The tone was harsh, in keeping with those eyes of jet, yet withal it still carried welcome. This customer was a man to MacAbre's liking.

Coincident with the closing of the door, a burst of flame came from the center of the room. The visitor dropped back startled; then forced a laugh, for he had seen this trick before. Though the flame kindled itself into a crackling fire, the whole arrangement was artificial, produced by imitation logs set teepee fashion above an electrical device that combined a heating coil with incandescents set among the logs. How this produced the effect of actual flames was something too complicated for the visitor to analyze; nevertheless, he became more at ease.

It was Professor MacAbre's turn to laugh.

"So simple, is it not?" MacAbre put the question in a chortled purr. "Yet it is a replica of the voodoo fire that inspires spells too great for humans to resist!"

MacAbre was facing his visitor across the artificial flame that provided the only illumination in the room. The professor's black eyes were vivid, for they had enlarged to show the whites around them. In return,

gray eyes were frozen as though their watery content had become ice, and their hunted expression had congealed with them.

"I have brought my voodoo magic with me." In the flickering glow, MacAbre's smile was definitely a leer. "Brought it from the jungle where the rite is practiced along with all the atmosphere that gives it power!"

There was a broad, high sweep of the professor's arm, his long-nailed fingers barely missing the hanging pendants of a great glass chandelier that was reflecting the artificial firelight from directly above. As though by magic, there came the thrum of muffled tom-toms and of a sudden, the surrounding walls were transformed into a jungle setting where female dancers whirled in voodoo rhythm.

It was still illusion, for these were motion pictures, but the life-size figures and the full-color background transplanted MacAbre's visitor into a state of mental realism. Gray eyes roved these living walls, while the recorded beats of the tom-toms were augmented by the clatter of anklets and bracelets which flashed from the lithe limbs of the mad dancers.

Professor MacAbre had turned the room into a contorted cyclorama brought straight from a Haitian jungle through the man-made magic of the camera.

"This is the spell of voodoo," spoke MacAbre, in a convincing purr. "The longer it lasts, the more you will understand - and believe."

His eyes no longer hunted, the visitor still stared at the dusky shapes that stirred the jungle green. The flash of the gold bangles was capturing him with a hypnotic effect. MacAbre leaned closer across the artificial fire.

"You have spoken of persons who bar your path to wealth," reminded MacAbre. "You have asked if I can dispose of them one by one, through voodoo forces that can never be traced. I have named my price. Are you prepared for the first test?"

With a wrench, the visitor brought his eyes from the captivating walls. Fumbling in his raincoat, he brought out a packet of money and handed it to MacAbre, adding in a hoarse whisper:

"Ten thousand dollars."

"Take this in return." From the robe that he was wearing, Professor MacAbre produced a small figure of hardened wax, dressed in an old fashioned frock coat and striped trousers. He handed it to his visitor who stared amazed at the face above the miniature Piccadilly collar and thread-like necktie.

"Why - why it looks like -"

"Of course," said MacAbre in a tone that was low, but harsh. "You wished it to represent this man. He is your first obstacle."

"But if anything happens to him -"

"It will be through Voodoo," supplied the arch-professor. "But the world will find a more convenient explanation. They will blame it on the Tarn Emerald."

"You mean they will believe the curse exists?"

"Why not?" MacAbre's chuckle was as dry as his gaze. "Only you and I will know what happened here. These witnesses will not see!"

By "witnesses" MacAbre meant the dancers, for he swept his hand around the walls. Gray eyes went fearful as they followed the professor's gesture, but once more the hypnotic effect took hold. Small wonder, for the rhythm had increased to a double beat of tom-toms and the abandon of the dance had reached the fanciful.

Sharp as a rifle came the crackled tone of the man who called himself Professor MacAbre:

"Break it!"

Caught by the madness of the moment, the visitor flung the waxen image to the floor, where it broke in half. The fracture was not visible, because of the doll's garments, but the fire-like flickers showed the change of angle between the head and feet of the figurine.

A sweep of MacAbre's hand ended the beat of the drums and as they silenced, the whirling pictures vanished with a final writhe. Taking his visitor by the arm, MacAbre guided him to the door by the flickery light. As the professor opened the door, the artificial fire automatically extinguished itself.

His face muffled in his coat collar, the visitor stumbled out through the antique shop like a man in a trance. Clutching the banister, he descended the stairs and continued out into the street. No longer was his manner furtive; rather, he seemed stunned as he shambled off into the rain like a panhandler seeking the shelter of the elevated.

Professor MacAbre was an interested witness to that departure. The Voodoo maker was watching from between two closed curtains of a front room window. Beside the professor stood the dapper, dark-faced man who had first received the visitor. The dapper man was watching the professor's hands as they thumbed through the stack of bank notes.

"We have made a good start, Fandor," declared MacAbre, as though he knew where his companion's interest lay. "A good start for all of us - and there will be more."

There, MacAbre paused, for the departed visitor was out of sight. Turning, the professor pressed the curtains tightly and added dryly:

"Much more."

From the cryptic tone in which MacAbre spoke, it seemed that the strange professor believed his Voodoo spell would be fulfilled!

CHAPTER II

NOBODY paid any attention to the armored truck that pulled up in front of the International Museum. Whenever the museum received collections of statuary or other bulky exhibits, the stuff always came in armored trucks.

Today, even the truck seemed superfluous, for there was nothing in it except two uniformed guards who stepped out when the driver opened the back door. All three went into the museum, which might have indicated that they intended to bring something out, but that guess was also wrong.

The men from the armored truck were bringing something very important to Doctor Gregg Henniman, curator of the International Museum. At that moment, Henniman was discussing the subject with two visitors in his office.

"I am honestly sorry!" declared Henniman, with a nod of his white haired head. "Honestly sorry that my relatives are not here to congratulate me upon my good fortune. That is" - he faced a visitor and turned

the nod into a bow - "with the exception of you, Rex."

A slow smile spread itself across the broad features of Rex Tarn. It was the sort of smile that Margo Lane didn't like, for it carried a "know-it-all" expression. Perhaps Margo exaggerated that point because she knew Rex Tarn and was therefore prejudiced. For Rex, once a wealthy playboy, still considered himself somebody of importance despite the fact that his only ability had been the squandering of a fairly sizable fortune upon a batch of worthless acquaintances who were already deserting him.

Yet, despite herself, Margo was forced to admit that Rex was rather handsome, for his keen gray eyes carried a friendly flash. Besides, he had his humorous moments.

"Maybe your relatives don't feel like congratulating you, Doctor," said Rex. "There are reasons, you know."

"Reasons?" Henniman's tone was querulous. "What reasons?"

"Approximately half a million," Rex estimated. "You can give the exact number after you count the dollars that you have inherited from the Tarn Estate."

"Money!" exclaimed Henniman. "Bah! All my relatives are wealthy, so why should they want more? Besides, they know that I intend to add the half million to the museum's endowment fund."

"And do you think they care about that? All they want is the cash - and more of it."

"Then you mean my relatives aren't my friends?"

"Did you ever hear of relatives that were?"

"Why, yes." Henniman took off his reading glasses and gave Rex a frank stare. "You appear to be a friend of mine."

"That's because we are very distant relatives," argued Rex. "So distant that we aren't relatives at all."

Margo Lane decided to take advantage of the pause. So far she hadn't managed to put in a word and the discussion was going further beyond her depth. It wasn't that Margo was dumb, because everyone, including Lamont Cranston, rated her with a high I.Q. - for a member of the brunette bracket. But Margo was beginning to wonder.

"Will you explain this double talk?" she queried. "When is a relative not a relative? When he is or isn't a Tarn?"

"It's very simple," explained Henniman, as he put his reading glasses in a case. "The Tarn Estate was left to the eldest of several possible heirs. I happen to be the eldest, even though my name is not Tarn."

"And the same applies to Numbers Two, and Three," put in Rex. "They are both Tarns on the maternal side, so their names don't happen to be Tarn."

"What about Number Four?" queried Margo. "Is he a Tarn?"

"Very much so," returned Rex, his gray eyes delivering an angry flash. "He happens to be my cousin, Alexander Tarn. Maybe you've heard of him."

Margo didn't recall Alexander Tarn, but Doctor Henniman did. Opening his spectacle case he again put on his tortoise-shell reading glasses and rummaged among a strew of papers that covered his desk.

"I have a letter from your cousin Alexander," Henniman told Rex. "Ah, here it is. He is like you, Rex, because he says that he will be glad to call here at the museum today. Unfortunately he has a luncheon appointment and can not arrive until afternoon. Nevertheless" - Henniman leaned back with a smile as he removed his glasses - "Alexander is more than anxious to view the celebrated Tarn Emerald."

"The Tarn Emerald!" A hunted look swept Rex's eyes as he came up from his chair. "You mean to say you have it here?"

"It is being delivered," returned Henniman blandly. "I have instructed the chief attendant to place it in the bullet-proof display case which contained the dinosaur egg that was here on loan."

"But you know what that emerald means! It has always brought misfortune to its owner! Why, it's - it's a -"

"A hoodoo?" laughed Henniman. "Nonsense. The term 'hoodoo' is as ridiculous as the word that rhymes with it, Voodoo. Indeed, according to their original definition, the two are synonyms." Placing the tortoise-shell glasses in the case, Henniman snapped the latter shut and gestured toward a large bookcase. "Look in the encyclopedia, Miss Lane, under the title 'Obeah' which covers all savage rituals."

Before Margo could comply, Rex Tarn interrupted. His eyes had a watery glint; his lips were quivering as he spoke to Henniman, whose only response was to sit back with folded hands and smile at Rex's intensity.

"It's more serious than you suppose," insisted Rex. "There's only one way to end that curse, Doctor Henniman. That's for us all to share the burden by dividing it."

"Break up the Tarn Emerald?" ejaculated Henniman. "Impossible! Why it is one of the largest and most magnificent gems of its kind!"

"I mean sell it," explained Rex. "Then divide the proceeds. You won't miss the difference, not with the half million that is coming your way."

Henniman's gaze sharpened to a degree that made Rex's gray eyes waver. Scornfully, the old curator demanded:

"Do you need money badly enough to play upon a superstition that you foolishly think I might believe?"

Rex stiffened at the pointed query.

"Ask Alex what he thinks," retorted Rex, hotly. "There's only one thing he and I agree on and that's the Tarn Emerald. We're both sure it brings bad luck to the man who owns it. Alex has hung onto all his money, so you'll have to admit that he's in a position to give an honest opinion - if he has one in him."

The addendum didn't help Rex's cause. It expressed his own distrust of his cousin Alex, so Henniman gave a shrug to close the discussion. Before Rex could reopen the argument, a brawny, dark-faced man stepped into the curator's office. Glad of the diversion, Henniman turned and queried:

"What is it, Jen?"

"I have come for my letter of recommendation," replied the dark man in a solemn tone. "You said you would have it, sir."

"Of course, of course." Annoyed, Henniman gestured to the muddled desk. "You'll find it among these

papers, Jenó. I don't know what I'll do without you around to clear up."

"I am sorry, sir," acknowledged Jenó, soberly. "But the doctor insisted that I go south for my health -"

"I know, I know," interrupted Henniman, drawing back his chair so that Jenó could straighten the papers while looking for the letter. "Well, Jenó, when your health improves, I hope you will return."

Margo was admiring the delicate way in which Jenó tidied the desk. He seemed to know where everything belonged and was putting objects in various drawers as rapidly as he came across them. At last Jenó found the letter and retired with a bow as profound as a Hindu salaam. Then, pausing at the door he stated:

"I might mention, Doctor Henniman, that the Tarn Emerald has arrived and has been placed on display as you instructed."

The effect upon Henniman was electric. Bounding from his chair, he started toward the door, almost blundering into it because he wasn't wearing his glasses. Hopping back to his desk, he pawed around and finally yanked open a drawer to find the spectacle case in its accustomed place. Muttering something about "bifocals" Henniman looked at the glasses before he put them on and ran his fingers along their rimless edges. Then, with a gesture to Margo and Rex, the curator led the way out through the door.

By then, the solemn-faced Jenó had gone. The stairway down to the main floor was deserted when Henniman reached its top. It was a long, steep stairway from the high mezzanine where the curator's office was located and it led to the center of the main display room. Twenty feet beyond the bottom of the stairs stood a marble pedestal that matched the interior of the museum; built into the pedestal was the burglar proof display case that contained the Tarn Emerald. Flanking it were the armed guards from the armored truck, while the driver stood nearby, speaking with the attendants.

Even from the balcony rail, Margo Lane could see the green glister of the priceless gem that now belonged to Doctor Henniman and was awaiting the inspection of its owner. Pausing, Margo gazed just long enough to draw an astonished breath and in that interval, she was conscious that Rex Tarn had passed her. Then, before Margo could turn, she witnessed sudden confusion below.

With excited shouts, guards and attendants sprang toward the bottom of the stairway. Hearing a loud clatter, Margo looked in time to see Henniman taking a series of flying somersaults down the steep stairs. There was a call from Rex who was arriving at the stair-top, a frenzied plea for those below to halt the tragedy that he had been unable to avert.

It was all too late.

So steep were the stairs that Henniman's whirl turned into a final bound that cleared at least a dozen steps and landed him with a half-twist upon the marble floor at the bottom. Striking shoulder first, the old curator's body seemed to cave, finally settling with a contorted sag that left it quite misshapen at the very feet of the rescuers who had failed to halt that flying fall.

In that horrible moment, Margo Lane knew that Gregg Henniman was dead. His motionless figure looked very pitiful and small in its striped trousers and frock coat, with the pointed collar above the shoe-string tie. Viewed from Margo's position at the balcony rail, the dead form looked much like a broken doll.

Though she did not know it, Margo Lane was gazing upon the exact reproduction of a scene that had existed only the day before in the voodoo parlor of a certain Professor MacAbre!

CHAPTER III

LAMONT CRANSTON gazed calmly at the blood-stained marble where the body of Gregg Henniman had laid a short while before. He turned toward the door where the body had been taken and caught a slow shake from the head of the attendant who was standing there. The man came over to where Cranston stood.

"There's no chance, Mr. Cranston," said the attendant. "Doctor Henniman has been pronounced dead. It's the coroner who's looking him over now."

Cranston gave a slow nod; then looked toward the steep stairway. "He fell all the way from the top?" he inquired.

"All the way, from the top," repeated the attendant. "The lot of us were standing down here when it happened. He saw the emerald, that's what Doctor Henniman did, and he just couldn't wait to have a closer look."

The attendant gestured toward the small display-case that was set in the marble pedestal. Approaching the tilted box, Cranston looked through the thick unbreakable glass and studied the Tarn Emerald. It was a magnificent stone, so huge that a skeptic would have argued that the glass had magnifying qualities. But Cranston was no skeptic where the Tarn Emerald was concerned.

A connoisseur of gems, Cranston was familiar with the size and shape of every notable jewel, along with the histories of all matchless stones. This was the first time he had ever viewed the Tarn Emerald, for the gem had been buried in a vault for more than twenty years, but to Cranston it seemed an old friend. Strange to regard an object with its history as a friend, but Cranston was a man of strange preferences.

The face of Lamont Cranston was as unfathomable as the great green eye that gazed unblinking from the bullet-proof case. In a sense, those features were as impenetrable as the case itself, for Cranston's countenance was truly a calm mask that hid the thoughts that lay behind it. Whatever the Tarn Emerald had witnessed in the way of death, Cranston could match it.

For in his other self, Lamont Cranston was a personage known as The Shadow.

Deep were the secrets of this famous emerald; deep too were those of The Shadow. Those secrets had much in common, for they involved the greed of men. Perhaps the curse of the Tarn Emerald existed only as a magnetic force that drew the very sort of malefactors whose deeds should rightfully expose them to The Shadow's justice. Such could have been the thoughts behind the inscrutable face of Lamont Cranston, when the train was interrupted.

Rapid footsteps were entering the museum, they approached the spot where Cranston was standing. Looking up, Cranston saw a young man whose features were quite handsome, though not in a rugged way. Perhaps it was the pallor of the face that took away the strength that the strong jaw should have indicated; as for the man's smile, though friendly, it had a tired expression that indicated overwork. Cranston remembered that smile from a few occasional meetings with its owner, Alexander Tarn.

Apparently Alexander recognized Cranston, for his droopy eyes opened a trifle wider and he gave a nod. Then:

"Doctor Henniman said you would be here," remarked Alex, in an affable tone. "I've heard of your interest in gems, Mr. Cranston, so I should have known that you would find the Tarn Emerald the main attraction."

Turning toward the stand, Alex gazed downward with his tired eyes. He didn't have to ask if this happened to be the famous emerald; the size of the green bauble announced its identity. But he

shuddered as he found his hands approaching the case too closely. Turning again to Cranston, he said in a hushed tone:

"You know its history of course. A single word will tell it: Tragedy."

"The plural would be preferable," corrected Cranston. "A whole line of tragedies have followed the Tarn Emerald from its discovery until the present date."

Alex smiled as he added his own amendment.

"Until twenty years ago," he said. "That was when the emerald was buried in a vault, where I hope its curse will remain and be forgotten. Should I say the same to Doctor Henniman or would it be more tactful to ignore the subject?"

Alex's gaze suddenly narrowed. The expression on his pale face was a cross between awe and horror as he stared beyond Cranston toward a door that had just opened. Out through that door, two attendants were bringing a figure that lay crumpled on a stretcher and Alex Tarn recognized the face that lay tilted half-askew.

"Doctor Henniman!" Startled though it was, Alex's exclamation carried a hush. "Tell me" - his hands gripped Cranston's arm and trembled there - "did something happen after the emerald arrived?"

When Cranston gestured toward the stairway, Alex's eyes went to the top and came slowly downward, the horror on his face increasing as he visualized the scene which Cranston did not have to describe. If there was anything of doubt in Alex's mind it was dispelled by the stain that he saw upon the marble floor. Weakly, his hands relaxed and withdrew from Cranston's arm, then suddenly they tightened into fists.

"Who did it?" Alex spoke coldly, firmly. "Tell me, who killed Doctor Henniman?"

"No one killed him," came a sharp response. "The coroner has heard the details. It was an accident."

The man who spoke was Rex Tarn. He had come from the room with the others, and close behind him was Margo Lane, very pale and very glad to see Lamont Cranston. As Margo's arm reached his own, Cranston drew the girl aside and calmly watched the meeting between the Tarn cousins.

"Why did you come here?" demanded Alex. "You certainly aren't interested in museums nor in emeralds."

"Emeralds perhaps," replied Rex, solemnly.

"Not so unlikely." Alex narrowed his gaze. "What did you do, suggest that Henniman give you the emerald to avoid the curse?"

"In a way, yes," admitted Rex. "Miss Lane will testify to the fact. I said we would all be willing to share it."

"What right had you to speak for me - or any of the others?"

"None, I suppose, but anyway, Henniman wouldn't listen. When we came out from the office, he was so anxious to view the emerald that he rushed ahead of us to the stairs -"

Rex paused; for a moment, his gray eyes showed the hunted waver that Margo had noted before; then, catching himself, he said sharply:

"No, I didn't push him. Miss Lane will testify to that. So will the others who were here at the bottom."

Without a word, Alex marched to the stairs and continued to the top. There he turned and looked down at the group, but his eyes were most interested in the display pedestal. Cranston could see the tightening of Alex's lips when his close-lidded eyes observed the gleam of the emerald, even at that distance. Despite himself, Alex seemed forced to the mental admission that there was something in Rex's story about the emerald's lure.

