

# THE SHADOW

A Serial Story by  
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## CHAPTER 31

### The Seven Swordsmen

PETER drew closer. Major Chris did not pass him the letter but, having slowly flattened it out on his knees, remarked:

"There's no need to read it out word for word; it will be better if I give you the gist of it, Peter. First, I wonder if you know what it has to do with?"

"I can't guess!" he exclaimed.

"Well, Peter, on the day that poor Odin was killed I was pondering over one or two little incidents; and on one especially. And something kept stirring at the back of my mind, and made me wish I was better up in modern affairs. Comparatively modern affairs, I should say. Did you ever hear of the War of the Seven Swordsmen?"

"Never," said Peter, and stared.

"No, I suppose you weren't born then. It was—let me see—yes, two years before the Great War," said Major Chris, glancing at the letter. "Well, I had a hazy recollection of hearing about it myself, but I couldn't remember any particulars or even how the affair got known by that name, and accordingly I wrote off to this friend of mine, and asked him to write me all he could about it. He's a man who has knocked about all over the world, and knows South America from end to end."

Peter was staring still and a little bewildered. What was Major Chris coming to? Why had he written off to his friend? What had South America and that oddly named war to do with the secret or mystery of Falcon's Flight?

"All in good time," sighed Major Chris, reading his thoughts. He tapped the letter. "Now this is what my friend tells me. It happened in one of those South American States in which they are always having, or were always having in those days, revolutions and upsets. About two or three years, as I've said, before our Great War, the government of this South American state had been seized by a dictator who was particularly corrupt and vindictive and hated. But he had a very strong army, Peter. And he paid them royally. And therefore the army was loyal. But the people groaned under him."

Major Chris paused to take breath, for much talking still taxed him.

"Well, Peter, seven brave men banded together to head and lead a rising against this vile tyrant. These seven men—they were heroes everyone, Peter—took a solemn vow that until they had either overthrown him or perished they would never return the swords they had drawn to their sheaths."

Peter listened with lips slightly parted; his face had changed colour.

"Some say that they threw away the sheaths of their swords. My friend is not sure of that," Major Chris went on slowly. "But it is certain that the seven took this vow never to sheathe their swords till they had overthrown the dictator or themselves had perished. So their rising was christened the War of the Seven Swordsmen."

"What happened to them?" gasped Peter under his breath.

"This is what happened. They put up a heroic fight against tremendous odds, for the dictator could place ten trained men into the field for every one of theirs. Eventually, at the storming of Pedros el Dios, the big battle which ended the rising, one of the seven was killed. The other six were rushed off the field by their men, who were devoted to them. But the dictator, stronger than ever, put a price on their heads. He was afraid of them, you see, and he publicly declared that he would give the country no rest till the whole six were slain or accounted for. He offered a huge reward for each one of them who should be delivered to him, alive or dead."

Peter sat mutely till Major Chris could proceed.

"Well, Peter, three of them were taken and shamefully executed. Two escaped to the United States. Of those two, one is known to have died almost immediately from the wounds he received at Pedros el Dios. The death of his companion was reported soon afterwards."

"The death of the second one who escaped to America?"

"Yes, Peter. So we have one of the Seven Swordsmen killed at Pedros el Dios, three taken and executed, one dying later of his wounds, and one reported dead. Have you got that in mind, Peter?"

Peter nodded. His companion glanced right and left, scanned the letter a moment, and went on in undertones.

"The seventh Swordsman, Peter? What happened to him? The other six were

South Americans by birth, but the seventh wasn't. He was believed to have been an Englishman, though he called himself by a Spanish name and spoke Spanish like a native. And, by all accounts, Peter, according to what my friend writes, this seventh swordsman was the bravest, the most reckless, the most generous, the most chivalrous of them all."

Why had the tired voice grown almost reverent? And what made Peter's eyes shine so, though he trembled?

"This seventh swordsman, this reputed Englishman, was always very reticent, so my friend says. But what became of him? At the storming of Pedros el Dios he was seen fighting desperately until he went down. Then his servant, who through all the campaign had never left his master's side, was seen to put his body on to a horse and to gallop off with it. Neither was seen again. The seventh swordsman just vanished. He was never traced, Peter."

"But had no one any idea where he'd gone, Major Chris?"

"Yes; there was a great deal of speculation. In South America I believe they speculate still. There are three theories offered. One is that he was dead when his faithful servant carried him off."

"Yes?" said Peter, and waited.

"But some people believe that he and his servant were captured, and were either secretly executed or are still held in secret imprisonment. There is no trace of their execution. And it hasn't been proved or disproved that they are in prison."

