Weird Tales

THE UNIQUE MAGAZINE

The
SPIRIT LOVER
by
HOUDINI

An Astounding Expose of Fraud Mediums

Mally

APRIL 1924
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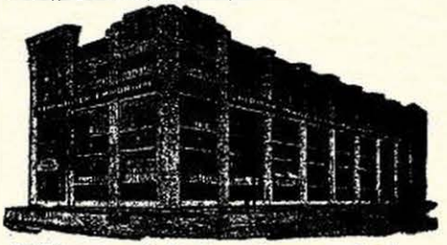

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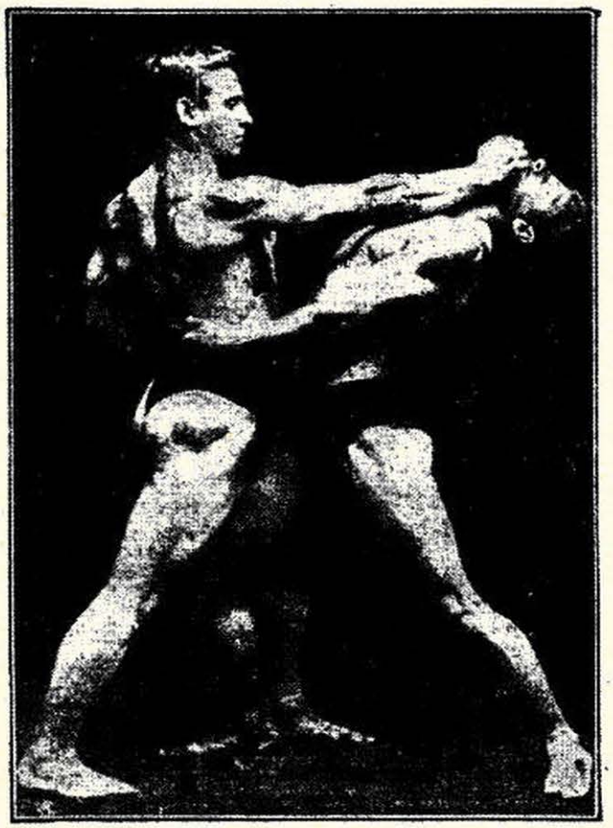
The following is a list of the athletes, physical culturists, and artists' models who posed for the pictures:



ATHLETIC CHAMPIONS

Ethelda Bleibtrey (several poses).
Charlotte Doyle.
Ida Schnall (several poses).
George F. Jowett.
Bernard Bernard (several poses).
Charlie Postl.
Ray Johnson.
Marie Curtis.
Edward Aston.
George Dimbinski.
Laura Bennett.
Mary Jane Lowe
Carrie Keeley.
Marion Fletcher.
Nursie King.
John G. Paine.
Charles Shaffer.
Al. Treloar.
Maurice Deriaz.
Hilda Curtis.
Strangler Lewis.
David Willoughby.
Al. Bevan.
Maxick.
Walter Klee.
Stanislaus Zbyszko.
Captain Johns (several poses).
Ottley R. Coulter.
Antone Matysek.
Sybil Bauer.
Joie Ray.
George Calza (several poses).
Arthur Saxon.
S. V. Bacon.
E. H. Bacon.
Sergeant Swimmer.
Joe Stecher.
Jack Dempsey.
Mark Jones.
Arthur F. Gay
Marin Plestina.

PHYSICAL CULTURISTS

Mrs. Earle Liederman —(Miss Alaska) (several poses).
J. Richmond (several poses).
Earle Liederman.
Charles Atlas (several poses).
Dorothy Knapp (several poses).
Kathleen O'Connor.
Olive Ann Alcorn.
Lionel Strongfort.
Jovita Dardon.
Helen Chadwick.
Joe Bonomo.
Madge Merritt.
Marjorie Barker.
Rev. B. E. Brown.
Gladys Walton.
Priscilla Dean.
Dr. C. B. Severn.
John M. Hernic.
A. P. Hedlund.
Mrs. Hedlund (several poses).
Rose Kinder.
Polly Walker.
Doris Wilson.
The Vanities.
Ann. Hyatt.