One step forward; then Alex caught himself. He'd almost done the same as Henniman and the fact brought a grim smile to Rex's rugged lips, which Margo chanced to notice. Then Alex was coming down the stairs slowly, watching each step, until he paused in deliberate fashion and picked up an object that had just escaped his foot. When Alex reached the bottom, Rex met him and demanded sharply:

"What have you got there, Alex?"

"Only a wire from Henniman's glasses," returned Alex. "I suppose there's another on the stairs if you want to look for it. I suppose they fell and broke on the way down."

Rex went up a few steps and found the other wire, pausing as some broken glass crunched beneath his foot. Alex was handing his wire to one of the attendants, so Rex did the same, adding in a rueful tone:

"Poor Doctor Henniman. If I'd thought the jinx was coming after him so soon, I wouldn't have dropped the subject. Well, if the coroner has any further questions, he knows where to reach me."

The cousins departed separately and Margo expected Cranston to follow. Instead, he stood looking at the stairs until finally he undertoned:

"Henniman was wearing the glasses when he came downstairs?"

"Why, yes," replied Margo. "I saw him put them on in the office."

"You mean he wasn't wearing them when you arrived here?"

"He was wearing reading glasses, tortoise-shells with big rims. He kept taking them off and putting them on. That's why I noticed them."

"And did you notice anything else?"

Margo was starting to shake her head, when a recollection struck her, one that seemed a trifle ludicrous despite the tragedy that had occurred since.

"Only that Doctor Henniman couldn't find his regular glasses," said Margo, with a slight laugh, "because they happened to be in the right place, which is where Jenó put them."

"Who is Jenó?"

"One of the museum attendants who was leaving to take another job. He came to get a recommendation from Doctor Henniman."

Cranston's steady eyes turned toward the stairs and followed them upward as though picturing what might lie beyond. Before Margo could begin to form conclusions, Cranston's gaze was back upon the baleful emerald that formed the nucleus of tragedy. Fantastic though the talk of an unknown curse might be, there was a practical side to the emerald question.

"When death strikes," stated Cranston, "certain things are often forgotten during the stress that follows. Sometimes they may prove the real object of a crime. This emerald for instance -"

"You mean someone might try to steal it?"

"Not while I am here," replied Cranston, in a quiet tone that allayed Margo's qualms. "I intend to stay until it is properly returned to the vault where it came from. There are also certain facts that I might learn - meanwhile and the same applies to you."

"Facts about whom?"

"In your case, about the Tarn cousins. There's more than an ordinary rivalry between those two, and both of them get around quite a bit. See what you can learn about them."

It was the type of assignment in which Margo specialized and the sooner she began it, the quicker the results. Besides, the atmosphere of the museum was beginning to tell on her, a fact that Cranston had readily discerned. So Margo suddenly found herself out in the sunshine, realizing that the world had something to offer besides death. On her way down the avenue, she decided that if Lamont wanted to worry about the Tarn Emerald, he was welcome to the task.

Lamont Cranston wasn't worrying about the emerald. It was safe enough in its anchored pedestal. Back in the International Museum, Cranston was going up the stairs to the curator's office, the place where tragedy could well have begun.

CHAPTER IV

VOODOO drums were thrumming their muffled mechanical basso and the walls of MacAbre's lair were alive with their medley of fantastic jungle dancers. Across the artificial firelight, the stooped man with the coal black eyes was watching the effect of his Voodoo magic.

Visitors who thought they could become acclimated to this setting were always wrong. Invariably they learned that they had missed much on previous occasions, for new fascinations were sure to grip them. Sometimes the dull throb of the tom-toms, often the contortions of the dancers, occasionally the weave of the jungle and even the flicker of the curious fire - always something could capture the gaze and hold it in hypnotic fashion.

So it was with the man whose mission involved the Tarn Emerald and the fortune that went with it. Only he believed beyond the capacity of the average visitor and the hunted look in the gray eyes showed it. For this man had received a visible demonstration of Voodoo power. For a price of ten thousand dollars, Professor MacAbre had matched a broken image with a human victim. A mere factor like the law had seen nothing untoward in such an event.

The case of Gregg Henniman was no mystery; it was officially slated as death by misadventure.

"The time has come for another test," reminded MacAbre, in his tone that crackled louder than the mechanical fire. "Have you come prepared?"

Fumbling as badly as he had before, the man who purchased death brought a bundle of currency from his raincoat and placed it in the weird professor's hands. In return, MacAbre supplied another image, stouter than the one that had represented Henniman and differently clad.

This doll had the florid face of a middle-aged man dressed in slacks and sport shirt. Fascinated by the realism of the thing, the gray eyes lost their hunted tremble and stared hard. Then, recalling the part that was his own, the visitor lifted the image to dash it to the floor.

The claw-finger hand of MacAbre stopped the act with a quick, firm reach across the firelight.

"This must be different," chuckled MacAbre. "If the curse of the Tarn Emerald strikes in many ways, so must the power of Voodoo. Take this pin and press it slowly - there."

The long pin that MacAbre supplied was pointed straight toward the doll's heart, but he let his client perform the action. Fingers steadying, the muffled man took the pin and pressed it slowly into the yielding wax until the professor raised one finger and ordered:

"Now! Press hard!"

Home jabbed the pin into the very core of the image. The hand that held it shook and would have dropped the doll if MacAbre had not caught it. With a laugh that chimed with the fire's medley, the professor of Voodoo announced:

"We shall keep this until the charm is complete. Then the wax can be melted and forgotten, like the person the image represents. Go! Your work is done!"

A wave of MacAbre's hand and the whirling cyclorama vanished. Gone was the firelight when the professor opened the door. Once again, a client was stalking from these strange preserves, ten thousand dollars lighter, but this time his departure was simpler. Dusk had already settled, the side street offered little visibility.

As before, Professor MacAbre entered the front room but this time he did not part the window curtains. Instead, he beckoned to a man who was seated in the dimly lighted room, a person whose face was as dark as Fandor's, but broad instead of dapper.

"Come, Jenó," spoke MacAbre. "It is wise that you should follow."

"But if the man should recognize me," protested Jenó. "Would that be helpful, mon professeur?"

"He did not see you often at the museum," reminded MacAbre, "so why should he remember? Besides, it is dark outdoors, Jenó. Dark, like the jungle."

There was a whitened display of Jenó's teeth in a broad, understanding smile. Swiftly, but with the slinky tread of a creature from the jungle that he loved so well, the man who had changed jobs for his health went out to the street.

The darkness was thickened with a drizzle. Jenó, with a glance from left to right, spotted a figure in a drab raincoat turning the corner from the elevated. In panther style, Jenó picked up the trail, confident that his quarry would not elude him.

There was a difference between Manhattan and a jungle. Here there were creatures that even Jenó had come to disregard when he reverted to his stalking ways. They were mechanical things like busses, trucks and taxicabs that belonged to an orbit of their own. One such, a taxicab, was swinging around a corner at this moment, but Jenó gave it no attention, not even when it stopped across the street.

All that Jenó wanted was to trail the man with the upturned raincoat and make sure that he caused no complications. But complications seemed in the making when the man halted at the next corner and began some wary observations of his own. He was stealing Jenó's act when he looked swiftly from left to right, but he went it one better when he suddenly turned and looked behind him.

He didn't see Jenó, for the jungle stalker was sliding into a doorway as easily as he might have sheltered himself beneath a spreading banyan. What the man did see was the halted taxicab. As if he expected it, he turned and cut across the street with long, hurried strides.

Those sharp eyes of Jenó saw something else. In his effort to track MacAbre's recent visitor, Jenó hadn't noticed a girl who had left the cab and moved to the corner on the other side of the street. She was coming back, and from her manner, Jenó was confident that she was bound for the same destination as the man. In matters of rendezvous, Manhattan and the jungle were the same to Jenó, but he had much to learn upon that score. This was one time when Jenó was mistaken. Coincidence, not prearrangement, was at work this evening.

There was one law that governed all followers of Voodoo, jungle or otherwise. Never were they allowed to meet with strangers in the vicinity of their hidden haunt. The lair of Professor MacAbre fulfilled the qualifications of a Voodoo circle and no believer, even a contributor who paid ten thousand dollars a visit, could break the rule. Death was the penalty for such a violation, but even there a distinction was in order.

Death to a believer could be delivered only by the papa of the tribe, in this case Professor MacAbre. The disposal of an outsider was anybody's privilege.

Those factors governed the strange and sudden actions of Jenó, the man with the ways of a panther.

Crossing the street with a long, swift lópe, Jenó gave no heed to the man who was entering the cab from the street side. Instead, Jenó rounded the back of the cab and sprang for the girl who was opening the door by the curb. With the same catlike motion, the human jungle killer whipped forth a knife and launched his hand in a long, murderous thrust.

All that stopped the stroke was the door, coming wider than Jenó expected. As the dark-faced man thudded the swinging obstacle, the girl saw him and shrieked. Bouncing up from the sidewalk, Jenó made a slithery sweep around the door intending to thrust the knife as the girl clambered into the car, but either terror or instinct caused her to seek refuge in the open. She started for the front of the cab, half a dozen paces ahead of Jenó.

Before the assassin could overtake the girl, the cab driver came launching, headlong from the front seat. He was wiry and his attack was sudden, for his tackle spilled Jenó to the sidewalk. Wrenching free, the Voodoo henchman displayed another of his rubbery bounds, this time ready to settle either victim, girl or cabby. But by then, a third antagonist was in the fray, the man in the raincoat.

He came right through the cab and out, lunging straight for Jenó. Knife poised, the jungle man halted at the sight of wide gray eyes and square-jawed face. The law of Voodoo was restraining Jenó from the kill, for he felt that decision here belonged to Professor MacAbre. But the man from the cab was freed from such restrictions; however much Voodoo governed his case, he left killings to others.

The man didn't even see Jenó's face, for he blotted it with a fist that punched the jungle stalker clear across the sidewalk. Beckoning to the girl, the man pointed her into the cab and shoved the driver in behind the wheel. Fists ready, he turned to meet Jenó's next attack but none came. True to the way of the jungle, Jenó had bounded off through the darkness fringing the house wall where he landed. Not knowing from where the next attack might come, the man on the curb sprang into the cab and slammed the door behind him. The driver took that thump as an order to get started.

It was fully two blocks before the cab's passengers gained a good look at each other, for not until then did they reach a well-lighted area. Their stares were those of mutual recognition on this their second meeting.

They had witnessed tragedy before; tonight they had almost participated in it.

The man was Rex Tarn, the girl Margo Lane!

CHAPTER V

FORMAL attire was required at the Club Galaxy. That rule, plus the five dollar cover charge, brought the place a wealthy if not exclusive patronage. Among tonight's customers was Lamont Cranston; attired in faultless evening clothes, he was seated languidly at a corner table, watching the doorway.

Slight but significant was the smile that came upon Cranston's lips when he saw two persons enter. Cranston had met one already: Alexander Tarn. The other was a girl who had been described to Cranston and was therefore easily recognized. Her name was Sue Aldrich.

It was Margo Lane who had learned about Sue Aldrich, through inquiry in the various social sets. The girl's name had been mentioned with that of Rex Tarn, but it seemed that they hadn't been seeing much of each other during the past several months. Then, only this very afternoon, Margo had phoned a new development to Cranston. She had been told that Sue Aldrich had been dropping in at the Club Galaxy with Alex Tarn instead of his cousin Rex.

So Alex had stolen Rex's girl. Or maybe he had simply invoked a priority something like the order of inheritance. Whatever the case, Alex hadn't done badly for himself. From Cranston's obscure table, Alex gave the effect of a stuffed owl with his padded evening clothes and droopy, half-closed eyes. But the description didn't apply to Sue.

The girl was worthy of a string of adjectives which added up to rate her as the nicest specimen of blonde night life that had wandered into this deluxe clip-joint during Cranston's current term of observation. Nor did other habitués overlook that fact, for Sue Aldrich was conspicuous in what might be termed a double-barreled fashion.

Her evening gown nailed every passing eye. It was blue velvet of a vivid shade, a perfect color for a blonde to wear. It would have been too gaudy had there been too much of it, so the designer had cut down the proportions in Sue's favor. It was difficult to criticize the gown while admiring the lovely shoulders and slender arms that emerged completely from it and with those as a basis, Sue's shapely figure was more worthy of consideration than the color of the gown.

Nevertheless, blue was this girl's color and she emphasized it with a necklace and a pair of matched bracelets that were studded with aquamarines against a dazzle of tiny diamonds. If the floor show had been going on, Sue's arrival would have stopped it.

Instead, Sue concentrated on the bar where heads turned and hands halted with half-raised glasses while the customers watched her order a drink. The veteran bartender accepted Sue as a usual customer but he was due for astonishment too. Alex was the person who broke down the barkeep's professional nonchalance by calling for a glass of milk.

In the course of things, the serious drinkers began to forget the sample of feminine brilliance that had landed in their midst and Cranston, in his turn became neglectful of Sue. Cranston found it more interesting to watch Alex, who was distinctly out of place in this assemblage.

Alex was trying to be convivial, as far as milk could help him. This wasn't Sue's coming-out party; the occasion belonged to Alex. It wasn't necessary to watch Sue's reactions to his conversation because they were reflected on Alex's own face. When his tired eyelids gave a slight lift, it meant that Sue was intensely serious. When Alex supplied a weary smile, it was in response to Sue's gay laughter. Indeed, Alex was finding Sue so congenial and vivacious that he forgot himself and ordered a second glass of milk.

Cranston had been watching these proceedings for nearly half an hour when a breathless girl arrived at his table. Rising, he drew back a chair for Margo Lane, at the same time studying her unusual confusion.

Sue's arrival must have left the head waiter dazed, otherwise he would hardly have passed Margo into these rarefied surroundings. Margo was wearing a frayed black job adorned with tarnished spangles which showed gaps where some were missing.

"I know I'm a sight," panted Margo, "but I didn't have time to dress. This was the first thing I saw."

"So you grabbed it," completed Cranston. "On the run, I suppose."

"On the run is right," added Margo, "and I've got to be on my way before Rex Tarn gets here."

Cranston's eyebrows raised in silent query. Taking a deep breath, Margo explained.

"When I found out that Alex was bringing Sue here tonight," said Margo, "I decided to go to a cocktail party where both Alex and Rex were supposed to be."

"So Alex is going to cocktail parties," put in Cranston. "On Sue's account, I suppose."

"That's right. Well, anyway" - Margo was eyeing Alex and Sue as she spoke - "Alex wasn't there. I found that out before I got out of Shrevvy's cab. Rex came storming out of the place and started arguing with the door man; saying that he must have mistaken somebody else for Alex.

"Next thing, Rex was in a cab and scooting away somewhere, so it occurred to me that Shrevvy ought to follow. No, wait!" Margo waived her hand in protest. "It was really my idea, not Shrevvy's. I hadn't told him how important all this might prove to be."

"I'm sure you hadn't," interposed Cranston, dryly. "Otherwise Shrevvy wouldn't have wasted time taking up the trail. He lost it, I suppose."

Margo gave a grim nod.

"But he found it again," she declared. "We had to do a lot of cruising, fifteen minutes of it at least. We'd just swung a corner when I saw Rex sneaking along the other side of the street,"

"You're sure it was Rex?"

"Yes, and you'll be sure too if you let me finish this story. I saw his face by a street lamp; he had his raincoat collar bunched around his chin, but those eyes of his gave him away. They had that hunted look."

"I know. Go on."

"Maybe I was foolish," conceded Margo, "but I got out of the car. Next thing, Rex turned around and came across the street, so I hurried back. He'd seen the cab and he wanted it. Before Shrevvy could pick me up instead, a man lunged at me with a knife!"

"Not Rex?"

"No, not Rex, but somebody almost as important in this case. The man was Jenó, the attendant who was leaving the International Museum the day Doctor Henniman died!"

Cranston gave Margo a steady look calculated to crack her strained imagination, but the girl shook her head emphatically.

"You can't talk me out of it," insisted Margo. "I'm sure the man was Jenó. Shrevvy made a dive from the cab and spilled him; then Rex pulled the hero act by punching Jenó in the face before he could make

another stab. Rex shoved me in the cab and Shrevvy got off to a flying start."

"What happened to Jenó?"

"I don't know." Margo frowned. "When Rex found out who I was, he was surprised that I was in that neighborhood. He acted worried, too, but pretended it was on my account. I said I'd lost my way while I was looking for an old antique shop and that I was quite as surprised to run into Rex."

"What did Rex say about Jenó?"

"He either didn't recognize him or pretended that he hadn't. He simply said the fellow must have been some mugger who thought he was smart enough to work alone."

"Did you tell Rex the man was Jenó?"

"Of course not. I said I wished that Rex had caught him, but he claimed he was too worried about me. More important, Rex asked me not to mention what happened to anybody."

"On account of Alex?"

"More on account of Sue." Margo gestured toward the blue vision that was draped across the bar. "He said she'd really pass him up if she heard that he was rescuing damsels in distress. Sue doesn't swallow that type of line."

"And where did Rex leave you?"

"At my apartment. He went on to his own place in Shrevvy's cab, so he could get dressed and come over here. That's why I rushed, because I knew you'd be here and I wanted to tell you everything first. I thought a chat would be better than a phone call and I was sure there'd be time before Rex arrived -"

Margo was casting a wary eye toward the doorway as she interrupted herself, but Cranston's gaze was a jump ahead. Across the table, his hand gave Margo's arm a lift and carried her right out of her chair. With a twist, Cranston steered Margo past an ornamental palm tree toward a service door. Catching her footing, Margo heard Cranston's parting words:

"Be outside, in Shrevvy's cab."

This was all in the interval during which Margo had been gasping in surprise because Rex Tarn had arrived so soon. For in her glance toward the doorway, she had seen the very man she wanted to avoid. If it had been left to Margo, she'd probably have sat there gaping until Rex had spotted her, for already he was glaring sharply about the nightclub. But Cranston had whisked the brunette right out of the picture.

When his gaze reached that particular table, Rex saw Cranston seated alone and stiffened. His eyes didn't take on the wide, hunted look that Margo had described; instead, they narrowed somewhat in Alex's style. Then, his lips forming a set smile, Rex gave a nod and came over to join Cranston. Under the table, Cranston's foot drew the opposite chair in his own direction. It was flush with the table when Rex arrived, giving no indication that it had just been vacated.

Cranston was rising with extended hand when Rex arrived. The warm shake that they exchanged gave no indication of the sentiments they felt. If this proved another meeting between the hunter and the hunted, the fact would certainly not reveal itself this soon.

Indeed, if murder really lay behind the recent death of Gregg Henniman, it could raise a question

regarding this very meeting. The question was: which was the hunter and which the hunted?

This was one time when The Shadow really wished he knew!

CHAPTER VI

ACCUSTOMED as he was to probing others, Lamont Cranston also could handle the receiving end. He showed his skill when Rex Tarn politely inquired if he happened to be waiting for anyone. Cranston's expression didn't change, but his head gave the slightest of shakes as he remarked:

"I hope not."

To follow that innuendo, Cranston glanced warily toward the door, then let his eye slowly rove the neighboring tables. Rex thought he caught the whole idea, namely that Cranston was "looking them over" in terms of the feminine youth and beauty that flocked the Club Galaxy.

So Cranston wasn't solely interested in Margo Lane. That, at least, was Rex's logical opinion and a few recollections clinched it. He'd seen Margo several places lately without Cranston in attendance. Maybe their paths just met occasionally over some mutual interest such as museums, though Cranston did seem a little worried that she might be coming here, as indicated by his glance toward the door.