"Yes?" said Peter again.

"And the third explanation, the most popular one, Peter, is that the seventh swordsman made good his escape to his own country, where he is living quietly under his real name."

In unsteady tones Peter uttered:

"What does your friend think?"

"He thinks the third explanation most probable, Peter."

Between them fell silence, neither looked at the other; it was almost as though they feared to let their eyes meet. Peter began to pluck restlessly at the grass. Major Chris had taken the letter and now his thin fingers were tearing it and tearing it into small shreds. Letter and envelope he tore them

both into fragments. Then he beckoned to Peter, and spoke again.

"Take these," he bade. "Don't scatter any. But burn them. Put them in your pocket now. Carefully, Peter. Go straight to the kitchen when we get in, concoct a message from me to cook about my broth, and burn them in her grate."

Peter nodded, and placed the scraps in his breast pocket. Something told him that his companion had not finished. And yet he was startled enough by the words that came next.

"Peter, think hard, and be quite sure before you answer: *What were the colours of that ribbon you found on the sword?*"

"Black and white and yellow. Three colours," he breathed.

"Can you guess the last thing my friend tells me in that letter?"

Peter's voice shook. "Yes, I've guessed it," he said in a whisper.

"When the Seven Swordsmen began their campaign they raised a rallying flag, the flag of revolt. Its colours were black, white, and yellow," said Major Chris gravely.

"And each of the seven—"

"Yes, Peter, each of the seven, but none of their followers, twisted a black-white-and-yellow ribbon round his sword's sheath in token of the vow they had taken together."

## CHAPTER 32

### Patrol

It was after meditating a few moments that Peter put his next question, very quietly: "Was Colonel Grevel a colonel before our Great War?"

"No. He joined the Army when the Great War broke out. He joined and rose from the ranks."

"Where was he, Major Chris, before the Great War?"

"I'll tell you," said Major Chris, nodding. "Nine or ten years at least before the Great War Colonel Grevel—Mr. Grevel, as he then was, and without any expectation of succeeding to Falcon's Flight—left England with an exploring expedition to Central America. He was quite a young man then and unmarried. Two years afterwards the explorers returned without him. They had done their job, but he had stayed behind to wander about, they reported. Well, after that he wasn't heard of again until he reappeared in England at the end of 1914 to join up against Germany. He brought back a wife with him—"

## JACKO CARRIES THE SUITCASE

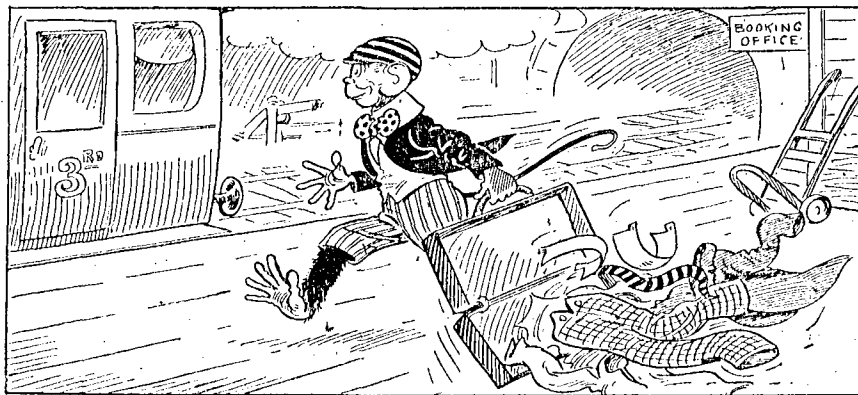
JACKO declared he was the unluckiest being in Monkeyville.

Mother said, "Nonsense! There's no such thing as luck. When things go wrong with you, dear, I'm afraid you've only yourself to blame."

As Jacko ran out into the hall after breakfast that morning he noticed a suitcase lying on the table.

"That's Uncle's!" he exclaimed.

"I'll carry it to the station for him. He'll have to give me something for



"It's all right, Uncle! I've got it!" shouted Jacko.

But Jacko wouldn't believe that. "I've been as good as gold ever since Uncle William came into the house," he cried, "and he hasn't even taken me to the Pictures!"

"Well, well!" said his mother. "But you've forgotten what happened at the barber's. If anyone had dabbed a lot of nasty soap in your mouth you wouldn't have been exactly pleased about it, would you?"

"But I didn't know it was Uncle William," persisted Jacko. "And besides, I apologised—and Father gave me a hiding. And that's the end of it."

