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THE GREEN SHADOW

by HERMAN LONDON

ON THE TRAIL OF THE CABALLERO

The head turned. For an instant Dale caught a vague glimpse of a face and then the head disappeared within the window.

"The caballero—Paul Ainsworth!" he mumbled. He was still gazing rigidly at the window from which the wigged head had projected. One, two, three. It was three floors above his own level. That would be the thirteenth floor, just midway between the ground and the roof. The window was the fifth from the central hall in a horizontal direction.

With the location clearly fixed in his mind, he went to the stairs, ran up three flights, and turned into the transverse corridor at the left. He counted the doors as he passed them. At the fifth from the turn he stopped, and the metal figures on the upper panel told him it was No. 1325.

He waited a moment. There was no sign of life in the hall. The orchestral din on the top floor was scarcely audible here. After a moment's hesitation he turned the knob gently. The door must have been left unlocked in preparation for a quick retreat if necessary, for it swung easily inward. He held it open a bit and listened, but no sounds came from the interior. He touched his hair, his mask, his purple-trimmed robe, and without a sound stepped inside.

Silently he moved forward, approaching the window, only a gray blur in the darkness encompassed by the four walls. Only a few steps he moved, across a rug that deadened the sound of his footsteps, then stopped. In the gloom he could hear some one breathing, and he traced the sound to a point near the window. He waited a little, not quite certain how to proceed, and presently his eyes turned in another direction. Again he heard a subdued intake of breath. There were two watchers in the room.

Holding his own breath he moved back a few steps. There was a sound of movement in the front of the room. A man's head and shoulders were silhouetted against the window. For a moment the man leaned out and glanced upward.

"Annie is taking her time," a voice mumbled. Dale recognized the voice in an instant. The speaker was Paul Ainsworth. The Annie referred to could be none other than Joan of Arc.

"Annie is wise," another voice remarked. It was low and distinct, and it sounded vaguely familiar to Dale, yet he could not identify it. "She knows we're playing this game to the tune of one hundred thousand berries. It pays to go slow and move carefully. Anyhow, there's no hurry. This party will last till daylight."

Ainsworth mumbled something under his breath. Dale was searching his memory for a clue to the other speaker's identity. He was certain he had heard the voice somewhere before.

"One hundred thousand," the same voice went on. "It's a nice little grubstake. Too bad it's got to be split five ways."

"Five ways," Dale thought. That meant there were five in the black-malling band. He tried to check them off by name; Dr. Moffett, alas! Paul Ainsworth, Annie, Axelson. Miss Conway was not to be counted, for she was dead. Who were the other two? The answer eluded him but by way of compensation the other speaker's name suddenly flashed through his mind Axelson, of course!

Again a shadow appeared at the window. Ainsworth was looking up at the balcony.

"Wish she would hurry," he mumbled peevishly, moving away from the window again. "Can't imagine what's delaying her."

"Miss Castle probably wants to look the papers over," Axelson suggested. "A lot of good it would do her! If I say it myself, I did a good job copying those papers. Even if she knows Forrester's handwriting—and I'll bet she doesn't—she won't be able to tell them from the originals."

Dale started a little. So the papers were merely copies! Well, he had

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suspected something of the sort. The originals, of course, were to be retained by Dr. Moffett and used by him for the purpose of further extortion.

"Oh, don't crow," said Ainsworth with his usual surliness. "I'll admit you are clever at that sort of thing, but don't forget that a lot of clever forgers are wasting their talents behind prison bars."

"So are a lot of clever black-mallers," Axelson retorted.

A pause fell, Dale was getting a deeper and more comprehensive insight into Ainsworth's despicable character. There seemed to be no limits to the man's villainy. Even while his heart ached for Miss Castle such an exhibition of treachery and infamy filled him with loathing.

"Are you sure Miss Castle came here alone?" Ainsworth asked in an undertone.

"Positive. Not worrying?"

"I'm just wondering if she is quite as simple as she looks. I think she would be capable of playing a trick on us."

"What can she do? We've taken precautions against every sort of surprise she can possibly spring on us, haven't we? I don't see where there's any room for trickery. Annie won't even touch the money. Miss Castle will just drop it over the railing, and Caesar will do the rest."

"Caesar," Dale, thought. That was the dog, of course.

Another pause came then Ainsworth asked: "Did you see the man in the white toga with the purple border?"

"Oh, you mean the cockeyed one?"

"I'm not sure he was as cockeyed as he looked. He danced with Miss Castle, and afterward he took her out on the balcony. I don't like the way he acted."

"She had to dance with somebody, didn't she? And it's the most natural thing in the world to step out for a bit of fresh air after a dance."

Dale smiled. It was a lucky thing he had selected a mask that concealed more of his features than the ordinary mask did. His muscles were beginning to feel the strain of remaining motionless for so long. He moved a foot cautiously.

"It's all right," Axelson was saying. "You're just nervous tonight. Everything is going all right. We'll trim Castle good and hard, and then we go after Ferryman, eh? Ferryman is rich. Not so rich as Castle, but he's got a lot of coin salted away. And he owes me something for the way he gave me the air. I'd like to—"

He stopped and caught his breath sharply. Dale's foot, as he moved it to ease his cramped position, had struck against something.

"Say, did you hear that?" Axelson exclaimed in a hoarse whisper.

"Sh!" Ainsworth whispered back.

Dale sensed two pairs of ears and eyes straining in his direction. He moved back and ran his hand along the wall until he found the light switch. A little click sounded, but no lights came on. The bulbs had either been removed from the sockets or partly unscrewed to forestall the very thing he had attempted to do.

"It's a plant!" Axelson cried hoarsely. "We've got to stop it! Quick—the signal!"