Though Rex didn't know it, that little touch was the clincher. Gradually recalling that he'd mentioned the Club Galaxy to Margo, Rex decided that she couldn't have known Cranston's whereabouts this evening or she might have insisted that Rex bring her here.

Rex was giving these thoughts away with the widening and relaxing of his eyes, all noted by Cranston's side glance. Then, letting his gaze rove further, Cranston halted in admiration and remarked:

"Not your cousin Alex! It can't be, not with that dream in blue! And Alex wouldn't be here of all places -"

Alert before Cranston finished, Rex was resuming the real search that had brought him to the Club Galaxy. All he had to do was follow Cranston's gaze to see Sue laughing as she leaned from a stool, slapping away Alex's hands as he tried to stop her from pouring some of her drink into his milk.

"It's Alex, all right," gritted Rex. "He's been getting out of character too often lately."

"Suppose we go over and have him introduce us," suggested Cranston. "Maybe they'll deal a few more hands in the paddy-cake game."

"I'll do the introducing!" snapped Rex. "I happen to know that girl a lot longer and a lot better than Alex."

Rex was on his feet, beckoning Cranston across the floor. Alex saw them coming and clapped his hand over the top of the milk glass, saying:

"Easy now, Sue. We're attracting too much attention. Maybe you've taken too many drinks -"

"Too many drinks?" giggled Sue. "Why, I've only had a couple of zombies. Just a couple of zombies! Look!"

Sue was turning toward the approaching men and spreading two slender fingers to indicate them while she tilted her head coyly and closed one eye as if sighting along a gun. Then, as Rex stiffly introduced Cranston, Sue chortled:

"You're zombies, that's what! D'you know what zombies are? They're the walking dead from the Voodoo country."

A wild, wide glare flashed to Rex's eyes. Whether the word "Voodoo" induced it in its own right, or brought up recollections of the curse attributed to the Tarn Emerald, was something for speculation. Indeed, Rex could have been recalling his own adventures this very evening; or contrarily, he might be showing anger over Sue's unruly behavior at the bar. Whatever the case, Rex was too busy curbing his own emotions to make a prompt reply.

Wheeling giddily on the stool, Sue gestured to Alex and said in demanding style:

"Another zombi."

"She means she wants another zombi cocktail," explained Alex. "She's had two already and I think that's all they're supposed to serve."

"Is that so!" Sue was defiant. "Then we'll go from bar to bar. You've heard of 'Ten Nights in a Bar-room'? We'll make it Ten Bar-rooms in a Night."

Rex grabbed Sue's wrist as she started to leave and twisted her back against the bar to keep her steady while he talked. Trying to wrench her arm away, Sue exclaimed frantically:

"Look out! You'll bend my bracelet!"

"What of it?" snapped Rex. "I bent myself buying that pair of bracelets, bent myself so badly that I finally went broke."

"I didn't ask you for the bracelets," pouted Sue.

"But I'll bet you asked Alex for this dog collar," retorted Rex, snapping his finger against the glittering band that encircled Sue's neck. "He's too much a tightwad to give anybody anything of his own accord. Well, since Alex is going in for aquamarines, I'll find some other preference in gems."

"What, for instance?" queried Alex. "Emeralds?"

Rex swung savagely toward his cousin, resenting the pointed reference to the Tarn Emerald and what it represented. Apparently Alex had schooled himself in the ways of night clubs before coming back into circulation, for he slid right to his feet and used his arm to ward the first threatening poke of Rex's fist.

Only Cranston could have stopped a fight between the Tarn cousins since he was where he might have stepped between, but he wanted to see how far the feud would carry. It stopped short, however, on Sue's account. Too excited to keep propped against the bar, Sue lost her balance and left the tall stool head first, shrieking as she went. Forgetting their fight, Rex and Alex made frantic grabs to catch the nylon-clad legs that came flying up from the blue gown; missing, they compromised by stooping to detach Sue from the brass rail around which she twined her arms as she flattened to the floor.

Since Sue was a trifle hysterical, Rex turned her over to Alex with the gruff statement: "You brought her, so take her away." This made Sue feel neglected, for as Alex started her to the door, she laid her chin across her shoulder and called back pleadingly: "When will I see you, REXY? Tomorrow?"

Some retort was on Rex's tongue, but he suddenly withheld it; then gave a polite response.

"I'll call you in the morning, Sue. Good luck and good-night." With that, Rex flashed a glare at Alex, but before his slow-mannered cousin could return the discourtesy either with eye or word, Rex swung to the

bar and added loudly: "Give me a drink. Make it anything except milk."

With Alex and Sue on their way out, and Rex determined on a course of serious drinking, Cranston decided that his own presence was superfluous. Leaving the gaudy nightclub, he reached the fresher air of the dirty street and joined Margo in Shrevvy's waiting cab.

Briefly, Cranston recited his recent experiences as they rode along and the net result disappointed Margo.

"Then you didn't really learn anything," said Margo, "except that the Tarn family is definitely blonde-blind."

"I learned which Tarn has priorities on Sue tomorrow," reminded Cranston. "He happens to be Rex and he may be taking Sue to the place where we are going."

"Where is that?"

"Out to Long Island to call on a gentleman named Wilfred Walden."

"I've heard of him," nodded Margo. "Big Sugar is what they call him in cafe society. But what has he to do with Rex - or Alex?"

"He happens to be related to them both," explained Cranston. "Walden is second in line for the long disputed Tarn Estate, or I should say first, now that Gregg Henniman has relinquished his rights."

"You mean Big Sugar owns the Tarn Emerald?"

"It will be turned over to him tomorrow, as it was to Henniman. This time" - there was a grim note to Cranston's voice - "I hope to be early enough to prevent another murder."

"Do you really mean murder, Lamont?" inquired Margo, "or just another freak of the strange curse that accompanies the emerald?"

For reply, Cranston brought a spectacle case from his pocket and Margo saw that it was identical with the one that Henniman had toyed with in his office. When Cranston opened it, he saw a pair of rimless glasses with lower circles indicating them to be trifocals.

"These were in Henniman's desk," stated Cranston. "Do you recognize them?"

"Why, yes," replied Margo. "Only - only -"

"Only what?"

"Only they look like the glasses Doctor Henniman put on before he went downstairs. I expected these to be the tortoise-shells, the big-rimmed glasses that he used for reading."

"Then don't these explain themselves?"

Margo shook her head at Cranston's query. Somehow she couldn't piece the pattern of this riddle. Feeling dumb, Margo risked appearing more so, when she asked:

"Explain what, Lamont?"

Cranston's reply came in a single word, as cryptic as it was ugly. It was the word that he had used before:

"Murder."

CHAPTER VII

IF ANY man didn't need the wealth he was about to inherit, that man was Wilfred Walden.

You knew that the moment you drove into the great grounds of Walden Manor, one of the prize exhibits of Long Island.

Wilfred Walden, or "Big Sugar" as he was known to the trade, was opposed to visitors of nearly all descriptions, for fear that they would pluck some of the ultra-rare flowers from his woods and gardens, carve their initials on specimens of trees that grew nowhere else in America, or frighten away a few coveys of odd and curious birds which had somehow learned that Walden Manor was officially a Bird Sanctuary.

Having been invited to the Manor and happening to be recognized by the gate keeper, Cranston and Margo were allowed to drive their roadster through the vast estate when they arrived at ten in the morning. However, they were admonished to stop if challenged by any of Walden's private game wardens and were advised to keep under fifteen miles an hour to avoid startling any of the wild life.

"What kind of wild life could we startle?" asked Margo as they wheeled through woods that formed a veritable forest. "Just flowers, trees and birds?"

"You underestimate Walden," replied Cranston. "He goes in for fauna too. The place is loaded with unusual species of rabbit, deer and other game. Walden even claims to have a few moose on the premises."

"Does he like snakes?"

"I wouldn't be surprised. Anything may pop out of these woods, Margo."

That brought a slight shudder from Margo. Then:

"And I thought he liked night life," she said. "He certainly spends money! No wonder they call him 'Big Sugar' whenever he comes around."

"Wrong again," put in Cranston. "Walden's nickname came from the fact that he imports more sugar from the West Indies than anyone else in the business."

"So that's the reason! Does he own sugar plantations himself?"

"Acres of them. In Cuba mostly, because he goes there often. But I understand he visits Haiti, too."

At that, Margo's eyes went big and wide. For to Margo, the mere mention of Haiti meant something else that she expressed aloud in a tone that was really scared:

"Voodoo!"

Maybe Margo was thinking of Jenó, whose foray of the night before had been a brief demonstration of a jungle prowler's ways. Perhaps she was thinking in terms of the imaginary snakes that Cranston mentioned, fancying them hanging from the boughs of strange, thick-branched trees. Whatever the whirl of impressions that flooded Margo's mind, they were more or less unified by Cranston's next gesture.

The coupe was swinging from the wooded road on to a driveway that led up to Walden's mansion. To

the front lay a sweep of rolling lawn, studded with rare bushes and gorgeous flower gardens. The driveway, however, approached the mansion from the side, and Cranston was indicating that portion of the building.

What Margo saw was a huge conservatory that occupied the complete end of the building. Through the glass walls of that huge hot-house, she and Cranston could discern a vast mass of tropical foliage that formed an actual patch of jungle transplanted to this northern clime and preserved through constant heat.

It was just another proof that Wilfred Walden handled more than sugar in a big way. Thinking in such terms, Margo forgot that the indoor jungle was itself associated with Voodoo, because of her increasing interest in meeting Walden on his home grounds and hear him talk about his unusual hobbies.

The wish was soon granted. Cranston pulled the car around by a driveway leading to the rear of the house and the first man to greet them was Walden. He approached the car wearing slacks and sport shirt representing a golfer's attire. In contrast, Walden was also wearing tennis shoes and swinging an expensive racquet which he tucked under his left arm while he shook hands.

Walden's face, big, broad and florid, was of a domineering type, but he could be genial in his off-moments. Having too much wealth to work, most of his moments were of the "off" variety, as he proved at present. Nevertheless there was in Walden's tone a constant self-importance that could not be missed.

"Glad you're here, Cranston," boomed Walden in a heavy tone. "Nice of you to bring Miss Lane. That will make four of you in the gallery. Rex Tarn is bringing another girl."

"What gallery?" asked Margo. She looked at the house. "You mean you have an art gallery too?"

Walden gave an over-hearty laugh.

"I mean the tennis gallery," he explained. "Over by the tennis court." Walden gave a wave with his racquet. "I'm taking Rex on for a match with a stake of five hundred dollars."

Catching Margo's inquiring look, Walden laughed again.

"Don't let my weight deceive you, Miss Lane," assured Walden. "It's all muscle. I'm in trim and Rex isn't. Never is, for that matter. Just wait and you'll see dissipated youth give way to well-preserved experience. That is" - Walden lowered his voice to a confidential tone that couldn't be heard at more than fifty yards - "if Rex puts up the money. It's been a standing offer, but he hasn't taken it to date."

Cranston put in a query:

"Four of us in the gallery? If Rex is playing tennis, who will the other be? Not, Alex, by chance?"

Walden gave a guffaw that echoed with rattles from the walls of the conservatory.

"After last night?" asked Walden. "Didn't you read the columns this morning? The Tarn cousins tried to put the family jinx on each other last night at the Club Galaxy. They won't be in a mood to get together today. The fourth man happens to be a good friend of mine" - Walden added a deep-throated chuckle - "because he's a good customer. He's in the conservatory. Come and I'll introduce you."

Leading the way into the glass enclosure, Walden picked a path among high entwining branches which made Margo shudder because of their resemblance to snakes. A shiver in these surroundings was quite an achievement, considering that the temperature was at least a moist ninety degrees. They found Walden's friend strolling past some banana trees and he looked as cool as Margo had felt in the crisp

outdoors.

The reason was that Walden's friend was obviously used to tropical climes. He was a dapper man with a decidedly dark face, which formed a striking contrast between gleaming white teeth and jet-black mustache, the moment that he smiled.

"Senor Fandor Bianco," introduced Walden. "Just arrived from Havana." Walden gestured to the tropical foliage. "I told him to come in here and feel at home. How do you like it, Fandor?"

"Very good," acknowledged Fandor, maintaining his gleaming smile. "Most very good, Beeg Shooger."

"He even knows my nickname," laughed Walden. "Well, if I'm Big Sugar on the buying end, maybe you'll be Big Sugar on the selling end, Fandor."

"Hardly, senor," returned Fandor, his tone serious despite his smile. "I'm just Leetle Shooger. That is what they will call me when I go back home and tell them how big your business is."

The flattery pleased Walden; perhaps that was why he insisted upon showing off some other features of his elaborate hot-house. He led the way to a corner that was boxed off with a smaller glass enclosure and as they went along, Margo noted that Cranston's gaze was on the mustached gentleman called Fandor. Whatever his opinion of Senor Bianco, Cranston was reserving it for later expression; of that Margo was sure.

This was no time for questions and Margo couldn't have put one anyway, for she found herself panting for breath. The corner room that they had entered seemed twice as hot as the rest of the conservatory, which was of course an exaggeration; nevertheless, its temperature must have been at least a dozen degrees higher.

"You'll get used to it," laughed Walden, as he closed the door. "This happens to be a very special room. Look around and you'll see why."

He gestured to a semi-circle of odd tropical plants, one of which was in bloom. Fandor gave a nod of recognition.

"Ah, the century plants!" he exclaimed. "I have seen them in Mexico."

"Not these," objected Walden. "You have seen the Agave Americana. These happen to be an unknown species of flower that I have termed the Agave Tropicala."

"And why so, senor?"

"Because they are true jungle flowers, sent to me as a special gift. I believe that these bloom regularly each year."

"But, senor, such is not possible -"

"I tell you again, these are not century plants," broke in Walden, angrily. "You should listen, Fandor! The name that I heard given them was the Secret Flower."

Margo stepped forward to look at the blooming plant. She noticed that others were on the point of blooming, which bore out Walden's theory.

"Why do they call this the Secret Flower?" queried Margo. "Is it hard to find?"

"That may be the reason," replied Walden. "But I think it is because the flowers bloom secretly. Every

day I watch them, hoping to witness the process." He shrugged and gestured at the plant before him. "This is one I missed. If you watch, you may see it fold."

Fandor started to speak; then stopped as he looked at Cranston. With a polite smile Fandor queried:

"You were about to say something, senor?"

"Nothing of importance," replied Cranston. "I was only going to ask why the room had to be kept so hot."

"Those were the instructions," stated Walden, as he stepped about, tilting his head from one plant to another. "The Secret Flower is far more delicate than a Century Plant. A touch of even moderate temperature" - he snapped his fingers - "and they would wither like that."

Briskly, Walden glanced at his wrist watch and turned to Fandor.

"How about our warm-up match?" asked Walden. "I want to be in good form when Rex gets here."

Fandor bowed.

"Most certainly, senor." With his broad smile, he queried: "If you win from Senor Tarn, do I receive - what is it you call it - my 'cut' of the money, is not so?"

"You'll help me spend it at the night-clubs," replied Walden. "Big and Little Sugar will sweeten cafe society. But come along, all of you" - he paused and looked at Margo - "unless Miss Lane would like to watch in case another Secret Flower blooms."

Across Walden's shoulder, Margo saw the slightest of nods from Cranston, she gave an eager nod of her own. Walden opened the door and the men left, Fandor delivering a deep bow. Alone with the century plants that were something else again, Margo took a long, deep breath. Walden was right; it didn't require much time to become accustomed to this humid atmosphere. Indeed, it was rather pleasant when breathed fully. Margo could now detect a heavy fragrance that she hadn't noticed earlier, so she took another breath and caught the scent more plainly.

Voices had faded when the door closed. Looking around, Margo saw that Cranston and the other men were out of sight, gone past the bank of jungle green that gave a curious impression of being heat-frozen. Such didn't seem impossible, in this exotic setting where everything was so unreal.

So calm did Margo Lane feel that her former qualms were all forgotten. Even the word "Voodoo" had faded from her mind, so completely that it didn't occur to her that she might be falling under its very spell!

CHAPTER VIII

WILFRED WALDEN was no mean man at tennis. He gave his serves the vehemence of his golf drives and about the same proportion of hook. Most of his points came when a little cloud of dirt enveloped the white-clad form of Fandor and left the dapper man bewildered.

Nevertheless Fandor forced Walden into an extra-game set, for his play was smart, particularly following his own serves. Quick as one of the wild rabbits that occasionally poked their whiskers from the shrubbery, Fandor retrieved every stroke that was short on speed. His placements were cunning, keeping Walden on the run from one side of the court to the other and alternating him between the net and the back-line.

Seated in a canvas chair near the court, Cranston was close enough to catch the conversation between two other members of the gallery who had arrived to watch the play: Rex Tarn and Sue Aldrich.

"I'm going to take this big baboon," undertoned Rex, referring to Walden. "I'll send him back to his own jungle, five hundred smackers short."

"But Rex," objected Sue, her voice worried. "You know you aren't in form."

"I can stop the fast ones better than that Cuban," Rex argued, "and good old Wilfred isn't going to keep me on the hop, even if he is my third cousin twice removed."

"And why not?"

"Because that little man on the other side of the net is showing up Wilfred's weakness. I'll let Wilf do the hopping and when I slap through a few of my fast serves, he'll cave. Look, Sue: here comes Chauncey. I wonder what he wants."

Chauncey was Walden's secretary and he looked the part. Frail, stoop shouldered and with a thin face that was mostly glasses, Chauncey stepped timidly toward the court as though expecting a barrage of tennis balls in his direction. Walden saw him and furnished a glare, just long enough for Fandor to place one nicely out of reach.

That point deuced the set again.

"Walden is mad," Rex told Sue. "He'll come through hard."

It was Walden's serve. Waving Chauncey away, he smoked his serves past Fandor for a love game. In receiving, Walden went the limit, outracing Fandor's place shots. They dallied around deuce until Fandor finally fluked a net shot and it was Walden's set and match.

Hitching up his white flannels, Rex started out to the court, as Sue queried:

"Won't Mr. Walden want to rest a while?"

"Not if I know Wilfred," replied Rex. "When he's hot he wants to keep on going, which is swell."

Sue wasn't wearing her aquamarines and though it was hardly likely that she would have included them with her present sport ensemble, even though it was blue, Cranston held the notion that at least one bracelet might be reposing in a pawn shop. Sue was the sort who never liked to lose a man, if only to hold him as competition for another.

On such opinions, Cranston liked to check with Margo, but she hadn't yet arrived from her vigil with the Secret Flowers. Looking toward the conservatory, Cranston saw Fandor going that direction, after shaking hands with Walden. Cranston was coming to his feet, when the door of the conservatory opened and Margo emerged in hesitating style.

Pausing where he was, Cranston watched Fandor bow to Margo and exchange a few words. Then Fandor went indoors while Margo came toward the tennis court. Her stride looked wobbly, so Cranston went to meet her, but with a secondary purpose. Walden had finished looking at some letters shown him by Chauncey and was thrusting something in the breast pocket of his sport shirt, while Rex was coming over toward them. Cranston wanted to hear what Rex might say to Walden.

There wasn't any interruption from Margo. She was catching her breath as Cranston supported her arm. It was as if the cool outdoor air had taken an opposite effect upon her, for normally Margo should have

been breathing more easily after coming from the oppressive atmosphere of the inner hot-house.

"Here's the five hundred," Rex was saying to Walden, displaying the money. "Want Chauncey to hold the stakes?"