ARTISTIC

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Les Syrenes.
Salammbo and Mattho.
A Study of the Nude.
The Slaves.
The Vine.
The Sundial.
Ecstasy.
Consolation.
Le Baiser.
The Tempest.
Rising Woman.
Braccio Nuovo.
L'Aurore et Cephalle.
Apollo.
Energy in Repose.
Psyche Receives the First Kiss of Love.
The March of Love.
Beauty and Development.
Climbing up the Cliff.
Hail to Life.
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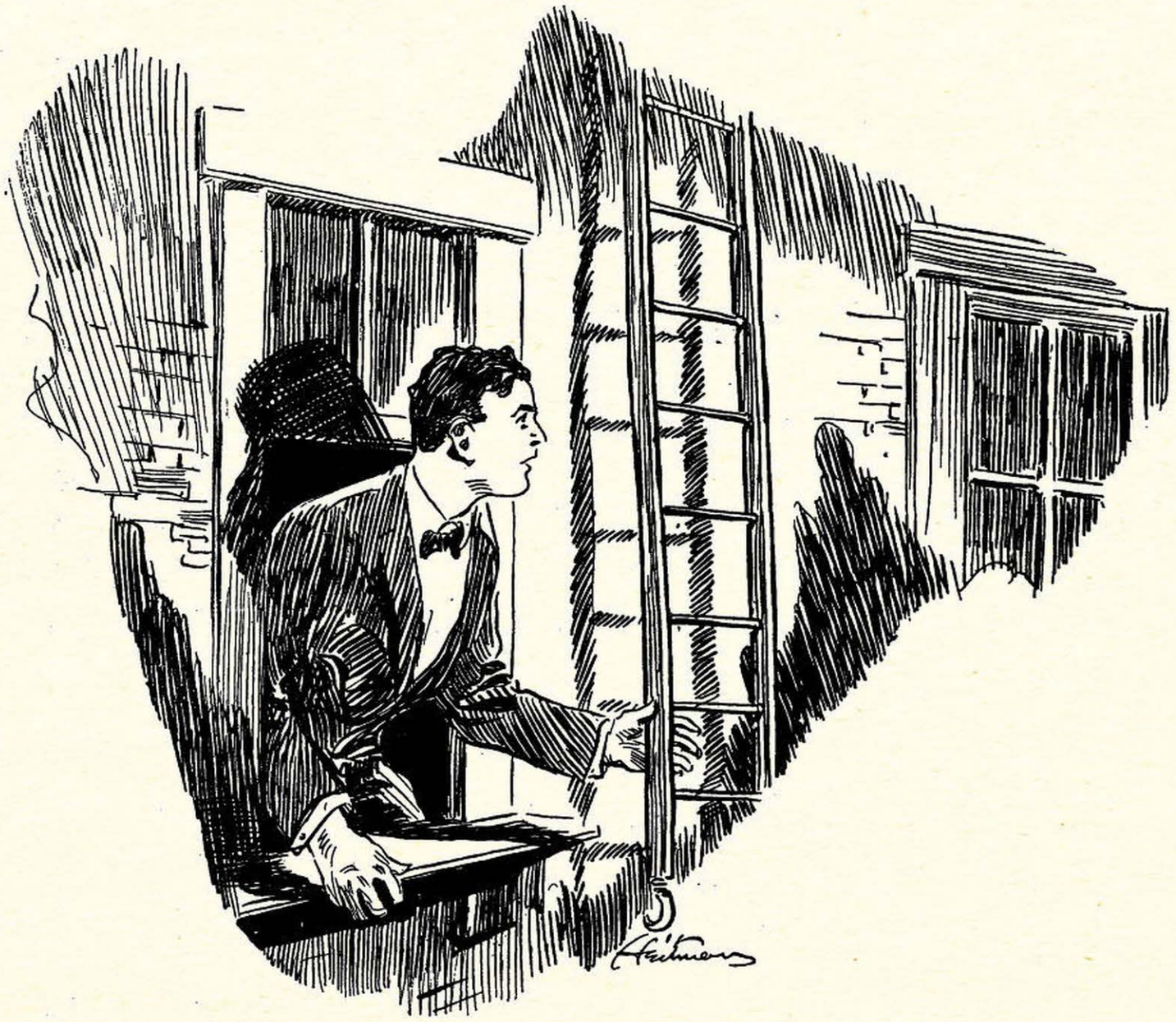
The Hoax of the Spirit Lover

By HOUDINI



ONE of the most remarkable instances of coincidence that ever came under my observation took place some years ago, in Montana, a coincidence so remarkable that if a story or a novel were built around it the incident would be considered so highly improbable that the yarn would be entirely unconvincing.