It didn't seem to be. Uncle William was a cautious man, and, not knowing what Jacko might be up to next, he took care to keep well out of his way—right up to the very last day of his visit.

that," he added under his breath.

On the way to the station he ran up against a man who was trying to take an obstinate pig to market.

Jacko laughed so much and lost so much time watching the fun that he arrived at the station as the train was almost due to start.

Uncle William was in a rare state.

"It's all right, Uncle!" shouted Jacko, waving the bag. "I've got it!"

Unfortunately at that moment something clicked, the bag flew open, and out fell every precious thing in it! Before you could say "Jack Robinson" the platform was strewn with half the contents of Uncle's wardrobe.

What Jacko got for his pains was not half a crown but a good sound box on the cars.

"Our Mrs. Grevel?"

"Yes, Peter. Our Mrs. Grevel. An Englishwoman, as you can see for yourself, whom he had met in his wanderings. But, although I saw a lot of him when we were serving together in France and although he spoke to me of his wife now and then, he never told me, Peter, just where he had met her or what he was doing at the time he met her. And although they are now my two dearest friends in the world, neither of them speaks of the days before marriage."

Peter kept silent. He was drinking in every word of the story.

"As I have told you, Grevel did splendidly on active service; he was as brave as a lion and showed all the qualities of the born leader; his men would have followed him anywhere. I served under him, and I'd have given my life for him," said Major Chris simply. "Instead of that, Peter, he risked his life for mine. He saved my life; and after the War was cleaned up he had me brought down here and gave me a home. So I owe him a good deal, don't I? I'd like to repay it."

"Oh, I do wish I could help you more, Major Chris."

"You're the man who counts, you're the man I depend on," said Major Chris with a little frown against sentiment. "Well, in the meanwhile, that is in 1916, Grevel comes unexpectedly into the possession of this property. And now you know as much as I do, friend Peter."

Shyly watching his companion's lined face and wasted frame, Peter waited with a question upon his lips. "Is the price still on the seventh Swordsman's head?" he whispered at last.

"I believe so," said Major Chris, nodding. "Although there was a general amnesty after their rising had been crushed, the survivors of the Seven were expressly left out of that pardon. On the contrary, indeed, as I told you just now, a large price was specially offered for them dead or alive."

"And is the dictator they rose against still in power?"

"Yes, and ruling more harshly. He's a vindictive brute, Peter. He never forgives. I have no doubt he would give a great deal to get hold of the seventh Swordsman. If only," Major Chris explained meditatively, "in order to ensure his son's succession to the dictatorship. For so long as that Swordsman survives he can't feel too safe. For remember the oath—there's one unsheathed sword waiting still, Peter."

Major Chris passed his hand across his brow as he finished. "You can take me in now," he uttered in a weak voice. And without another word—but with how much to think of!—Peter slowly pushed the chair back and then went to the kitchen where he completed his errand.

Two days later Peter wrote in his diary:

There is a horrible feeling of tension in the house. Last night the falcon flew again, it came from the moor just at dusk. We all saw it, and I thought at first that Mrs. Grevel was going to faint.

And on the following day:

Yesterday morning Major Chris had to keep to his room again, so I went by myself for a walk on the moor. I went as far as the Devil's Chimney and was scrambling about there when whom should I run into but Mrs. Mandeverell. She told me all about her health, how much better she felt since she'd come to Riding, and that sort of thing, and then she began to ask how Major Chris was. I knew Major Chris would hate being gossiped about so I changed the subject to collecting butterflies. She said, yes, once or twice she had seen Mr. Scharner in chase of them. Then I made an excuse and got away from her; I hope I wasn't rude.

On my return I found that a new Great Dane had arrived. It had been brought over from Market Torridge. But it wasn't alone. There were three Airedale terriers with it, huge dogs, all for the Colonel. He had all four on the terrace when I arrived, with Abbot there; they had got to know Abbot already but they set up a growling at me. Colonel Grevel told me to go indoors and fetch Mr. Scharner, and when I'd brought him out the Colonel made us stand together while he led each dog up to us. He started with the Great Dane. "Now, you see these two people? You have got to know them," he told it, "and make friends of them." It sniffed at us. We patted it on the head and Colonel Grevel made us speak to it three or four times. "So that it shall recognise your voices," he said. Then one by one the Airedales. The Colonel said, "Now they know everyone in the house, Abbot." Then he walked a few yards with Abbot, speaking very earnestly in an undertone. "Two by day, Abbot"—I caught that. "And two by night."

TO BE CONTINUED