"That won't be necessary," boomed Walden, "unless you think I ought to put up my cash too."

"You ought to be good for five hundred," returned Rex, "unless the mortgage has caught up with this big place of yours. Only we ought to start our match right away."

"Why do you think so?"

"Because I want you to have a sporting chance. You see" - Rex adopted a tone that suited his canny air - "I don't think I need a jinx to help me beat you. Let's finish this match before they deliver the Tarn Emerald."

Walden's lips curled in a broad sneer.

"Your cousin Alex spoke about the hoodoo," said Walden. "He said you tried to relieve Gregg Henniman of the family curse."

"That's right."

"But since it involved relieving him of the emerald too, Henniman didn't fall."

"You're wrong there," put Rex, bluntly. "Henniman did fall, but not in the way you meant."

Curbed anger flushed Walden's face. He looked ready to boom a loud indictment of Rex for his more than casual treatment of Henniman's death, but Walden finally compromised with sarcasm.

"Would you like to know how much that bunk about the Tarn Emerald counts with me?" demanded Walden. "Would you like proof that the jinx is a joke?"

"Very much," assured Rex. "I'll make you the same offer that I gave Henniman. Let me sell the emerald for you and divide the proceeds among the family. That's a fair way of sharing the possible misfortune."

"Generous, aren't you?" sneered Walden. "You follow the rule of never giving a sucker an even break."

"You'll have a better break than Henniman," insisted Rex, seriously. "There's one less person to divide the money, now that he's dead. I think I can convince you that the curse is real, Wilfred. Of course I don't want to hold up our tennis match, even though it's only for five hundred dollars -"

"Then why hold it up?" interjected Walden. "Let's start and talk about the emerald later!"

With a triumphant wave to Sue, Rex took the far court and volleyed a few with Walden while Cranston was piloting Margo around to a comfortable chair. Sitting down with a sigh, Margo pressed her hand against her breast and took a long breath.

"I - I guess I was frightened in there," admitted Margo. "I forgot all about the flowers and began thinking of Jenó."

"Of Jenó? Why?"

"I seemed to remember him, not from last night, but when I saw him leave Henniman's office. It was the way he bowed, I suppose."

"The way Jen0 bowed?"

"Why, of course. Who else would I remember? But it began to worry me, Lamont. When I came out of the conservatory, I thought I saw Jen0 again. Only when I looked, you were coming toward me."

Cranston glanced toward the conservatory; then studied the silent house. His meditation was interrupted by the thwacky thud of a tennis ball. The match was under way in earnest.

Rex Tarn had overrated his ability, condition or both. His serves were fast, but they didn't swamp Wilfred Walden. Though he was able to return Walden's serves, Rex couldn't press the advantage. He was using Fandor's system of racing Walden all over the court, but Rex either lacked the necessary inches or Walden was pushing himself to greater effort.

Taking four games in a row, Walden was ready to receive, his face flushed with the triumphant prospect of a love set. If he could take this game that Rex was about to serve, Walden was confident he could smoke his opponent under for the sixth. Over-anxious, Rex planked two in the net. Controlling his next serve, he took Walden's return and began a determined volley.

Walden wanted that point more than any other, on the theory that if Rex lost it he would be through. Back and forth across the court, Walden was playing like a fish on a line, getting the ball back every time with Rex too desperate to poke a stroke too far from reach, for fear it would miss the court. Judged on the basis of his annual income, Walden was doing five hundred dollars worth of work right there.

The break came when Rex laid one just within the side-line. Walden took a long, loping stride and lashed a backhand scoop from the dirt. The ball flipped over the net to Rex's total astonishment; caught flatfooted, Rex could only stare in absolute chagrin. He didn't look toward Walden until he heard Sue shriek.

Margo looked up suddenly to see Cranston coming to his feet. With that diving back-stroke, Walden had flattened on the clay and was rolling on to his back. His hand was clutching at his heart, scooping the cloth of the sport shirt, pocket and all. So frantically did he claw that the pocket ripped, but Walden's hand stayed fisted.

Just as Cranston reached the prostrate man, Rex leaped the net. Both were too late, for Cranston heard the gargly sigh that choked from Walden's throat as his body sagged back. Rex was near enough to see that death slump and he stopped with a horrified pose.

Then, a strange thing happened. As though actuated by the invisible hand of Fate, Walden's left fist came open finger by finger, to reveal a thing that he had tugged from his pocket with that final rip. Whatever the cause of Walden's death, it could be charged to the jinx that he had boasted he could beat.

Like the green eye of some evil monster, the Tarn Emerald was glowing from the center of Wilfred Walden's outspread palm!

CHAPTER IX

PROFESSOR MACABRE turned from the curtained windows of his quiet front room and gave a nod to Jen0 who was sitting morosely in a corner chair. The gleam in MacAbre's coal-black gaze was pleased, but Jen0's eyes did not reflect it.

"Fandor is coming along the street," announced MacAbre. "He will be glad to know of our success. Let us welcome him, Jen0."

The mode of welcome was the usual sort. When Fandor came up the stairs he found Jenó in the antique shop acting as though in charge, a job which Fandor had personally handled on occasion. Their meeting was simply a blind in case of followers: Fandor, the arrival, was acting as a customer, while Jenó passed as a seller of antiques.

After a reasonable interval, Professor MacAbre appeared from the rear room. Nodding to indicate that he regarded all as safe, the Voodoo leader gestured for Jenó to lock the outer door; then beckoned both Jenó and Fandor into the rear chamber where weird rites were held for the benefit of paying customers.

These men being partners in his crimes, MacAbre ignored the usual theatricals, except for the artificial fire which ignited itself automatically. Gesturing his companions to folding chairs that were standing against the bare white walls of the windowless room, MacAbre gave a demoniac leer at Fandor, which brought a broad gleam of the latter's white teeth.

"Yes, Fandor, you have guessed," spoke MacAbre. "Walden died as effectively as Henniman, shortly after you left. I might say" - those coal-hued eyes showed sharply from their sockets as they turned toward Jenó - "that Walden's death was handled better than Henniman's."

Whatever his awe of MacAbre, Jenó still was stout in his own defense.

"I did all that I was told, mon professeur," Jenó argued. "It was not my fault that le docteur should be forgetful in a different way. Never before did he make that mistake with his glasses -"

"We must be prepared for all mistakes," interposed MacAbre, "including our own. You nearly made a serious mistake again last night, Jenó."

"When I saw the girl? It was my duty to follow the law of our jungle -"

"But this is not our jungle. You must remember that, Jenó. Her coming to this neighborhood may have been a pure mistake. That is why I do not blame the man. You did well to restrain your knife in his case and he was equally justified in attacking you. I do not intend to deal him Voodoo vengeance, as you wish."

"Mais, professeur! In our jungle -"

This time MacAbre's interruption was a furious snarl that utterly silenced Jenó. Then, turning his outburst into a low, hissed tone, MacAbre waved his hand and declared:

"Fandor understands the difference between jungle life and civilized. You would do well to follow his example, Jenó. And now, Fandor" - MacAbre's tone reverted to its purr - "it will please you to learn that Walden died within a half hour after your departure."

There was satisfaction in Fandor's gleaming smile.

"I was very careful, mon professeur," Fandor declaimed. "I pressed Walden hard, but stopped when I felt the limit was close. It was very easy to leave, for I simply went to the telephone in the great house and called the city. I told the secretary, the one called Chauncey, that an appointment was taking me back to town."

"It must have been an hour later that I phoned," acknowledged MacAbre. "I talked to Chauncey too and told him I had business with his master. He was telling me of Walden's sudden death when another man took the telephone, a man of very calm speech."

Fandor narrowed his eyes and nodded.

"Cranston, probably," said Fandor. "He was there with the girl."

"With what girl?"

"The one that Jenó mentions. The Lane girl, who was at the museum with Rex Tarn."

"So? Why should she have come with Cranston?"

"Because she is his friend and not the friend of Rex. Another girl, a blonde called Sue Aldrich, came with Rex Tarn today."

MacAbre's black eyes seemed to sink back in their sockets as he weighed these facts.

"Perhaps it would have been better had I talked to Cranston," mused the professor, "rather than cut off the call the way I did. But tell me, Fandor" - the eyes opened and glistened sharply - "did you remember to destroy the evidence?"

"Of course, mon professeur." Fandor's tone was shrewd. "And I did even more. I placed the blame upon some one else."

"Upon whom?"

"Upon Margo Lane. She remained in the room with the Zombi Plants. They will believe that she found the air too oppressive and therefore opened the windows."

MacAbre's long claws scraped his chin with a light stroke that Fandor recognized as the Voodoo professor's only symptom of worry.

"Walden was used to the tropics," reminded MacAbre, "for he made many trips to Cuba. This Margo girl is not. Therefore what happened to Walden slowly, but in large degree, would affect her rapidly but in small degree."

"Which is very good," put in Fandor. "Tres bon!"

In return for his enthusiasm, Fandor received the sharp glare that MacAbre had previously awarded Jenó.

"It is for me to decide what is best!" hissed MacAbre. "As you say, Fandor, the girl will be blamed for something apart from Walden's death, but it may be that you have left a dangerous clue, as Jenó did!"

"But the girl will remember nothing," reminded Fandor. "When I met her coming from the conservatory, she stared at me like something from a dream. Why, my face is handsome" - Fandor smiled to prove it - "but she was afraid of it. She acted as though she saw someone like Jenó."

Fandor's gesture toward Jenó was polite and the broad man took it as a compliment. Indeed, the leer that spread on Jenó's face signified that he preferred to be regarded ugly. But when it came to sinister quality, Fandor's smile could rival Jenó's sullen glare. These henchmen of Professor MacAbre were shaped much to their insidious master's pattern, despite their pride in what they thought was individuality.

"Someone like Jenó," repeated MacAbre, smoothly. "You are right, Fandor, the girl could have thought so. She saw Jenó last night and would remember him so well that his face will creep into her imagination at the slightest suggestion. Perhaps it is well that she stayed among the Zombi Plants. It will be a few days before the stimulus wears off."

Going to a corner, MacAbre unfolded a portable stand that was lying flat against the wall. Upon it he

placed a small cauldron, closely resembling a chafing dish, and lighted a burner beneath it. From his robe, MacAbre brought the effigy in sporting togs that represented Wilfred Walden. He carefully removed the pin from the figure's heart, removed the miniature attire and tossed the doll into the metal bowl where a quantity of wax had already begun to boil.

"There will be a few days wait," purred MacAbre, "before we need another image for which our client will pay the usual price. Meanwhile, we shall prepare an effigy for our own purposes according to the description that you two can give me.

"It is well that others should believe in Voodoo power, even when we use hidden methods to invoke it. But there are times when the Voodoo influence is real, as all of us can testify. You have seen it in the jungle; it can be witnessed here" - MacAbre indicated the whole room with a broad sweep - "because through mechanical art I can bring the jungle to this room."

MacAbre was stirring the waxen broth with a long spoon that had an insulated handle. In his other hand, he held an object that looked like a miniature coffin, its outer layer a rubbery material. The interior of that little casket was a mold, shaped to human form. Into it MacAbre began to ladle molten wax while Fandor and Jenó watched with eager eyes.

They were like the Witches of Macbeth, these three; perhaps it was from that legend that MacAbre had chosen his peculiar but significant name, as thin disguise for the thing the term "macabre" represented: Death.

Though Professor MacAbre was the instigator of the heinous scheme he now intended, it was difficult to mark him as the ringleader. The handsome face of Fandor was as livid as the ugly countenance of Jenó, those other members of the Evil Three, and both looked capable of serving in MacAbre's place, should occasion so require.

Voodoo magic was again upon the march!

CHAPTER X

DUSK was streaking the long lawns of Walden Manor like a belated portent of death already done. But whatever the mystery such gloom might signify, all doubt regarding Wilfred Walden had been officially dispelled. The living room of the great mansion was fringed by a cordon of physicians all summoned from New York, and to a man these specialists agreed upon the cause of Walden's death.

It was a very common thing, an unsuspected heart ailment which Walden had not only ignored but challenged.

When a man of advancing age and increasing weight disported on the tennis court, he was running an undue risk. One specialist put it in the form of a brief analogy that brought approving nods from the rest.

"I've often told men like Walden," said the doctor, "that if I gave them a rare but fragile crystal and said that so long as they carried it unbroken their lives and health would continue, they would act with due accord. Always, they would hesitate before risking that priceless possession.

"Excitement, exertion, anything wherein their charge would be neglected, would be something that they would strictly avoid. Simply picture such a crystal as a heart that has seen long service and must therefore have been subject to the wear that a man recognizes in the rest of his physique. You then have the case in terms that a layman should understand."

The terms applied to Walden's case. He had been careless with the precious crystal. However, the

analogy could be interpreted in another way, for Walden had actually been carrying something on his person which might be likened to a priceless crystal.

That something was the matchless Tarn Emerald.

The green gem had been sent back to the lawyers who represented the Tarn Estate and in due course it would be offered along with half a million dollars to the next inheritor. But though the physicians had omitted the emerald from their verdict, it wasn't totally forgotten.

Rex Tarn was mentioning it in rueful tones to Sue Aldrich and Margo Lane as they stood near the passage that led to the conservatory.

"I saw Chauncey give something to Walden," expressed Rex, "but I hadn't an idea it was the emerald. Honestly, I wouldn't have thought of starting that game if I knew that Wilf was defying the curse. I've gone into the history of the thing and it's been bad news for everybody who tackled it. Why, the original Tarn who brought the emerald from Colombia was washed overboard from the schooner that was taking him to New York. Within a few months, the man who inherited it was also dead, which showed how fast the jinx could work."

"That wasn't very fast," put in another man's voice. "The curse seems to be working in days instead of months, ever since you took an interest in it, Rex."

Turning indignantly, Rex saw his cousin Alex standing in the passage. During that moment, Margo caught the wild, hunted look in Rex's gray eyes, a thing she'd noticed earlier when he had stopped short at sight of Walden lying dead.

In contrast, Alex was eyeing Rex narrowly and firmly. There was a purpose in Alex's manner, which he had acquired since last night. That run-in with Rex at Club Galaxy had turned him into a decided extrovert. No more of the quiet life for Alex, not if there was any reason to assert himself, as there seemed to be right now.

"And speaking of fast workers, Rex," Alex's words carried punch instead of a drawl, "you may think you belong in that category yourself -"

"I had nothing to do with what happened to Walden," broke in Rex. "I was in the other court when he dropped dead, further away than I was from Henniman when he tumbled down the museum stairs. I've had enough of these accusations, Alex! Nobody can prove a thing against me!"

"Who was making accusations?" demanded Alex. "Not I, that's certain. I called you a fast worker because of the way you ran off with Sue today, before I had a chance to see her." Swinging to Sue, Alex added reprovingly: "I told you I was going to a bank directors' luncheon and that I'd call for you afterward."

"But I couldn't leave here," protested Sue. "Not until the doctors settled the question of Walden's death."

"And you shouldn't bother with directors' meetings," Rex told Alex, "not if you expect to get along with Sue. She isn't the sort to stand by and be neglected."

Alex gave Rex a cold, narrow stare.

"Sue's future isn't being neglected," declared Alex. "Not when I attend directors' meetings. I regard financial interests as important on her account, because some day I expect to marry Sue."

In an indirect way, this must have been Alex's first proposal of marriage, for Sue's surprise was so

sudden that she couldn't speak when she tried. Noticing it, Rex spoke for her.

"Perhaps Sue has other ideas, Alex. She might be just independent enough not to marry you."

"She won't be independent long," Alex retorted, "if she keeps lending you money to replace the fortune you squandered."

"How do you know I squandered it?" asked Rex. "Maybe I've invested it, Alex. There are ways of making bigger money than through bank stocks, even though it means tying up cash until the pay-off comes."

"If you mean through roulette wheels," scoffed Alex, "I hope you're a man who owns one. That's the only way to make those playthings pay. Come along, Sue, we have a dinner date this evening. Remember?"

Taking Sue's arm, Alex started out through the hallway with Rex following as though hoping to renew the argument. Margo would have gone along just because she felt it was her duty to witness any trouble, but a hand suddenly grasped her and she turned with a startled gasp, clamping her hand below her throat to keep her heart where it belonged. It was Cranston who halted Margo.

He had stepped from the doorway of the conservatory after listening unnoticed to the dispute between the Tarn cousins.

"Frighten you, Margo?"

"A bit, Lamont." Margo felt easier as she heard Cranston's calm voice. "I - I feel jumpy inside. I guess it's because of what happened to Walden."

"You felt the same after Henniman died?"

"Well, no. Only that was the first time -"

"And a worse experience," put in Cranston. "That's when your heart should have begun the thumps."

"I suppose you're right, Lamont. In a way I know you're right, because I'm sure this was beginning when I reached the tennis court. I felt tense as though something was to happen."

"Not as if something had happened?"

Slowly, Margo shook her head, not grasping Cranston's question fully. By way of explanation, Cranston led her through the silent jungle of the tropical conservatory until they reached the door of the small corner room which was kept in a superheated condition. There, Margo gave an involuntary shudder as Cranston gestured her across the threshold, but his smile reassured her.

"You won't have to worry, Margo. The room is different now."

It was different. It was cooler than the main conservatory; indeed, the chill of evening was penetrating it with air that had the tang of wine. Closing the door to protect the flora in the main conservatory, Cranston gestured to a pair of wide open windows.

"Did you open them, Margo?"

"Why, no, Lamont."

"You're sure?"

"I - I think I'm sure. Only it was so strange in here, with the scent of the flowers so oppressive."

"Chauncey says you were in here when he came through the conservatory. He thinks you must have opened the windows."

"But I passed someone when I was going out, Lamont!" exclaimed Margo. "I passed Jenó!"

"Jeno - or Fandor?"

"I suppose it was Fandor," recalled Margo, hazily. "Funny that I should have them mixed. Maybe it's because they are both dark and bow so profoundly. But Jenó looked almost like a Hindu while Fandor is a Cuban."

"No, Margo. Cubans speak Spanish, but Fandor had a habit of dropping into another language, French. It happens to be the language spoken in Haiti."

Margo's eyes opened as they had before; she could feel herself seized by one of those hunted fits that Rex Tarn was always trying to fight off. To Margo, Haiti spelled Voodoo, the word that prompted fear.

Again, Cranston's calm took hold; he turned Margo's mind to other matters as he gestured to the plants that Walden had admired so greatly. Margo's gasp was one of sorrow when she saw that those precious specimens had wilted, flowers and all, from the cool air through the open windows.

"Why, they're dead," expressed Margo. "I - I suppose I'm partly to blame. But I supposed century plants would be more hardy."

"They are," acknowledged Cranston. "A single treatment shouldn't have killed them, which proves that these weren't century plants. I'll tell you more about them later, Margo."

Going out by the rear door, Cranston and Margo entered the coupe and drove back to Manhattan. During the ride, Margo came under Cranston's keen-eyed scrutiny more often than she realized, for at the moments when he watched her, she was staring straight ahead. Cranston drove across a bridge instead of using the East River tunnel because he felt the open air was doing Margo good; at least she was quite relaxed when the car reached the familiar city streets.

It was then that Cranston said:

"I spoke to Chauncey about Fandor. It seems that the handsome Senor Bianco may have much less background than we supposed."

"But Walden said he was a sugar planter," reminded Margo. "They did business, didn't they?"

"Walden expected to do business," replied Cranston, "purely on Fandor's say-so. The chap came here with an offer of sugar in huge tonnage at the lowest wholesale figure that Walden could expect. Of course Walden treated him like a long-lost friend. That's business."