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A match flared up. Then came a sizzling sound like that of a frying pan over a fire. A small streak of flame shot up over the window sill. Then two pairs of feet scurried quickly across the floor. The door slammed.

With a soft chuckle Dale stepped forward and fumbled for the light fixture. As he had suspected, the blub had been partly unscrewed to break the connection. He gave it a few twists and a bright light came on. He saw a spacious room, an open travelling bag on the floor, a few toilet articles on the dressing table.

He acted in great haste now, as if each second were precious. He took two newspapers, saturated them with ink from a bottle on the writing desk formed them into a small, compact bundle, tied a string around it, and held it at arm's length. A small steady trickle of ink fell from the package.

Smiling, he stepped to the window. He looked down for a moment, then let the ink-dripping package drop to the ground.

"Caesar will do the rest," he chuckled softly as he ran quickly from the room.

As if to cheer the pale, lovely girl seated on the frail-limbed Chipendale chair, a flood of glorious sunshine poured through the windows of the Castle drawing room.

"How dreadful!" she sighed.

Dale, looking his brightest and freshest, picked up the afternoon paper she had dropped to the floor. A prominent black caption stood out from the general run of news on the front page:

"Arrest of the Mysterious Mr. Graves Promised Within Twenty-four Hours"

Dale ran his calm, gray eyes down the appended column.

"Rot!" he exclaimed.

"But it says the police have definite information which will positively lead to an arrest before tomorrow night."

"Lies!" Dale crumpled the paper and flung it from him. "It is only yellow journalism at its worst. Nothing but insinuation, innuendo and drive. Not one positive statement in the whole article. I admit Dr. Moffett is clever, though. He has fed a few harmless hints to the authorities, enough for this yellow rag to base a scarehead on. His object is to frighten your father and you, and to convince you that he is ready to go the whole way unless you submit."

"But suppose he should—"

"Look here, Miss Castle, Dr. Moffett is flourishing a big gun, but he has only one shot. He isn't going to waste that shot."

She considered then brightened a little. "I was hoping to hear from you yesterday," she murmured.

"Busy," said Dale laconically. She smiled faintly. "I thought perhaps you were resting after the big night."

"Oh, the Mummies Frolic. Rather a bore, wasn't it?"

She searched his face. "Not for me. Was it for you?"

"That reminds me. This is my first opportunity to ask you what happened out there on the balcony after I left. Joan of Arc proved to be Dr. Moffett's messenger, I suppose?"

"Oh, you knew that? I didn't suspect anything until she spoke a sentence with the words 'blue' and 'yellow' in it. She almost knocked me over with that sentence."

"No wonder. What happened?"

She looked at him as if suspecting that he knew a great deal more than he pretended, but she plunged into her story, finishing at the point where a warning signal had been flashed to her companion on the balcony.

"I'm afraid I didn't carry it off very well," she concluded.

"You did splendidly!" Dale assured her. "Did you know the papers were forgeries, or was it only a bluff?"

"Only a bluff."

"Well, it was a good one, and it happened to be true."

She looked a little startled. "Then the papers were forgeries?"

"They were copies," said Dale. "Dr. Moffett meant to keep the originals for future use."

The dark look in her face showed that she understood.

"What a blackguard he is!" she exclaimed.

"Oh, all of that," said Dale in his test tones.

She reflected for a moment. "But a signal? What was the meaning of that?"

Briefly Dale explained his own part in the events leading up to the signal, but he omitted the fact that Ainsworth was one of the two men he had found in the room on the thirteenth floor of the Vandermore. She listened intently, her eyes gradually widening with amazement.

"A dog was to receive the money!" she exclaimed. "What an idea!"

"A rather clever one. After giving the signal, the two men fled from the room very hurriedly. I didn't care so much about them, but what I was curious to know was whether Caesar would have carried the packet of money if one had been dropped. I supposed some one was waiting for him in a car nearby, but that night every block in the neighborhood of the Vandermore was packed with cars, so it would have been hard to find the right one. Then I hit upon the idea of having Caesar lead me to it."

She wrinkled her forehead perplexedly.

"It was perfectly simple. I merely dropped a package from the window. It was only a couple of newspapers done into a neat bundle but Caesar couldn't be expected to know. He did his duty like a thoroughbred. Oh, I forgot to tell you First I saturated the newspapers with ink."

"Oh!" she exclaimed after a moment's bewilderment. She laughed a little. "And then you ran down and picked up Caesar's trail."

Dale nodded. "It was lucky I had a trail to follow. The car was parked several blocks away, and I would never have found it without Caesar's assistance. The trail grew fainter and fainter. The papers absorbed some of the ink, of course. But I found the car. It was just about to start and I barely had time to jump into a taxi and follow it." Dale laughed amusingly. "Wonder what the person in the car thought when Caesar brought him that package."

She gave him a warm glance of approval. "That was clever. Where did you follow the car?"

Dale looked suddenly diffident. "To Dr. Moffett's new headquarters," he replied vaguely.

"He had to leave Bank Street, you know, after the excitement the other night."

His tone seemed to puzzle her. "Did you see who was in the car?"

"No, it was too dark and it drove away too quickly." He paused for a moment. "Any other developments since I saw you last?"

"Mr. Ferryman called yesterday. He appears to be a very kind gentleman. He said he understood his house had been the scene of certain activities that had brought unpleasantness to father and me. Feeling as if he were somehow responsible, he wanted to know if there was anything he could do."

"Generous of him," said Dale. "He can't help us, but the offer shows he has a kind heart. You and I will handle Doctor Moffett, and we'll put a crimp in his scheme before long."

To Be Continued Tomorrow

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