The incident occurred quite unexpectedly during my attempt to expose a charlatan medium. It made my attempt unnecessary. The medium himself was a victim of the improbable coincidence and his boasted powers of materializing spirits were proved a shabby fraud.

Three men came to my hotel room in —, and asked me to aid them in exposing a medium whose powers seemed so miraculous as to admit of no explanation except supernatural aid. One of the three men was a minister of the gospel. All had tried to pick flaws in the medium's powers, and had attended one of his séances without succeeding.

One of the men, a lawyer, declared that he was about convinced of the reality of the medium's pretended spiritualistic powers.

"Were it not that to admit spiritualism opens the door for a wave of superstition and charlatanry," he said, "I would quit right now and acknowledge myself convinced. The three of us attended a séance last night, in the third story of an office building. We locked the door, locked the window, examined the room carefully, examined the medium's portable cabinet, and then the lights were extinguished, and spirit materializations took place. There was no possible chance for the medium to have confederates enter the room, nor is there any explanation of the materializations except that given by the medium."

I smiled, and agreed to do whatever I could to learn what deception the medium was practising in his séances.

"It sounds very convincing," I said. "But there must be some plausible, natural explanation. If, in my study of spiritualistic phenomena, I had accepted defeat every time I was baffled by something that I could not explain, then I would not have got very far with my investigations. Instead of saying that there is no explanation except an acceptance of spiritualism, I have said to myself merely, 'I have not yet found the true explanation.' It may be that I shall absolutely fail to pierce the methods of this charlatan who has tricked you. My failure would not prove that the medium had power to call spirits into materialization. There is no reason we should accept spiritualism, which is contrary to all our natural experiences, unless we have absolute proof of it. Failure to disprove spiritualism is far from being positive proof of the reality of spiritualism. I am as open-minded as anybody else on this subject, but I want positive proof. Mere failure to prove fraud in any given case is not a proof of spiritualism. It is simply an indication that the true explanation of the medium's phenomena has not yet been fathomed."

IT was the following night that I was to assist my friends in attempting to show up the medium. The more I pondered the deception played on them, the more inexplicable seemed the materialization. I was certain that the alleged materialization was nothing more nor less than a flesh and blood human being in the employ of the medium. There must be some way of entry to the room. My friends had locked the door and the window. It occurred to me that the medium or his confederate might have had a pass key, or he might have made his way over the transom, or the lock on the window might be broken. I have had too much experience in opening locks to believe very strongly in their power to keep people out of rooms.

We met, late at night, in the third story of an office building, the minister, the lawyer, and myself. The medium and several men and women were already there. The third of the trio who had called on me arrived a little later. He was a grocer or confectioner—I do not remember which. The medium remarked that there were certain psychic influences in the room that worked against any spiritualistic manifestations, and looked pointedly, as he spoke, at the grocer, who was a small man with cold, skeptical gray eyes and rather a determined chin. I had been introduced to the medium as Mr. Kochler, and evidently he did not suspect me.

My eyes traveled around the room. There was but one window, and the door was secured by a Yale lock. It could be opened from inside. Immediately it flashed through my mind that the medium had a confederate in the room, who would open the door and admit the materialization, but the grocer pointed out to me that this could not be done, because there was a light burning in the hall, and this would be visible to those in the room if the door were opened. I answered, rather curtly, that it should be a comparatively easy matter to extinguish the light in the hall, and my friend merely shrugged his shoulders in reply.