"You mean they'd just met for the first time?"

"That's right. Chauncey corroborated it. I doubt that Fandor could deliver a hundred pounds of sugar, let alone a thousand tons."

"Then what was Fandor's game?" Margo was experiencing new palpitations. "Tell me, Lamont -"

"Tomorrow," interposed Cranston, as he swung the coupe to the curb. "You're tired and here's your apartment. Why don't you nap a while and then go out to dinner? But forget all that happened today -"

until tomorrow."

After leaving Margo, Cranston drove the car to a garage where a cab was waiting outside on the darkened street. It was natural for Cranston to choose that cab in order to ride to his club, but what happened during the cab trip savored of the unexpected. From a hidden drawer beneath the rear seat of the cab, Cranston brought black garments in the shape of a cloak and hat, with which he enveloped himself so rapidly that he seemed to literally disappear within the cab.

This was Shrevvy's cab, the one that Cranston used on many missions, particularly when he became his other self, The Shadow!

CHAPTER XI

FROM beneath the structure of the old-fashioned elevated, a furtive figure detached itself and started rapidly along the street toward MacAbre's house. A huge tumult was raging overhead for a northbound express on the central track was overtaking a local on its right, while another local was coming southward on the left.

In fact, the avenue trembled as if from a man-made earthquake transmitted down the el pillars, and the furtive man shuddered in his turn. Just away from the corner, he dived into the security of a doorway and cringed there in the darkness. It wasn't just because the vibration of the paving reminded him of Voodoo drums; the thought of faces at the windows of those el cars frightened him.

This habitual visitor to MacAbre's preserves could not afford to be spotted in the neighborhood. He had been seen once, the night when Margo Lane had come here and another such episode could spell the end to all his plans for wealth. That was why gray eyes were wide when they peered from the doorway after the trains had rumbled away; wide with the hunted stare that had become indelibly identified with Rex Tarn.

But it would have been impossible to mark the man as Rex when he started along the street again, for he was huddled with his face deep in his raincoat and his eyes, when they gave darting glances, were too hurried to be noted in the light.

All doorways looked suspicious on this dark night. A fog that was weaving in from the river produced fantastic shapes. Lamp-posts, fire-plugs, even house steps seemed to cast their own reflection as if against a misty mirror, producing the effect of lurkers everywhere. Sometimes those figures actually moved, but that could have been charged to the swirl of the fog.

Nevertheless, these things didn't please MacAbre's visitor. He was glad for once when he found himself in the Voodoo professor's preserves. Tonight, MacAbre met him personally in the antique shop and bowed a deep greeting to this black sheep of the Tarn family. Ushering his visitor into the Voodoo chamber, MacAbre closed the door that produced the simulated fire blaze and announced with his most cheerful cackle:

"I have summoned you to complete a pleasant duty; one you will enjoy because it requires no payment of the usual fee, yet will prove to your advantage."

Hunted gray eyes didn't understand.

"This does not concern the Tarn Emerald," explained MacAbre. "It can wait for the next heir-apparent. But meanwhile, there is a certain person whose account must be closed. She has been concerned in matters much too often."

"You - you don't mean Sue?"

"You mean the girl your cousin would like to steal from you?" MacAbre cackled a laugh. "Of course not. Here, identify her for yourself from the face of this image. I would like to know how accurately Fandor and Jenó described her."

Across the flickery artificial logs, MacAbre thrust a shapely waxen effigy into his visitor's hand. Gray eyes reflected horror in the changing light as the lips below them gasped:

"Margo Lane!"

"Excellent!" With a wave of his hand, MacAbre started the thrum of tom-toms and brought the walls to life with a whirl of pictured Voodoo dancers. "And now to choose a suitable garb for this image, which will properly represent its fate."

Stooping beside the fire, MacAbre raised the metal bowl that an hour before had boiled with molten wax. At present, the miniature cauldron contained a more potent substance. Its contents consisted of melted bronze, glistening and seething as it bubbled. Pointing to the image, MacAbre lowered his claw-tipped finger to the bowl and stated:

"Drop it!"

A hand trembled, then moved forward. Opening mechanically, fingers let the wax image slide into the bubbling metal which swallowed it with a hiss. Taking a pair of odd-shaped tongs, MacAbre dipped them into the bronze stew and brought out the effigy with the pincers. In that brief bath, the Voodoo doll had become a bronze statuette!

"You wonder at this?" clucked MacAbre. "It is really very simple. Why do you suppose I deal in antiques? Only to dispose of life-sized statues such as this" - he leaned across the fire and his tone changed to a hiss that tuned with the music of the simmering bowl - "statues that represent the bodies of victims who have defied my power."

"I export statuary." Carefully, MacAbre set the bronze image on the floor to let its coating harden. "There is little difficulty in shipping it to certain points; the complications come when customs officials examine it at the receiving ports. But for some strange reason" - MacAbre reverted to his chuckle - "these shipments never arrive."

Abruptly, MacAbre cut off the pictured whirl that swept the walls and the beat of drums stopped also. He ushered his best customer out through the antique shop and on the stairs MacAbre paused, to put the invitation:

"Would you like to stay and witness the working of a Voodoo charm? After all, you received very little entertainment from the deaths you purchased. You are welcome to remain -"

The reply that interrupted MacAbre's offer was the slam of the front door, so fast did his horrified visitor scurry down the stairs. With a chortle, MacAbre went into the front room, where Fandor and Jenó were peering through the slits of the front curtains.

"They are too commercial, these people who call themselves civilized," commented MacAbre. "They are willing to buy death, as any other investment, but its beauty does not appeal to them, any more than the other commodities from which they profit."

"Shall we follow him?" asked Jenó, thumbing toward the window curtain. "I shall be careful tonight, mon professeur."

"No, Jenó," returned MacAbre. "I shall need you here. Besides, I have arranged with others to make sure our client does not behave unwisely as he did the other night. I am leaving it to the men who will handle our shipment. Crooks, they call them in this country. Come. Let us go below."

Outdoors, two sweated men were meeting near the corner by the elevated. One gave a gesture through the thickening fog.

"Say, did that bloke hustle," said the man who gestured. "You wouldn't have knowed him for the fellow who came sneaking up so cautious like. Or was he the same, Griff?"

"He was the same all right, Johnny," returned Griff. "Only that don't mean he won't be coming back. Maybe he wants to see somebody and tip them off to something. I don't like it. So keep your sea-eye peeled."

"Righto," agreed Johnny. "How soon do we ship the cargo?"

"As soon as they have it ready." Griff stepped to the curb and waved to a truck that came rumbling from beneath the elevated. Griff's gesture was a sweep that ended in a half circle. "The boys will park in back and leave the truck. I'll use them as lookouts too."

"What a lot of trouble over one statue!"

"It's important, that statue, and your job is important, too. Remember, the statue goes overboard before you reach port."

"Agreed. But what will I tell my matey when he helps me bring the crate up from the hold?"

"Tell him it's an insurance gag," suggested Griff. "The statue is being sold for more dough than it's worth, so it's got to turn up missing in order to collect."

"And Lloyd's will stand the difference, as they can blooming well afford. That will suit my matey."

Griff was gesturing Johnny along the avenue so they could meet the truckers and deploy. Professor MacAbre had chosen good helpers for this occasion; except for Johnny, Griff's men constituted an experienced highjack crew who had specialized in anything the black market wanted.

No blacker market could exist than Professor MacAbre's deals in statuary. In the windowless cellar of his house, the Voodoo specialist was completing his preparations for another masterpiece in death. Fandor and Jenó were stirring a bronze broth in a full-sized cauldron that loomed shoulder high beside a half door that looked like a large wicket, set at head level in the wall. The arch-professor was at the telephone, which oddly was in the cellar, speaking in a smooth, persuasive tone that copied the soft, snakelike simmer of the steaming bronze.

It was a night of madness, this, indoors and out. By now, the side street was shrouded in a whitish pall as ominous as blackest night. Through the thick, ugly fog came basso blasses of river whistles, singularly like tones of doom. Amid the thick swirl, Griff and his expert crew had spread to patrol the district, with the fog as perfect cover.

Strangest of all, was the ghostly shape that glided through the neighboring streets like the stalking figure of death itself. It seemed a human shape plucked from night's own blackness, visible only where it stirred the whitened mist, disappearing in the grimy background beyond the swirls of its own making.

The Shadow was seeking an arch foe whom he had never seen nor heard of, but whose existence was a matter beyond all doubt: Professor MacAbre, the brain of Voodoo crime!

CHAPTER XII

WHY Margo Lane believed the voice, she could not tell.

It was a voice that she had never before heard, persuasive in its purr yet pointed in its statements. It simply told her where she was to go, not why.

There was no use putting questions to that voice; it wouldn't have answered them. Somehow it caught the tempo of Margo's excited heart-beats and brought from her a breathless "Yes" each time it paused.

So Margo was riding to her destination in a cab that wasn't Shrevvy's and through her brain there throbbed a peculiar rhythm that was an aftermath of the strange coma which had gripped her when she breathed the fragrance of the Secret Flowers in Walden's oppressive conservatory.

The doorman at Margo's apartment house had watched the girl get in the cab and had noted a fixed expression in her eyes. He was still thinking about it when another cab wheeled up and a young man sprang from it, much excited.

The doorman saw the full, square jaw of Rex Tarn, before the latter bundled his raincoat collar about his chin. All that remained visible of his features were gray eyes above a thin, aristocratic nose, but his disguise was by no means complete. Those eyes were the sort to be remembered, by their wide, excited expression.

"Miss Margo Lane." Rex glanced upward at the building. "Has she gone out?"

"About five minutes ago," replied the doorman. "She took a cab."

"Didn't she say where she was going?"

"No, sir."

"But you must have heard her tell the driver."

"Sorry, but I didn't. She hadn't told him when the cab started. She seemed to be thinking about something else."

It wasn't exactly a hunted look that flashed from Rex's eyes; rather, their gray glint expressed guilt because of his belated arrival. Certain it was that Rex wanted to make amends for his delay, for he sprang back into his cab and told the driver to get going without stating where.

Apparently he had a general idea where Margo had gone.

In her own cab, Margo was sitting silent with half-closed eyes. Somehow the throbbing in her head was taking on the beat of drums. It seemed that such an obligato had come with the voice across the telephone and now Margo could remember a curious effect at the finish of that talk. The voice had given a crackle, like that of fire. Mentally, Margo could picture the flicker of flame accompanying it.

The cab stopped suddenly and the driver leaned back to state the fare. It was eighty cents and Margo pushed a dollar bill through the window, wondering how she could have come so far in what seemed only a few minutes. Then she was standing on the sidewalk, staring at a house she'd never seen before, and shivering as the cold fog crept about her.

Oddly, Margo was wearing the same rejected evening gown that she'd put on the other night. Why she'd picked it again, she couldn't understand, except that the voice had told her to hurry and therefore she'd

let her thoughts revert to the last occasion when she'd been in haste. At any rate, the flimsy gown was a good argument for getting indoors, so Margo went up the steps of the house where the cab had stopped.

Pressing a button, Margo heard the click-clack of the automatic latch so suddenly that the thing must have been geared to the button itself. Going upstairs, she saw an open door and entered a room well-crammed with antiques. A far door was open, so Margo went there, following instructions that the crackly voice had given.

Beyond the door was a blank walled room. Its sheer whiteness gave the effect of a motion picture screen on every side. Even the inside of the door was a smooth white that matched the slight glisten of the walls, another feature that made them resemble picture screens. As Margo crossed the threshold, the door closed behind her and she was startled by a crackle accompanied by a blaze of light.

Staring at a fire in the middle of the floor, Margo was amazed by its apparent reality. Her eyes went upward to study the scintillating effect of the artificial firelight upon a crystal chandelier above. That was when she noted curious beams spread from above the chandelier, like the glare of movie projectors focused on the walls.

Margo felt quite herself, for the hypnotic effect of the voice no longer bothered her. She was simply experiencing a state of simple post hypnosis, wherein a subject has a craving to complete a given duty, which in Margo's case was to come to this place. The effect of her sojourn in the glass room where Walden kept the Secret Flowers was practically worn by this time, remaining only as the faintest recollection unless something stirred it strongly.

Something did.

Turning around to leave the room, Margo noticed something, resting on the fire. She could tell by now that the fire was artificial, so she stopped to examine the object. It was a little statuette of bronze, simply shaped in the set form of a doll. Even when she picked it up, Margo didn't realize that its face was formed to represent her own.

By then, Margo had forgotten the doll.

The mere action of picking up the statuette had cut the photo-electric beam that controlled the mechanical effects of this strange room. Drums began to throb, bringing back the maddening note that had gone through Margo's brain. She dropped the statuette, which didn't break like a wax doll would have, because its coating of bronze kept it intact.

Then the room became alive.

To Margo, the effect of jungle scenery in full color was more than startling, for it took her back to that setting at Walden's. When the figures of the Voodoo dancers whirled into sight, Margo was gripped with momentary terror, which caused her to turn from wall to wall. Everywhere those mad dancers, brown like the bronze statuette, were flinging themselves into abandoned gyrations, with the furious scintillation of golden bangles clanging a tempo to the drums.

Professor MacAbre had added another effect tonight, in addition to sight and sound.

Wispy smoke strayed up from the electrically heated fire, like the trail of perfume. It carried the scent of the strange plants that had withered at Walden's that afternoon. As Margo sensed the aroma, she stiffened, for the fragrance brought her mind to a state of seeming reality.

Her eyes closed, Margo recalled a rapid series of events: the death of Henniman, her encounter with Jenó, the sudden fate that had overtaken Walden. All seemed to be happening in the broad light of day and when she opened her eyes again, her present surroundings, though those of night, seemed to savor of complete reality.

Literally, Margo was in the center of a Voodoo jungle, for to her distant gaze, the dancing figures had gained a three dimensional effect. They seemed to loom forward from the screen and crowd around the fire-light where Margo stood, but always they receded in tantalizing style. They were beckoning with clanging bracelets, madly inviting this newcomer to join their circle and Margo found herself swaying to the beat of the drums. Her mind was actually moving ahead of itself, for as she swayed around the firelight, she seemed to be among the dancers, sharing their happy hysteria.

The reels that MacAbre had brought from Haiti provided for that response to the increasing Voodoo spell. In their dance, the dusky maidens weaved their hands with snakelike undulation toward one spot in the circle, indicating it from both directions. Her eyes attracted, Margo saw an opening in the far side, a gap that the dancers wanted her to fill.

It was subtle, that serpentine weave. Upon Margo, it produced the same effect as the hypnotic power of a snake directed toward a helpless bird. She was moving forward, slowly, under an irresistible spell, while the dancers at the opening in the circle were waving extra bangles, inviting her to accept these tokens of the dance.

A dance macabre, had Margo known it!

Ignorance, however, was the theme of Voodoo, and all rational ideas were gone from Margo's mind. Her civilized intelligence gave way to the lure of primitive savagery as she approached the wall, hoping to receive the glinting bangles. Margo was on the very verge of going berserk, when there was a sudden wobble in the dancing circle behind her.

That wobble came when the door swung inward. Through the gap came the cloaked figure of The Shadow. Only briefly did the firelight disappear, for the door went shut again, restoring the weird flicker. But the colored pictures did not waver, not at the spot where Margo was about to cast aside all civilized restraint and fling herself into the ring of jungle dancers,

With a long leap past the fire, The Shadow caught Margo by her shoulders above the slipping straps of the evening gown. He tried to wheel her away from the spot that lured her, but in her eyes he saw a mad determination that challenged his own.

Margo herself would never have believed that she could fight so hard. To her wide-eyed gaze, stimulated by the drugged perfume, The Shadow was a clouded blur that lay between herself and mad desire. She became a jungle wildcat, clawing, kicking at this hated shape that intervened, her strength increasing with each frenzied moment that she was thwarted from joining the circle in which she insanely believed she now belonged.

Hurling her whole weight against The Shadow, screaming wildly above the beat of drums, Margo was actually driving her cloaked friend back against the screen, when he took the only course that could terminate this folly. Slashing Margo's clawing hands aside, The Shadow drove a thin-gloved fist straight to the jaw below her crazed face.

It was an expert punch, well placed. It had to be, to counteract Margo's maddened mood. It was meant to score instantaneous knockout and it did, but it would have given Margo a broken jaw as a souvenir, if The Shadow hadn't pulled the punch at the proper instant.

The Shadow's forearm gave the punch, his body provided the pull, and he was unstinting with the recoil. As Margo slumped to the floor, The Shadow wheeled back and away, expecting the wall to stop him.

It didn't, because there wasn't any wall.

Striking the exact spot where Margo had hoped to fling herself into the circle and take her place among the bangled tribe, The Shadow crashed a paper-thin barrier. The spot was an open doorway that had been papered over with the white, glistening wallpaper that MacAbre had chosen for a surrounding screen.

The doorway led directly to a rear stairway that had also been altered to suit the machinations of MacAbre. It was a steep stairway and it was provided with a ramp as smooth and polished as a bowling alley.

Before he could catch the sides of the doorway, The Shadow was skidding headlong down that slide, bound for the reception that Professor MacAbre had provided for his Voodoo victim, Margo Lane!

CHAPTER XIII

PROFESSOR MACABRE turned with chin in hand to watch what happened at the half-door above the cauldron. He knew that the trap had sprung, because an automatic cut-off had stopped proceedings in the Voodoo chamber and flashed a signal light below.

It would mean a new statue in MacAbre's unlisted collection. A flash, a plop in the cauldron beside which Fandor and Jenó waited; then all would be over. Death from boiling bronze was practically instantaneous and it would simply be a case of fishing out the human statue, the way MacAbre had done with the wax figure when it gained its coating of bronze.

With a clatter, the half-door cracked open.

In a mere split-second, MacAbre and his patient henchmen were overwhelmed with a complete surprise. Instead of a live Voodoo dancer with arms waving in quest of imaginary bangles, a black-cloaked shape came lunging forth. As for the surprise that greeted The Shadow, it was equally forceful.

However, The Shadow expected a surprise.

If Margo had come skidding down that chute, her mind would still have been upon the Voodoo dance. The most that she could have done would be to try stop herself and the cauldron was perfectly placed for anyone who made that despairing effort.

But The Shadow was thinking in terms of what he found. He wasn't wondering why he wasn't wearing the clanging costume of a Voodoo dancer in exchange for cast-off civilized attire. He was expecting anything from a bed of spikes to a battery of machine guns and whatever it was, he planned to rush it.

So The Shadow rushed the cauldron.

It was just a matter of turning a slide into a dive. Doubling his knees as his arms spread the half-door, The Shadow turned his plunge into a spring. His hands, jabbing as far as they could reach, went beyond the seething brew of deadly bronze and struck the far side of the cauldron. If the thing had been anchored hard and fast, The Shadow would have plopped back into it, but it wasn't fixed in place.

Over went the cauldron and The Shadow with it, in a somersault that carried him ahead of the pouring bronze. His fate at that moment was really in the balance, for unless the flip landed him on his feet, he couldn't hope to escape the flood that followed. The concrete floor was hard and a flat landing would

have been a stunning blow, so The Shadow did his utmost to avoid it.

His grip on the cauldron edge helped. The massive iron vat was firm, even when it tilted, and The Shadow added the necessary hoist to his flying turnover. Hitting on his feet, he reached the far wall with a run, caught himself with one hand and wheeled around with the other producing the latest specimen of a .45 automatic from a holster comfortably situated beneath his cloak.

If The Shadow was fast, so were his challengers. In fact they were no longer challengers at all.

The moment that the cauldron tipped, MacAbre set the precedent for safety. The arrival of a fighting foe instead of a helpless victim was trifling compared to the menace of the cauldron. Close to the edge from which the molten metal poured, MacAbre did a rapid dive for the nearest doorway and both Fandor and Jenó followed with quick leaps past the flood of bronze.

When The Shadow turned, he saw figures disappearing in a steam as thick as the fog outdoors. Rolling towards him like a trailing surf was the bronze bath meant for Margo and it was spreading wide. Instead of trying to dodge it completely, The Shadow cut across its thinning mass, without pausing in a single stride. Using the door that the fugitives had taken, The Shadow found his way upstairs. A quick slam from a rear passage announced that MacAbre and Company had taken the back way out.

Where they went, it was The Shadow's job to follow, for the simple reason that Margo was still upstairs enjoying the sweet coma of a knockout punch. If MacAbre doubled the trail in that direction, it wouldn't be pleasant for Margo, considering that these Voodoo artists could be quick with knives when cauldrons failed.

So The Shadow kept to the trail and in the course of it, he could have chopped the Voodoo villains one by one, if it hadn't been for the fog. Ducking around corners, they were just ahead of gunfire, thanks to the grimy haze that so promptly swallowed them. But their fear of The Shadow kept them in full flight, as was evidenced when they finally dashed beneath the elevated and took to a side street toward the river, which was the opposite direction from the headquarters that they had abandoned.

The Shadow fired three shots through the fog to spur the flight. That volley brought him trouble.

Instantly, guns opened from all sides. Griff and his gang were converging on the scene and in the light from the corner, they made out a cloaked shape that they recognized. Perhaps the perpetrators of Voodoo terrorism were unacquainted with the prowess of The Shadow, but these men of common crime knew all about their superfoe. If gangdom ever gained a dictator, that post could be claimed by the man who settled crime's great scourge, The Shadow.

Plenty of candidates had gunned for The Shadow and failed, but never had better opportunity been at hand. Here was a chance to stay within close and open range, firing pot shots for The Shadow who was somewhere in the middle, yet avoid his return fire by trusting to the thickness of the fog, which in terms of the gang's courtesy member, Johnny, was as much like suet as any London pea-souper.

Tongues of flame were spurting through the fog, their location difficult to trace in that illusive atmosphere. As many as six assailants were surrounding The Shadow, shooting for anything that looked like blackness. To cleave a path among them would be foolhardy, the way stray shots were flying.

Amid those deadly gun coughs, The Shadow laughed. His tone came strident through the thickness, inviting enemies to do their utmost. Maybe they took it as a bluff, for with one accord they charged, shouting to each other to "get The Shadow," embellishing his title with various unnecessary adjectives.

Shots from thrusting guns stabbed at a common target, looming blackness that could only represent The

Shadow since there was no one else about. Instead of collapsing, that shape loomed higher and grew huge, as though magnified by the fog. The Shadow seemed to be gaining a gigantic stature, his taunting laugh rising with him.

The burst of guns was drowning the metallic clang of bullets, otherwise Griff's marksmen might have realized what their target was before they reached it. Coming together at the focal spot, they saw the thing they had mistaken for The Shadow take its rightful shape. The bulking monstrosity was the steep, covered stairway leading up to the elevated line!

It was one of those stairways with several turns, which accounted for its massive appearance. It was made of metal; steps, rails and all, a zigzag pill-box towering up into the foggy night. Already well up the steps, The Shadow was laughing down at the foemen from whose very midst he had escaped.

Two could play that game; namely, two in terms of factions. Griff snarled the order for attack and with a mad surge, six mobbies stormed the stairs, blasting shots upward at every turn. Either The Shadow was out of shots or saving them, for his laugh was the only response. Always it was a full turn ahead and the gun bursts did not drown it.

What did drown the laugh was the heavy rumble of an elevated train, stopping at the station. During the brief pause, The Shadow halted somewhere to jab a few delaying shots below, then as the train pulled out again, his strident laugh was lost in its increasing clatter.

This was an express station, where the central track mounted to a superstructure above the local platform. Until noon, that track was used by downtown trains; after that hour it became a path for rapid uptown traffic. The train that had just pulled out was a local, but from down the line, approaching lights were twinkling upward through the mist, announcing that an express was taking the rise toward the double platform of the superstructure.

The Shadow was at the local level when he saw those lights. Griff's maddened mob was very close, taking the final turn of the steps. Instead of making for the turnstiles that led to the local platform, The Shadow whirled toward a flight of steps that marked an exit from the upper level. The first of his pursuers glimpsed him and shouted to the rest. With a massed drive they followed The Shadow, all guns blazing, expecting to box him at an exit gate.

There wasn't any gate at the upper platform. This was an oddity of elevated lines that practically everyone had overlooked, except The Shadow. What he reached was a short passage of a dozen feet, with about the same width of platform just beyond it. Then came the deep-set single track in a space wide enough to accommodate an el train; beyond it the far platform.

This was at the south end of the station and as The Shadow started along the short passage, three of Griff's thugs made the turn behind him. Charging full tilt, they saw The Shadow dash ahead of them, in a brilliant light that suddenly sliced the fog. It was the headlight of the elevated express, coming fast.

Crooks raised triumphant shouts, confident that The Shadow would be blocked. They were hurling themselves after him, intent upon slugging him with their empty guns, the moment that he turned about, because of the intervening train. But The Shadow didn't turn; he had timed his coming exploit almost to the exact second.

Reaching the edge of the platform at full speed, The Shadow launched himself in air. His was the action of a broad jumper, perfectly performed. A capable jumper can cover twenty feet with a running broad and the width of the track pit was considerably under that distance. But few athletes would have taken the chance in circumstances such as this.

The Shadow's leap carried him right across the path of the intruding train, the gleaming headlight growing as if to swallow him. His flight through air seemed painfully slow compared to the metal juggernaut that was roaring at him, but his timing wasn't wrong. The Shadow struck the far platform and reeled onward, half a second ahead of the mighty mass that threatened to doom him.

His pursuers weren't so lucky. The first man reached the brink just as The Shadow landed on the far side; making an effort to halt, the thug couldn't. His shriek was louder than the grind of brakes as he toppled from the platform's edge and was slapped by the full tonnage of the el train. The clattering express knocked the puny thug half the length of the platform and before the motorman could stop the train, the wheels were slicing the body of the victim who had landed dead when he struck the tracks.

The second mobbie met the passing train head on and was ricocheted like a dummy made of straw. He went whirling along the platform, crashing a bench against which he struck, while the third crook halted and stared aghast. Then Griff arrived and shouted at the man who was standing stupefied. Together they grabbed the stunned thug who had crashed the bench and rushed him back down the steps.

Above the groan of the halting train, a weird laugh floated back from the stairs beyond the opposite platform. The Shadow hadn't waited to witness the fate of his pursuers; having let the train cut them off, he was on his way elsewhere, taking advantage of the dozen seconds or more that would elapse before the doors could open and let Griff's tribe through.

Only they weren't coming through. Flinging themselves madly to the street, they wanted flight, knowing that The Shadow was somewhere at large in the dank fog, probably prepared to chop them down at leisure, if they crossed his deadly path. They weren't even going back to get their truck.

They were lucky, those scattering gunners who had dared The Shadow. He was letting them go their way - for The Shadow had another person to consider: Margo Lane.

Turning in the misty gloom, The Shadow gave a brief departing laugh as he started back along the avenue to cover the few blocks to the abandoned lair of Professor MacAbre.

CHAPTER XIV

MUCH had happened in a short time at MacAbre's house. In a few brief minutes, the tide of excitement had swept in another direction and during that interval, Margo Lane had retrieved her senses.

Sitting on the floor beside an artificial firelight, Margo was holding, her chin and wondering what had kicked it, along with other things that puzzled her. For The Shadow's punch had obliterated Margo's recollections of the vanished Voodoo dance.

Looking toward one wall, Margo saw a jagged gap with a peculiar slide beyond and recognized that it couldn't be the right way out. Coming to her feet, she rearranged her draping gown, found a shoe that she had kicked off during her struggle with The Shadow, and looked for a door. Since the walls were no longer alive with fantastic pictures, the crack that represented the corner door was very evident. Opening the door, Margo went out through the antique shop, staring as though she had never seen it before, and so down to the street.

Once in the fog, Margo experienced her former chill. This neighborhood seemed ghostly, if for no other reason than that she couldn't remember how she had arrived here. The clatter of Margo's high heels was music to her own ears, for it offset the silent creep of the fog while she was walking toward the nearest corner. Margo didn't like the stillness of that shrouded atmosphere.

At least not until the rumble came. High overhead, something roared past with a gush of light, sending

Margo back in a wild stampede, until she realized it was only an elevated train. By then, Margo was tripping into a basement entry, or would have, if firm hands hadn't caught her.

In the hazy light from the corner street lamp, Margo saw Rex Tarn. In his eagerness to find her, Rex had let his coat collar fall, but that wasn't necessary to identify him. His wide, excited eyes were enough.

As the rumble of the southbound local faded, Rex began to pour quick explanations.

"I thought you'd be around here," he said. "I was afraid it would be dangerous after the other night, you know."

"Around where?" queried Margo. "What other night?"

"The time that knife just missed us," returned Rex. "I've felt as though someone was after me ever since. I guess seeing Walden die upset me, because I was worried all the way into town.

"Then when I got here - into town I mean - I began thinking that whoever was after me would be after you too. So I went around to your apartment and found you'd just left. I was afraid you'd come to this neighborhood, so I came to overtake you."

Rex was speaking in an earnest tone that made his story plausible, though why he'd so suddenly become troubled over Margo's welfare, and how he had guessed her moves so promptly, was something he didn't explain. In fact, Rex was quick to change the subject, once he had stated it briefly.

"You're shivering!" exclaimed Rex. Tightening his grip on Margo's arms, he darted a hunted look across his shoulder. "Something must have terrified you."

"I'm only cold," returned Margo. "I didn't notice the fog when I started out, or I'd have put on my cape."

Noticing that Margo's arms were bare, Rex hesitated, then whipped off his raincoat, to drape it over the girl's shoulders. In a quick undertone, he asked:

"Did you just get here?"

"Why, no," replied Margo, slowly. "At least I don't think so."

"Then where have you been all the while that I've been looking for you among these streets?"

Margo's memory was back again, beginning with the other night and working toward the present.

"Why, I found the antique shop I was looking for," she stated. "Don't you remember? That's why I was in this neighborhood."

"Where is the shop?"

"In a house several doors along the street. Don't ask me which one, because I lost count when I came out through the fog. Somehow I can't recall the address either."

"Did you go into the place?"

Margo nodded; then added truthfully:

"But there was no one in there. When I saw I couldn't buy antiques, I came out again, that's all."

Although Margo still couldn't recall the Voodoo ceremony that had nearly lured her to oblivion, she was

realizing that the less she said about the strange house, the better. Its menace must have been powerful to obliterate all recollection of it. Usually canny, Margo had returned enough toward normal to recognize that Rex's sharp probe might be intended to make her betray herself. So she just shook her head.

Doubt mingled with impatience on Rex's hard but handsome features. Noting something looming through the fog, he put his fingers to his lips and gave a sharp whistle. A cab nudged warily toward the curb and Rex pushed Margo toward it; momentarily resisting, the girl yielded when she recognized Shrevvy as the driver.

"No word of this to anybody," undertoned Rex, as he put Margo in the cab. "Some people might not approve of it."

"You mean people like Sue?"

"Yes, or my cousin Alex, who likes to make trouble for everybody." Not sure that the argument would stand, Rex added another: "And then there's Cranston. Maybe he wouldn't like it."

"Lamont would understand," insisted Margo, closing the cab door; then, with a note of reassurance, she said: "Nevertheless, I won't tell him."

The cab was on its way and Rex had become a crouched figure, skirting the corner toward MacAbre's house. Having no raincoat to disguise himself, he was working from doorway to doorway, pausing intermittently in each. Still short of MacAbre's, Rex was making another foray through the fog when he sighted blackness that literally filtered toward him. Only briefly did it take a human shape, but that was enough.

Launching himself upon the evasive figure, Rex was amazed when it vanished from his driving clutch. He didn't realize the illusive effect of the fog; how it could make objects seem closer than they were, when the eye tried to gauge in terms of normal visibility. The Shadow had wheeled before Rex reached him and by angling sharply into the fog, was circling his attacker, when Rex suddenly halted.

What stopped Rex was another human figure that suddenly replaced The Shadow. Thinking that the cloaked specter was back, Rex locked furiously, to find himself eye to eye with the glaring face of Jenó!

Apparently the Voodoo law was off, where Jenó was concerned. On a previous night, Jenó had failed to knife Rex Tarn, classing him as a man who accepted Voodoo rule. All such were answerable only to MacAbre - or had been. But now, with Voodoo schemes gone wrong, Jenó showed lust for vengeance on a man whose very presence here was indication that he might have aided Margo Lane. With a wide sweep of his arm, Jenó produced a knife that looked immense as he drew, catching the handle to direct the blade.

Rex's warding swing was unnecessary. Though he thought the knife was meant for him, it wasn't. Hand halting, Jenó scaled the dirk across Rex's shoulder toward a figure that was lunging in from the fog: The Shadow!

A whirling shift of shoulders, the weave of a flying cloak as the knife slashed through it, and the missile rammed its point upon a brick building front. Jenó needed a trifle more accuracy, plus a dash of speed, to clip The Shadow on the whirl. He managed, though, to trip Rex against the curb, and fling him into The Shadow's path.

Then Jenó was bounding up the steps into the house, waving two figures ahead of him. MacAbre and Fandor were back, having doubled their trail with Jenó while The Shadow was shaking off Griff's crew with the assistance of an elevated express.

Spilling Rex into the sprawl which Jenó had started, The Shadow took after the Voodoo trio. His path was barred by doors which they bolted in closing, but The Shadow made short work of such barriers. The front door was mostly plate glass, which The Shadow shattered with a swing of a big gun. When he reached the door of the antique shop, he blew its lock apart with a single bullet; then rammed a few more shots that gnawed the wood around a bolt. But there was to be trouble before The Shadow reached the third door.

Professor MacAbre was diving through to the Voodoo chamber carrying an armful of odd items from his antique shop. Fandor and Jenó were standing ready with heavier exhibits; they began flinging them in a fast barrage: chairs, taborets and brassware. Warding off the flying objects, The Shadow kept on his way, forcing Jenó and Fandor to follow MacAbre and slam the final door. One crash of The Shadow's shoulder wrecked that barrier, but he was too late to overtake his prey.

Having gathered his prized projectors and other devices of the Voodoo chamber, MacAbre was sliding down the chute to the cellar with his helpers close after them. By now the molten bronze had hardened and they would be ready, this time with bullets, if The Shadow took that route.

Speeding down the front way again, The Shadow saw that the street was deserted when he arrived, Rex having decided on flight as his own best course. That MacAbre and his partners in Voodoo believed the same was evidenced when The Shadow reached the avenue, intending to follow it to the rear street. A fading rumble greeted The Shadow and it wasn't from the elevated line.

The sound represented the truck that Griff had brought. MacAbre and his two lieutenants had commandeered it for their own departure. Alone, The Shadow stood in the swirling fog, master of a situation which no longer existed!

CHAPTERS XV

MARGO LANE still didn't believe it until Lamont Cranston made her read the newspaper.

The discovery of an antique shop, with a polished slide down to a cellar filled with molten bronze, in a house not far from where a mob battle had ended in a death upon the el track, was indeed a riddle.

Of course, the police had the answer and curiously they were partly right. The shop was a blind for the peddling of "ancient" statuary that was faked and aged down in the basement. This tallied with some reports that had reached the law, regarding statuary shipped from certain East River piers. But that was as far as the investigation went.

A budding racket had simply exploded itself, due to friction among the men who operated it. The police were willing to question a certain racketeer named Griff Torrock, on the chance that he was acquainted with the mobbie who had perished under the wheels of the el train, but there wasn't a link with anything resembling Voodoo.

Not to the law there wasn't, but there was to Margo Lane. After reading of the unique set-up in MacAbre's house, she was ready to credit the details that Cranston added. Gradually, it all came back like a dream.

"You're right, Lamont," declared Margo, her eyes half closed as they rode in Shrevvy's car. "Why, it's horribly vivid, that maddening dance! Only the whole thing was so real, that I imagined I'd joined it, gold bangles and all!"

"It's lucky you didn't keep up with your imagination," asserted Cranston, "or instead of gold bangles you'd be wearing a bronze kimono of a permanent pattern."

"That strange perfume!" recalled Margo. "Like the odor of the Secret Flowers!" She took a long sniff of the evening air. "I've lost the impression though, since last night."

"Which is logical," agreed Cranston. "Twenty-four hours should be sufficient to offset the treatment. How's your heart?"

"No more pitty-pats."

"That's logical, too. The effect of that flower grows on people in proportion to the time they are exposed to it. After a while it creeps into the system and stays."

"But why did it influence me so fast?"

"Largely because you weren't used to the tropical humidity of the green-house. Moreover the place was loaded with specimens of the Obi Weed."

The term puzzled Margo.

"The Obi Weed? What does Obi mean?"

"It means Voodoo," defined Cranston, "especially the West Indian sort."

The dread word gave Margo shudders, even though she was wearing a wrap over the new evening gown that she had picked for another visit to the Club Galaxy. Cranston noticed her quiver, and added calmly:

"If you can stifle those creeps, I'll tell you more about the Obi Weed, now that I've checked the facts."

Stiffening, Margo said to "go ahead."

"In certain inner circles," declared Cranston, "particularly in Haiti, the Obi Weed is affectionately termed the Zombi Plant. Perhaps you get the connection."

Margo got it. She didn't shudder, but simply froze. Her own experience in mechanical behavior convinced her that the term was literally true. She'd heard of "zombies" - otherwise termed "walking dead" - and knew that they were supposed to thrive in Haiti. Margo was willing to believe that such creatures could perambulate in New York as well, for she realized that she'd come very close to becoming one of them.

"Some scientists ridicule the Obi Weed," remarked Cranston. "They class it purely as a plant used in witchcraft, its virtues - or should we call them vices? - exaggerated as in the case of the famous Mandrake. They even claim that it lacks potency as a drug."

Margo was in a mood to disagree with science, but didn't say so. She decided to leave that to Lamont.

"What they have overlooked," continued Cranston, "are the combined properties of the various species. The Obi Weed is usually found singly; a cluster, in bloom and properly confined, could readily provide a heart stimulus to anyone who imbibed their odor."

Unconsciously, Margo's hand went to her throat, to learn if her heart was creeping there.

"As for the extract of such weeds," concluded Cranston, "it might conceivably live up to the reputation of the Zombi Plant if mixed in due proportions. The stories of zombies seen in Haiti are not myths. The only doubt is whether they are actually walking dead."

The lights of the Club Galaxy terminated Cranston's grisly theme, much to Margo's relief. They left the

cab and entered the club where Margo shed her cape to display an olive evening gown decorated with a topaz pendant, a combination that attracted the eye as readily as Sue's familiar blue and aquamarine.

Sue was there, again sporting her favorite regalia. She was the first to envy Margo's get-up, even though it was strictly suited to a brunette. About the only advantage Sue's creation could claim was brevity, but the envious blonde soon found a better point of satisfaction. Sue had bracelets to match her necklace, while Margo hadn't. Sue didn't know that Margo had sworn off bracelets - with good reason.