There were about a dozen in the room besides the medium when the séance began. Seven of these were women, although the usual proportion of women at a spiritualistic séance is much higher. The medium aroused my suspicions immediately by throwing a double curtain over the window, "to keep out the light," as he explained. The night was dark, and only a very little light could enter the room from outside. One black curtain would be sufficient. When the medium used two, I felt sure that he wished to conceal the entrance of someone through the window after the room should be plunged in darkness. I had examined the window carefully before the curtains were put up, and satisfied myself that there was no means of getting to the window from outside, as there was a drop of two stories to the ground, and no fire escape near, but the action of the medium in arranging a double curtain over the window caused me to revise my theories.

We were required to join hands in a circle around a central table. The lights were put out at the wall switch, and also individually, to prevent any skeptical person in the circle suddenly arising and flashing them on. The grocer, however, at my advice, had brought a strong pocket flashlight, so we were prepared.

THE séance was opened by the company singing a hymn. Then there was silence for a space, and more singing, while the medium, tied up in a black bag, went into a trance. The proceedings were directed by a woman who, I think, was a sincere believer in spiritualism, and wanted to make all psychic conditions right for opening spirit communications.

I noticed that the singing was loud enough to deaden any sounds a person might make by entering the room either by the door or through the window, and I knew that if the medium had unlocked the window while he was putting up the drapes, it could be opened very easily without being heard above the noise of the singing. I was uneasy, however, and feared that I was on the wrong track, because I saw no way by which an outsider could gain access to the window, which was too far above ground to be reached by ladder.

Finally the spirit manifestations began. There were table rappings, twanging of mandolins, movements of the speaking trumpet, ghostly touches in the dark—all the old claptrap of spiritualistic séances. Then the messages began, the spirit control being ostensibly an Irishman named Mike, who talked in a thick brogue and cracked numerous jokes, even banging the grocer sharply over the head with the mandolin to cool his skepticism. The medium, during all this excitement, was supposed to be in a deep trance, with his hands made useless by being sealed into the black bag, which in its turn was covered with postage stamps on which everyone present had placed marks by which we should know that the medium had not emerged from the bag. This also is a time-worn device of spiritualistic charlatans. It does not hamper the medium's movements as much as might be expected.

Mike, the spirit control, then asked every person in the circle to think very hard of some departed friend or relative whom they wished to see, for the psychic conditions were right for a materialization. The room was very hot and close, but an almost imperceptible breath of air fanned my cheek, and I knew that the window had been opened. The medium, of course, had unlocked it when he was putting up the curtains.

I moved my chair back, out of the circle, and the grocer, who was on my left, moved in a little to take up part of the space I had occupied. I freed my left hand carefully, and substituted the grocer's hand in the hand of the woman on my left, who must have thought that I sat on her right, still holding her hand. My purpose in leaving the circle was to make an investigation. I wanted a look at that window.

A phosphorescent glow emerging from the cabinet now showed vaguely a human face, whether of man or woman I could not say. But the grocer and lawyer were there to attend to the materialization. It was my purpose to learn how the materialization had gained access to the room. I wormed my way down into the cabinet, and through an opening in the back I reached the window very easily. The double curtain bulged out with a slight breeze, and I knew that *the window was open.*

I POKED my head out, and was amazed at what I found. To the left of the window a ladder was hanging from the roof above my head. It was a fireman's extensible hooking ladder, about fifteen feet long, which had been thrust out of the window above, and attached to the top of the building so that the medium's "materialization" could climb down from the window in the third story.

Behind me a scream arose, which I did not take time to investigate. It was a girl's scream,and the name "Marion" was repeated several times.

I tried to push the hooking ladder off from the roof, but I could not dislodge it. The ladder was in two sections, and the lower section, being loose, merely slid upward in its grooves. The upper part of the hooking ladder was securely attached to the roof, and could not be lifted out unless I could raise the rigid upper part of the ladder. So I climbed out, and went up to the window in the story above. Behind me still arose the girl's scream: "Marion! Marion! Oh, God, it's Marion!"

I found the window in the fourth story open. I sat on the sill, lifted the hooking ladder from its position and shoved it in the room. The escape of the medium's materialization was cut off, and my own return by the window was also blocked. I found the door locked from the inside. Evidently the "materialization" wished to make himself secure from intruders while he waited for the singing to tell him that the time had come for him to put out his ladder, attach it to the roof, and descend to take his part in the séance.