Flanked by the Tarn cousins, Sue gave a very pretty smile when Cranston and Margo approached. The smile was Sue's self-compliment at her ability to keep two rivals in line, but she was taking undeserved credit. Alex and Rex had their own reasons for being on friendly terms tonight.

"Hello, Cranston," greeted Alex, "and Margo, too! We looked for you last night, after we came in from Long Island. Thought you might have enjoyed a drink or two."

"Two zombies," added Sue, very seriously. "That's the limit. This is only my second."

Sue held up a tall glass containing a dark concoction. Rex turned to the barkeeper and ordered:

"Make mine another zombi."

"You've had two already, Remy!" warned Sue. "Better look out! They do things to you!"

"And I do things to zombies," retorted Rex. His eyes, looking past Sue, met Margo's, and for the first time she saw them narrow, the way Alex's did. "Have a drink, Margo. I'm sorry, too, that I didn't see you last night."

Alex was watching Rex suspiciously, with the tight gaze that his cousin had begun to copy. Cranston's manner was totally indifferent, the best of poses if it hadn't been for Sue. The blonde liked the stare that Alex gave to Rex, for she felt that it might be on her own account. But to see Rex giving Margo the eye, meant that he might be slipping toward brunettes, a particularly serious thing when Sue noted Cranston's indifference.

Revolving on the stool, Sue made an off-balance twist, her cute way of gathering complete attention. Both Rex and Alex grabbed to save her from decorating the brass rail and with murmured thanks, Sue added:

"That's better. Now we can be chummy again."

"It suits me," said Rex, easing his gaze and reaching for his drink as it arrived. "Maybe Alex won't be so cryptic about Lee Selfkirk."

"Why shouldn't I be?" demanded Alex. "Since he's next in line for the Tarn Emerald, why should I help you play him for a sucker?"

"I only want to warn him about the curse -"

"Like you warned Henniman and Walden? I don't think Selfkirk would thank you, even if he lived long enough."

Rex started forward from his stool, to be slapped back by Sue, who was providing excellent insulation whenever sparks began to fly between the cousins.

"Both of those deaths were accidents," snarled Rex. "You can't prove otherwise, Alex."

"Funny to hear you say that," returned Alex, candidly. "You yourself claim that the curse was working. Do you call it an accident?"

"Yes, because it could be avoided."

"By giving you a cut on the price of the emerald," laughed Alex. "Of course you'd argue it that way."

"You'd come in for the same amount, Alex. I asked both Henniman and Walden to divide the proceeds among all the family."

"And the split is getting bigger," put in Alex, "like those eyes of yours, Rex." Over his zombi, Rex was resuming his wide-eyed glare, which he promptly stifled. "It would be three ways according to your present calculation, since we're all the family that's left, except for Selfkirk."

"But I don't want any part of the Tarn Emerald." Alex became emphatic. "Whoever gets it is welcome to it and at present that means Lee Selfkirk. So I wouldn't help you find him even if I did know where he was. Maybe you're the jinx and not the emerald. You were right with Henniman and Walden before the emerald was delivered to either."

Rex brushed Sue off the stool when she tried to stop him this time, but Cranston was there to catch her so promptly that Margo experienced a surprising flare of jealousy. Fortunately, Rex had finished his third zombi, and the rule of two proved true. He wobbled as he tried to shove a punch through the space where Sue had been and his other elbow missed the bar when he tried to catch himself.

A couple of waiters were coming up before Rex could renew hostilities. Alex gave them a weary nod along with his gesture toward Rex.

"Better start him home," suggested Alex. "He's feeling those swift ones."

Slipping a bill to one of the waiters, Alex received quick cooperation toward the removal of his unruly cousin and from then on the party quieted. Margo found herself chatting very pleasantly with Sue while Lamont and Alex went into a serious huddle.

It was an hour before the couples parted and Margo was able to ask Lamont the question that bothered her.

"What about Lee Selfkirk?" Margo queried. "I know he's in line for the Tarn Emerald, but what does he do and where is he?"

"He's an artist," replied Cranston, "and he has an income. Other artists like to borrow from him, so Selfkirk never lets anyone know where he is."

"Then how will he receive the Tarn Emerald?"

"I suppose he'll arrange it privately through the lawyers," stated Cranston. "Alex says it's due to be delivered tomorrow night, but he didn't like to tell Rex."

"But what if Rex finds out?"

"If he does, it will be our job to learn it," asserted Cranston. "I know that Alex hasn't guessed all that lies behind the so-called jinx, but he called one turn correctly. Death won't follow the delivery of that emerald unless Rex Tarn knows how to reach the man who receives it."

Margo's shudder was very noticeable despite the warmth of Shrevvy's cab, which was taking them from

the Club Galaxy. Twice having met Rex Tarn in the vicinity of the Voodoo lair, Margo Lane felt that her information was complete. Nevertheless, she rallied when Cranston declared:

"It will be our job to watch Rex Tarn."

Family curse or Voodoo spell, Margo was willing to do her part in stopping the next impending stroke of death.

CHAPTER XVI

HUNTED eyes were rapid in their glance outside the rear door of the old and obscure hotel. Quite as quick was the dart of the man himself, as he slid indoors and bolted the door to produce complete darkness. Soon there was a rumble from a service elevator in which a flashlight blinked. Stopping on the third floor, the visitor muffled himself in his drab raincoat and approached the door of a corner suite.

A rapped signal admitted him. He crossed to an inner room, where artificial firelight flickered as soon as he closed the door. Muffled drums began to throb and fantastic dancers writhed in picture form upon the walls. But this was no time to stand on Voodoo ceremony. Across the imitation fire, an eager hand thrust a bundle of currency.

The cash was taken by a clawed fist, above which was another that held a deep-buried chin. From lips that were muffled, as suited the guarded drum-beats, there came a cackled tone:

"You are fearful even here at this new meeting place."

"Why not?" was the reply. "I was seen outside the other. So whatever happens -"

"Will be blamed upon Professor MacAbre!" With that pronouncement, MacAbre lowered his hand to reveal his face. "Unless you would rather have it blamed upon Rex Tarn!"

"No, no! If I defy the curse and live, after the emerald is mine, the world will know that I am guilty! You must take the blame, MacAbre! It is part of our bargain!"

"Agreed." MacAbre chuckled as though he relished the prospect. "So let us proceed with this night's business. Take this doll and place it on the stand."

The effigy was an odd one. It represented a bearded man, wearing an artist's smock and beret; so lifelike was the image representing Lee Selfkirk, that it brought wavers from the gray eyes that viewed it. As for the stand, it was significant, too. It was built in little tiers, ten in all, a fact that made MacAbre's visitor recoil.

Nevertheless, the proxy murderer placed the waxen image on the top tier of the standard; then, at MacAbre's command, he tipped it over the edge. Falling headlong, the effigy crashed upon the floor. With a wave toward a ceiling fixture, MacAbre stopped the tom-toms and the kaleidoscopic dance; rolling a screen upward, he revealed a window leading across an adjoining roof.

"Out that way," ordered MacAbre. "If you were followed here, the trail will be lost."

OTHER persons were speaking of lost trails. In her apartment, Margo Lane was answering an urgent phone call from Lamont Cranston. Though the situation offered serious angles, Cranston's tone was very calm.

"Rex has left the Cobalt Club," declared Cranston. "I had to let him go alone."

"But why, Lamont?" asked Margo, anxiously. "I thought we weren't going to let him out of sight."

"I said more than that, Margo," came Cranston's voice. "I said not out of sight or earshot."

"What has earshot to do with it?"

"Too much, Margo. Where has your ear been for the last fifteen minutes?"

"On the telephone," admitted Margo. "I've been listening to Sue, the pest. She's full of weeps over the Rex and Alex question. She prefers love over money but thinks that the two ought to mix. Why don't they repeal a lot of silly laws and allow bigamy for girls like Sue?"

"It wouldn't be bigamy," objected Cranston. "When a woman marries two men, it's called biandry. But let's stop being technical. I'm turning Rex over to you."

"How do you mean?"

"He tried to make a phone call just ten minutes ago, after we finished dinner. He was in a booth here at the club."

"And you kept him in sight?"

"No, in earshot." Cranston was precise about it. "Remember that trick of catching the clicks from a dial and naming the number from it?"

"Yes, I've tried it," replied Margo. "But it won't work with me. Anyway, I give up. What number did Rex call?"

"He called yours, but the line was busy. At least that told him you were home. So when he came from the booth and said he had an appointment, I knew where he was going. But I didn't press the question, because after all, you're supposed to be my girl."

"Supposed is right!" snapped Margo. "If Voodoo wizards didn't try to sling me into cauldrons, we wouldn't be meeting up except once in every leap-year. Alright, how soon will Rex be here?"

"In about ten minutes. Keep me posted."

It wasn't ten minutes. It was more than twenty, with a yearning to be called a half-hour. When Margo opened the door of her apartment, Rex came in with a legitimate stagger, which was something that Lamont would have mentioned if Rex had owned it when he started.

"H'lo, Margo," greeted Rex. "Glad to see you. Just stopped at the Galaxy for a couple of zombies."

"You look better than a couple," retorted Margo. She was standing by the window and caught the blinks of a taxicab's lights below. Those blinks were from Shrevvy's cab, meaning that he'd be on call, whenever Margo needed him. "Sure you didn't have a head-start?"

"They were double zombies," laughed Rex. "New invention of my own, so's to avoid arguments with barkeeps. By th' way, I just left your boy friend."

"You mean Lamont?"

"Thass right. Went from Lamont to Galaxy; then here. Got a cab waiting, so's to go some other place next. Let me use your phone, will you?"

Margo nodded. She watched Rex go to the phone, where he fumbled a few moments with the dial. Then:

"Wait a minute," said Rex. "Don't tell Lamont I stopped here, will you?"

"And why not?" demanded Margo.

"Because I came to get my coat," replied Rex. "You borrowed it - remember? Guess you wouldn't want Lamont to know you'd been looking at antiques when a lot of trouble started. Would you?"

Margo shook her head and went to get the coat, while Rex resumed operation with the dial. This time he made it and his fumbly pauses enabled Margo to count the clicks fairly well. She heard Rex's voice, abrupt and thick, while she was marking down her version of the number.

"H'lo. Yeah, I got your message..." Rex straightened his tuxedo tie with one hand. "Sure, at the Galaxy... Glad to hear from you... Thought maybe you didn't want to see me on account of what's happened... Thass nice... Glad you don't blame me... Sure, I'll be right over..."

Rex was scribbling something on a pad that was attached to Margo's telephone. He tore off the sheet, poked it in his pocket and let Margo help him into his raincoat. Margo watched him navigate the stairway in steadier fashion; then closed the door and grabbed the telephone book.

What Margo wanted was Sue's number, which she didn't have because the call had come from Sue tonight, instead of Margo making it. But Sue's number proved to be Gotham 4-3856 instead of Alcott 2-3266 which Margo had written after listening to the dial clicks. Much annoyed by her error, Margo called the Cobalt Club and asked for Mr. Cranston, who was promptly on the wire.

"They don't work," declared Margo, after describing Rex's brief visit. "The dial clicks I mean. I missed completely on Sue's number."

Over the phone, Margo described the difference in the tally. Cranston's reply was pointed:

"Are you sure that Rex called Sue?"

"Why, no!" exclaimed Margo. "Come to think of it, he didn't mention her by name. Of course she might have been somewhere else, because he wrote down an address. Still, Sue called me from her own apartment -"

"Take a pencil," interrupted Cranston's voice, "and rub it lightly over the telephone pad. Right away, Margo!"

Margo obliged. Cranston's guess was correct; Rex's heavy hand had pressed the impression to the second sheet. Under the graphite treatment, words appeared, as if from a sheet of carbon. Margo read them over the telephone:

"Quentin Apartments. 10-A. 330 River Avenue."

"Phone the number that you checked," ordered Cranston. "You may have it correct, Margo, but I'm sure it's unlisted. Tell him not to admit anyone."

"You mean tell Rex?"

"No," Cranston's word came sharply. "Tell Lee Selfkirk! He's the man that Rex Tarn wants to see and death is riding with him!"

CHAPTER XVII

THE telephone bell in the top floor studio was ringing at full blast. Lee Selfkirk gave it an annoyed glance and shrugged; he was busy on a painting and couldn't be disturbed. So he let the phone keep right on ringing until he heard a sharp knock at the door. Stepping over to the telephone, Selfkirk took it off the hook, thus silencing it.

Unbolting the door, Selfkirk admitted Rex Tarn. From deep in his beard, the artist furnished a smile, and gestured his visitor to a chair beside the telephone table. The first thing that Rex noted was the lifted receiver. In an undertone he inquired:

"Who are you talking to - Alex?"

Selfkirk shook his head.

"I don't know," he replied. "I just didn't want to be disturbed. But you're wrong about Alex. He's really a good friend of yours. He might stop up before the evening is over."

"And before the Tarn Emerald gets here?"

In reply, Selfkirk reached in a pocket of his smock and smilingly produced a jewel case. Opening it, he laid it where Rex could view the magnificent contents. There, glowing in its full brilliance, was the mighty emerald!

"Just what was your proposition, Rex?"

Selfkirk smiled with the question and Rex's eyes came wide open, but without their hunted stare.

"You mean -"

"I mean I'd like to hear it," completed Selfkirk. "If this gem carries a curse, the best thing is to avoid it."

"You can!" Rex's eyes were hungry. "Sell it, Lee! Split the proceeds - and why not? You're getting half a million from the Tarn Estate. Why worry about the emerald?"

Selfkirk's eyes were as dark as his beard. They fixed on Rex with a deep, significant stare.

"You are hard up, aren't you?" queried the artist. "To let Alex have his share, despite the way you hate him."

Rex came to his feet, indignant.

"I'm square with the world!" he began. "That includes Alex -"

Funny sounds were coming from the telephone receiver. Noting Selfkirk's annoyance, Rex paused. The next interruption was from the door, in the form of another knock. Having bolted the door, Selfkirk gestured for Rex to open it.

"I think it's Alex," declared Selfkirk. "Let's have this out, Rex."

"Gladly," stormed Rex, as he strode to the door. "If I'm hard up, Lee, I'm still willing to be honest. This curse is a thing that bothers me."

"How badly, Rex?"

As he spoke, Selfkirk reached beside his canvas. The thing that he picked up did not remotely resemble any item in an artist's paraphernalia. It was an iron rod, about the length of an average crowbar. Holding the rod upright, Selfkirk turned his back toward the open window of his studio. Again, the artist smiled.

Often, Selfkirk had practiced this pose in the hope of lulling an unwelcome visitor. He waited until Rex had drawn the bolt; then, coolly, Selfkirk asked:

"Badly enough to help the curse along? For instance, by aiding it with murder?"

Angrily, Rex wheeled about. His hands lunged toward the easel to stop, when he saw that Selfkirk had retired toward the window. That glare in Rex's eyes convinced Selfkirk that his guess was right. With a nod toward the door, he called:

"Alright, Alex. Come in."

THE man who entered wasn't Alex Tarn. Turning along with Selfkirk's gaze, Rex Tarn stared at the sweated figure of Griff Torrock. In his hands, Griff was balancing a pair of revolvers, nicely determining their individual weight.

"I've come for the emerald," said Griff, coolly. "Kind of surprised to see me, aren't you - both of you?"

"So that's the game!" stormed Selfkirk, savagely. "A fake robbery. This stooge of yours is playing it too strong, Rex. Chase him out of here!"

Rex's hands were creeping upward as he gave his head a shake. But before Rex could speak, Griff was prodding him playfully with the muzzle of a revolver.

"Over there," ordered Griff. "By the telephone. As for you" - Griff was approaching Selfkirk - "if you don't get those mitts up quick, I'm going to show you curtains" - he gestured with the gun - "and they won't be fancy curtains like those you've got hanging around this joint!"

Backing away from the threatening gun, Selfkirk was tightening as he neared the window. His back was almost against the balcony rail when Griff made the gun gesture. It was a low rail, of iron, with the wire from a radio aerial attached to it, but Selfkirk wasn't thinking of such details. His thoughts were on the crowbar, which he was shifting backward, preparatory to a lunging swing.

Then the incredible happened.

As the crowbar grazed the rail, Selfkirk gave a backward stagger and tightened his grip on his pet weapon. There was a clang of metal meeting metal as the crowbar clamped the rail in horizontal style. Over went Selfkirk, shrieking; flung by some strange force, he lost both grip and balance, as he disappeared with a plunge that was measured by the trailing cry that followed it.

On the balcony rail, planted as if glued, remained the iron rod that had figured so curiously in Selfkirk's doom!

With a grin, Griff Torrock gestured both guns toward Rex Tarn.

"All right, double-crosser," sneered Griff. "You've been double-crossed yourself. The prof has told me all about you and what's to be done about it. For first, I'm taking that emerald."

Fists clenched tight, Rex backed against the telephone table as though to protect the priceless gem. Griff made Rex's hands rise again, with a two-gun gesture.

"Pick up the phone," ordered Griff. "Call the cops and tell them to come here. They can figure what happened to Selfkirk and the Tarn Emerald. Move."

Rex moved, but couldn't find the telephone receiver. For the first time, Griff noticed that it was off the hook. With an indulgent shrug, he shoved one gun to his hip, then followed with the other. Seating himself in a chair, Griff kept his arms akimbo, his hands ready to draw the revolvers on an instant's notice.

"Jiggle the hook," suggested Griff. "You'll get an answer. I'm not here to croak you, unless you act foolish."

Reluctantly, Rex complied. His eyes were wide, as often, but their glare was angry rather than hunted. He kept thumbing the hook until the operator finally responded; then, in a forced tone, Rex asked for police headquarters. At last his call was put through, but Rex's tone was still forced when he stated:

"There's trouble up in Selfkirk's studio. Quentin Apartments, tenth floor front."

"Tell them what you did to Selfkirk," growled Griff, coming up from his chair and shoving his hands to his hips. "What's more, make it natural."

"Selfkirk just fell out the window," explained Rex, his tone still forced. "It was an accident, of course -"

"Lay off that guff!"

With his interruption, Griff was coming forward, only to halt rigid. The guns that he hadn't drawn were outmatched by a single weapon that loomed through the half-opened doorway, a mighty automatic, held by a gloved fist as black as the cloaked form behind it.

"The Shadow!"

Griff coughed the name as Rex turned. Standing idle with the telephone, Rex showed the same rigidity as Griff. If ever a scene was indicative of double-crossing doubly dealt, this scene portrayed that picture. Too late to prevent the death of Lee Selfkirk, The Shadow had arrived to settle the affairs of the men responsible.

The first to welch was Griff Torrock.

"There's the guy!" Hands trembling, Griff was backing toward the window, but his nod was in Rex's direction. "He's the champion double-crosser, he is. You can't blame MacAbre for slipping a fast one past him, or me for working the way the prof asked. Look" - Griff thought he had an inspiration - "there's the emerald he's been after all along!"

Turning as he passed Rex, The Shadow looked and saw the giant emerald. Perhaps Griff thought that the great green eye would capture the full attention of The Shadow. At least it appeared that way, for Griff suddenly halted his back-step and sped both hands to his hips. It was then that The Shadow gave a rapid twist, bringing his automatic full about with a forward lunge that cowed the startled mob leader.

Griff Torrock took one more backward step.

There was the clang of metal as Griff's hips thwacked the rail and the crowbar that was clamped along it. With a howl wilder than Selfkirk's, Griff teetered backward, waving his hands wildly. Over he went and in his fall, he caught the straggly aerial wire, ripping it with his plunge.

Again, a screech was wailing up from below. It ended in a solid crash that was accompanied by a metallic clang, for in Griff's headlong drop, the hanging crowbar had gone with him. As those echoes

died, The Shadow turned to look for the stupefied figure of Rex Tarn.

The man in the tuxedo was gone. Always an opportunist, Rex hadn't missed his chance. He had fled from this studio of death, the moment that Griff Torrock had begun his duplication of the plunge that had carried Lee Selfkirk to a sudden death. Nevertheless, The Shadow's laugh came in a sinister whisper as he viewed the spot where Rex had stood.

From the telephone table gleamed a great green stone, like a huge, unblinking eye. In flight, Rex Tarn had forgotten the object that he coveted most, the mighty emerald whose famous curse was backed by Voodoo spells!

CHAPTER XVIII

A WAXEN image stood upon a plate that was resting on the upright logs of MacAbre's artificial fire. A circle of light shone on the effigy, for tonight there was no thrum of Voodoo drums, nor any dance along the walls.

This was the final transaction in the chain of death, a deal in which no money was involved.

Into the light crept a shaky hand, carrying a miniature pistol only a few inches long. Small though it was, the gun was real and at last it steadied between this bearer's thumb and fingers.

The crackly voice of Professor MacAbre commanded:

"Fire!"

The trigger clicked; the pistol sputtered. A tiny slug, smaller than a piece of lead from a mechanical pencil, was imbedded in the body of the waxen image, which promptly toppled on the plate. There was silence; then MacAbre's tone:

"And now the award for this priceless deed. I promise that the Voodoo spell shall work. In return I claim the Tarn Emerald!"

"No, no -"

The protest came fiercely from the darkness, to be interrupted by MacAbre's purr:

"But you can not keep the emerald. It would lead to suspicion of your guilt. I told you I would take full blame. Unless I have the emerald, I can not."

"But if I give you the emerald -"

"Who said that it was to be a gift?" MacAbre's query was velvety, yet firm. "Suppose the emerald should be stolen, despite the greatest of precautions. Take this" - a paper crinkled from MacAbre's steady claw into the hand that trembled in receiving it - "and follow all instructions!"

Out went the circle of light. There was the scrape of an opening window. Again, a Voodoo deal had been completed, with the croaking laugh of Professor MacAbre the final note that certified it.

WHEN Rex Tarn entered the sumptuous apartment belonging to his cousin Alex, a courteous secretary bowed him to a lounge and provided him with an evening newspaper. If ever Rex's eyes had flinched, it was when he scanned the headlines.

The death of Lee Selfkirk was big news. A wealthy artist wouldn't pitch himself ten stories down after

receiving an added legacy. It was murder, that death, unlike the sudden fates of Gregg Henniman and Wilfred Walden. Of course, the murderer was known; he happened to be Griff Torrock, already wanted by the law. The fact that Griff had perished with his victim, probably in a death grapple, was at least some solace.

Even robbery had failed, for the Tarn Emerald had been found on Selfkirk's premises and had been passed along to the next heir, Alex Tarn. But this smooth settlement of the situation did not allay Rex's worries. As a witness to the actual crime, he was fearful that the law would question him, and the source of his worry was the fact that he had not been the only witness to the actual death scene.

Through Rex's harrowed brain kept pounding the name that Griff had gasped before his surprising death plunge:

"The Shadow!"

Many a man of hidden crime had quaked at mere recollection of that name. But Rex Tarn had failed to hide his part in the death scene that involved Lee Selfkirk. In *The Shadow*, Rex pictured a master of unquenchable vengeance who would never stop until he had dealt with all concerned.

When the door opened, Rex nearly sprang from his chair, expecting to see the cloaked invader who had been at Selfkirk's studio. Instead, it was only Alex's secretary, coming to tell Rex that his cousin would see him.

On the desk in Alex's sumptuous study, Rex saw the great Tarn Emerald gleaming from its open case. Beside it was an old-fashioned revolver, a family heirloom that belonged to Alex. With a mild smile, Alex drew the gun away.

"Sorry, Rex," said Alex. "Just a precaution, you know. After what happened to Lee Selfkirk, well -"

Finishing with a shrug, Alex dropped the revolver in the desk drawer; then leaned forward and queried:

"You didn't go up to see Lee, did you, Rex?"

Stolidly, Rex shook his head.

"I hoped not." Alex leaned back, relieved. "There seems to be some talk about a visitor other than the murderer. I'm glad you didn't go there, because I now appreciate the advice that you have been giving all along. I am going to sell the Tarn Emerald."

Rex's eyes popped wide; then narrowed in a doubtful stare, which brought another smile from Alex.

"On a fifty-fifty basis," added Alex. "Half yours and half mine. The jewelers are coming to appraise it very shortly. I have arranged a display stand in the reception room. What bothers me" - Alex hesitated as his hand moved forward - "is whether I should touch the gem. The curse is now mine, you know."

"I'm still free from it," returned Rex. "I'll put it there if you want. But maybe you'd better follow with the gun, just to see that I don't skip."

Rex's tone carried its old challenge, as though he expected a resumption of the bitter feud with Alex. In return, Alex thrust his hand across the desk, offering a clasp that Rex accepted with only a slight show of reluctance.

When the privileged guests arrived, they were treated to the novel sight of the Tarn cousins playing the part of friends. Sue Aldrich was among the invited and she looked very happy and handsome, all done

up in blue polka dots. When Lamont Cranston arrived with Margo Lane, the party seemed complete. Sue immediately corralled Margo to ask her advice regarding which Tarn cousin to accept. While Rex was talking to the other guests, Alex beckoned Cranston to the room where the emerald was on display.

Through half-drawn curtains, they looked into an old-fashioned reception room where the Tarn Emerald rested on a table not far beyond the curtains. Past the table was a high cabinet to which Alex pointed with pride.

"Can you see it, Cranston?"

"See what?"

"All right," chuckled Alex, "you can't, so that answers my question. I've planted a special movie camera in that cabinet, focused straight down on the lighted table. It contains a color film, by the way."

"To show the emerald in full tints?"

"And more. It's a thief trap, Cranston. You've heard of gems disappearing in circumstances such as this. If anything should happen this evening, there would be no trouble picking out the culprit, for the camera would register the deed. It has a short-wave-control, similar to the instrument they call the theremin. If anything approaches the table, the camera will begin to operate."

Alex was raising his tone for the benefit of two new arrivals. One was Cranston's friend, Police Commissioner Weston, a brusque man with a military mustache. The other was Inspector Joe Cardona, ace of the Manhattan force. They nodded their approval of Alex's theft detector.

"After what happened to Selfkirk, I felt we ought to be here," announced Weston. "As for this precaution of yours, I hope you haven't mentioned it to anyone else?"

"To no one," replied Alex. "Not even to my cousin Rex. That may amuse you, Cranston" - Alex turned about with a smile - "but I think you must have noticed that Rex and I are now upon good terms."

BOWING the group back to the main reception hall, Alex introduced them to the jewelers and drinks were promptly served. It was apparent that Rex had gained a head-start on the beverages, for he was imbibing the second round of his latest favorite, the double zombi, which he had specially ordered. Rex's daring was really troubling Sue, who had decided to forego zombies altogether, and the blonde's apprehensions were promptly realized.

While Alex was still talking to the guests, the drinks began to take effect on Rex. Brushing Sue aside, he said he was going to the study to lie down, and when last seen Rex was reeling through the hallway, past the little reception room. Alex gave an indulgent shrug over his cousin's condition.

"Rex is celebrating his luck," said Alex. "I've promised him a half share in the sale of the emerald. Which reminds me" - Alex rubbed his hands warmly - "since all the bidders are present, suppose we view the gem."

Proudly, Alex led the way to the display room, and drew aside the curtain. He stepped back as he saw the lighted table. Where the emerald had glistened from its casket, there no longer was a gleam, not even the casket.

The Tarn Emerald was gone!

Before anyone could stop him, Alex wheeled from the curtain and strode down the hallway, taking the turn to the rear study. Hardly had he passed that bend before a gun-shot blasted. Cranston was first to

dash in the direction of the sound with Weston and Cardona close behind him.

A slumped figure blocked the study door, motionless in death. The man was Alex and pointed down toward his heart was the smoking muzzle of an old-fashioned revolver, clutched in the hand of Rex Tarn. If ever a man had shown open pride in murder, Rex was that person.

As he saw the arrivals, Rex tilted back his head and laughed in maddened glee. Then, savagely, he thrust the death weapon toward the intruders, only to have it knocked from his grasp by a lunging stroke of Cranston's hand.

Another tragedy had marred the history of the ill-fated Tarn Emerald and with it, murder no longer lay hidden. The curse of the Tarns had reached its fulfillment, with the guilt placed full upon Rex Tarn, the last member of the line.

The Tarn curse, backed by a secret Voodoo spell!

CHAPTER XIX

THE brilliant light of the study lamp was gleaming full upon Rex Tarn's sweat-stained face. His eyes wide in the stare of a fanatic, Rex was insanely shifting his plea from innocence to guilt.

Under the blunt questioning of Inspector Cardona, whose favorite catch-phrase was "Why did you do it?" Rex kept chortling that he hadn't. When Commissioner Weston snapped "You know you're guilty, Tarn -" Rex nodded and gesticulated like a happy madman.

This variance of testimony produced a huddle that included Cranston, who was seated at the desk.

"If he keeps this up," argued Weston, "he'll get by on an insanity plea if he gets a lawyer who isn't crazier than himself."

"Why question him further?" demanded Cardona. "We have the gun, that's evidence enough."

"Except that no one saw Rex fire it," reminded Cranston. "It's a long hallway and the back door is very close."

"But you saw how Rex was hanging onto the gun," argued Cardona. "Do you think somebody handed it to him? Alex for instance?"

"It wouldn't have been impossible," replied Cranston, "and when you speak of hanging onto things, why didn't Rex keep the Tarn Emerald? You haven't found it on his person; in fact you can't prove he even stole it."

In answer, Cardona turned and called to the door. In came two headquarters men with a movie projector and a film that had been rapidly developed. Cardona thrust Rex into a chair and let him sit there chattering to himself, while the film had its run.

That movie was the clincher. It showed the curtains of the room where the Tarn Emerald had been on display. The curtains parted and the face of Rex Tarn came into sight, his eyes wide in their gleam, but sane. Rex's hand came forward and closed on the casket; then drew it away, closing it between his hands, as though nursing the precious prize.

Only a few steps forward and back; but they were enough. In that brief action, the theft of the Tarn Emerald stood proven. What had become of the priceless gem might still be a mystery, but the guilt of Rex Tarn was not.

Sue was sobbing on Margo's shoulder as they took Rex out through the hall. The blonde's hope of happy romance had been dealt a double blow. One of her suitors was dead; the other was the murderer. No wonder Sue's sobs reached the distant study, where Lamont Cranston still sat at the desk, going through scrap papers that consisted largely of penciled notations.

At last Cranston reached for the telephone book and checked a number. Picking up the phone, he called headquarters and gave a message to be delivered to Joe Cardona as soon as the inspector arrived. With that, Cranston left Alex's study, opened the back door and went down a convenient fire tower that led to a rear alley.

ABOVE the imitation flames of an artificial fire, a man with long clawed fingers was completing a curious effigy of wax that was dressed entirely in black. It was lifelike, that puppet shaped by the skilled hands of Professor MacAbre, for it represented a figure which even when motionless, produced a pronounced effect.

The black-clad doll was attired in miniature cloak and hat to represent The Shadow!

Over the shoulders of MacAbre gleamed the dark, insidious faces of his henchmen, Fandor and Jenó. They watched the lift of MacAbre's head; saw it go toward a weapon that hung upon the wall of the otherwise undecorated room. That weapon was a long bladed machete, a great knife that had the size and weight of a sabre.

In front of MacAbre glistened a great green trophy, the Tarn Emerald. Viewing the stolen gem, the arch professor laid the puppet in his hand and sneered his contempt.

"It was so simple," spoke MacAbre. "You should have been there, Fandor, and you too, Jenó. Of course the path was open, because I had ordered that it should be. The drug worked perfectly as it always does when properly administered. But the timing was perfection; a single shot where it was least expected; the simple placement of the gun -"

Pausing, MacAbre drew a strange pin from the lapel of his robe. It was shaped like a machete, but in miniature. Detail for detail it was a tiny replica of the great blade that hung on the far wall.

"All very easy," added MacAbre. "As simple as this!"

With a thrust he stabbed the tiny machete straight through the image of The Shadow!

"This will be our final mission," affirmed MacAbre, "to rid ourselves of the only enemy who has even suspected our game. We shall set the trap and await The Shadow. I do not doubt that he will come!"

There was something heinous in MacAbre's cackly laugh, the tone that drowned all nearby sounds. Even the slight scraping of the window sash could not be heard, for it had ended when the Voodoo's wizard's laugh began to dwindle. Amazing, though, were the echoes of MacAbre's laugh.

The tone seemed to rise again, though MacAbre's lips no longer moved. Instead of coming from the walls, the echo issued through the window. That is, if it could be termed an echo, for its tone was changing now to a sardonic mirth that even MacAbre could never copy!

Swinging about, Professor MacAbre saw the guest he had promised to invite, but not on so early an occasion. Within the window stood the foe of everything that MacAbre represented, the avenger who styled himself The Shadow!

Cowering at their cloaked visitor's approach, MacAbre and his partners watched The Shadow place a gun beneath his cloak, a single automatic being all he needed, with its muzzle practically in reach of three

cringing heads. Then, on the plate that topped the fire-logs, The Shadow tossed the evidence that stood for Voodoo crimes.

"This was your mistake, Jenó," giped The Shadow, as he brought a spectacle case from his cloak. "You switched Henniman's glasses, giving him a pair so badly focused that he pitched himself down the museum stairs.

"But you overlooked the fact that Henniman's reading glasses, not his bifocals, were in the case you took. I found these - his own bifocals - in his desk; rimless glasses instead of the tortoise shells that should have been there."

Next of the exhibits were letters of reference bearing the name of Fandor Bianco, who winced when he saw them. Steadily, The Shadow said:

"You shouldn't have left these with Chauncey. I have checked them as forgeries, proving you an impostor. You were clumsy, Fandor. Margo was too weak to have opened those windows; or had she been strong enough to open them, she would not have weakened."

The simple logic caused MacAbre to switch his glare from Jenó to Fandor. The Shadow's response to MacAbre's action was another laugh during which a coil of wire dropped from the gloved hand to the plate.

"Your error, MacAbre," stated The Shadow. "I didn't overlook the radio wire that Griff pulled from Selfkirk's balcony. I checked its real hook-up, to the electro-magnet underneath. That was the force that clamped Selfkirk's crowbar and toppled him back before he could let go. The same applied in a way you didn't expect; to the guns in Griff's hip pockets. He broke the current when he snatched the wire, but he was too late."

Picking up his own effigy, The Shadow studied it along with the miniature machete that transfixed it.

"A childish notion, these," remarked The Shadow, "but they influenced the man they were meant for, making him believe that Voodoo charms were really responsible for death. I refer to your steady customer, Alex Tarn."

An angry hiss accompanied the vicious glare that MacAbre furnished. The calm way in which The Shadow bared MacAbre's deepest secret was a final humiliation for the mad Voodoo genius. To make it worse, MacAbre had no choice but to listen as The Shadow tallied off the count:

"It was obvious that Rex was checking on his cousin Alex, or he would not have shown himself openly in your neighborhood. Rex was following Alex, the night that Jenó picked up the second trail by mistake.

"If Rex had been your client and had weakened the night you doomed Margo, Rex could have reached her with a phone call. Instead, he went to her apartment; he gave his real reason later, his fear that she might be in danger of the threat that he felt hovering over himself.

"Alex knew where Selfkirk could be found. He persuaded Selfkirk to communicate with Rex. It wouldn't have been possible for Rex to come here that evening, for he was with me earlier and with Margo later. Between times he was riding in a cab that I provided, except for a short stop at the Club Galaxy.

"Besides" - The Shadow stressed the final point - "Rex no longer had the raincoat that Alex had copied to be mistaken for his cousin. It was at Margo's apartment, because Rex had given it to her the time I raided your old headquarters."

Pausing, The Shadow flung the cloaked effigy upon the plate with the other exhibits.

"Alex couldn't afford to blame Rex openly for crimes," added The Shadow. "Unless he too became a victim of the emerald's curse, Alex would have appeared its instigator, once he gained the gem. So he gave you the right to steal the emerald, with the guilt to be pinned on Rex. Your promise to make Rex appear a suicide also pleased Alex."

The Shadow was practically repeating MacAbre's own instruction sheet, even though Alex had destroyed it. The Voodoo fiend was coming up with his claws trembling forcibly, but he was afraid to thrust them toward The Shadow's throat.

"You loaded Rex's so-called zombi drink with the real zombi drug," described The Shadow. "Alex did the act that you had planned and you murdered him at the finish, simply planting the gun on Rex. In death, however, Alex gave himself away, as he hadn't in life.

"His eyes are wide open now, MacAbre. They are hunted eyes, like those of your regular visitor. Another of Alex's imitations when he came to see you, although I have an idea that on those occasions his fear was real."

Before MacAbre could reply, a door flung open and Inspector Cardona lunged in from the threshold, followed by a trio of detectives. Fandor and Jenó tried to spring away, despite The Shadow's gun and in their scramble, they screened Professor MacAbre.

Madly, the Voodoo killer kicked the artificial logs at The Shadow and dodged past him toward the wall. With a wild wrench he hurled the full-length machete point-first toward The Shadow. Even as the blade was leaving MacAbre's claw, a gunshot responded.

MacAbre's hurl became a jolting lunge that sent the machete high and wide, pinning it above the door. Striking the floor, the evil genius of hidden crime rolled dead, a bullet in his heart. Not a silver bullet, the only sort that could supposedly kill a master of Voodoo wizardry, but an ordinary leaden slug. The Shadow had dispelled that myth along with MacAbre's own fantastic claims to Voodoo power.

The Shadow was gone through the blackened window while Cardona's men were subduing Fandor and Jenó. By the time they were brought to headquarters, Lamont Cranston was waiting there with Margo Lane and Sue Aldrich, to hear the confessions that the prisoners would repeat since MacAbre could no longer speak them. But Cranston was due for congratulations first.

"It was a swell tip-off, Mr. Cranston," declared the ace inspector, "sending us to that old hotel. I ought to have gotten there sooner, but I had to wait to try the thing you suggested with the movie. It clears Rex Tarn, all right. Watch."

The picture flicked on the wall of Cardona's office. It showed curtains parting; then Rex Tarn's hands came through as he stepped forward. Those hands were opening a jewel case to display the great Tarn Emerald as Rex placed it on the table. Stepping backward, Rex withdrew his empty hands and closed the curtains.

"Alex must have told Rex to put the emerald on display," declared Cardona. "That's when you figured the picture was taken, didn't you, Mr. Cranston?"

"That's right," agreed Cranston, "and the camera was specially geared so when you developed it, you naturally ran it backward."

"Maybe Rex will remember it," said Cardona. "He's coming out of that zombi trance."

"He won't remember," declared Cranston. "Professor MacAbre intended to clinch a case that could

never be disproven."

Disproven it had been, despite the cunning of MacAbre. A greater brain than that of the Voodoo genius had cracked the case well apart. With murder placed where it belonged, all other evidence was nullified. Such was The Shadow's method.

Death was the commodity in which MacAbre dealt and The Shadow had rewarded him in terms of his own product!

THE END