I made my way quickly through the corridor and down the stairs to the room of the séance, and found everything in turmoil. I had missed the unmasking of the fraud, but I had prevented the escape of the "spirit." What happened while I was going out of the window and removing the ladder, if told in fiction, would seem like stretching the long arm of coincidence so far that it would break under the strain. That is why I said, at the beginning of this article, that the story would be unconvincing if told by a novelist, because of its improbability.

I had wormed my way into the cabinet and was approaching the window when the grocer flashed his pocket light upon the supposed materialization. A woman's scream split the darkness, and the flashlight was violently knocked from the grocer's hand, but the young woman had thrown her arms around the ghost and was covering his face with kisses, screaming "Marion, Marion! It's you! For God's sake, speak to me, Marion!"

While some tried to find the switch, only to find the lights turned off at the chandelier too, someone probably the medium, was striking the girl's hands with a blackjack, endeavoring to break her hold, and the ghost was muttering in great fright: "Frances, let go of me; you're smothering me, Frances," and fighting to free himself. The combined efforts of the medium and the ghost finally freed him from the girl's hysterical embrace, but the means of escape was cut off by my removing of the ladder. The ghost was a real flesh and blood one, and could not dematerialize into the world of shadows.

THE girl, Frances, whose surname I will not mention here, as she is still living, had attended the séance in good faith, and when the spirit control asked everyone present to hold in mind the image of a dear departed one, so that the spirit might be aided in showing itself, she concentrated her thoughts on her fiance, who had died a little less than a year before.

Out of the cabinet, dimly seen by a phosphorescent glow from the features of the ghost, stepped the materialization. The girl stared, hoping that this was indeed her fiance, trying to believe, her heart beating between skepticism and faith, when the grocer's flashlight lit up the features distinctly. It was only for an instant, for the flashlight was knocked from the grocer's hand almost immediately, but that instant was enough.

The ghost that had emerged from the cabinet was the man she had been engaged to marry, the man whom she had seen laid away in his coffin and buried in the earth!

Is it any wonder that the poor girl became hysterical? Is it any wonder that she threw her arms about her beloved dead, and sought to hold him in the land of the living? Possessed for the moment of an unnatural strength, she held him tight, screaming her love at him, until the struggles of the ghost and the cruel blackjack of the medium had broken her hold.

The materialization, of course, was a paid employe of the medium. And he really was the girl's fiance!

It transpired that the man, who lived in Chicago, had a twin brother in Wyoming, who was slowly dying of consumption and had gone west to work on a ranch in hope that the high altitude would help him. Frances knew of the existence of this twin brother, but she had never seen him. Marion, realizing that the end was near for his brother, had himself heavily insured in his brother's name. He sent for the brother, who came to Chicago while Frances was in Montana with relatives. In Chicago Marion changed lodgings to break contact with those who knew him, and he took his brother's name, and gave his own name to his brother. The brother died in a Chicago hospital under the name of Marion, but Marion was speeding west to Wyoming when the end came. Letters from Frances in Montana were found in the pockets of the dead man, and a telegram brought the heartbroken girl back to Chicago to attend the funeral of her fiance, as she supposed. Marion, by this fraud, was able to collect the insurance on his own death.

The money did him very little good, however, for he squandered it in mining stocks and gambling and other means, and was soon penniless. He then obtained employment as assistant to the charlatan medium, and did materializations for him, with his face smeared with phosphorescent paint that gave a pale, unearthly radiance to his features in the dark, and yet did not light them up enough so that anyone could certainly recognize his face. It was the flashlight of the grocer that accomplished that.

The strangest part of the whole occurrence is that the girl and the man should meet in this strange way. He had not the slightest notion in the world that his fiancee was in that room, while she, of course, believed him dead.

The insurance company prosecuted the man for fraud, but the medium who employed him departed suddenly, and may still be preying, under another name, upon the credulities of those who want to communicate with their beloved dead. He was a clever magician, and under whatever name he perpetrates his fraudulent tricks, he should be very successful. It is much more lucrative to be a charlatan medium than an honest magician, for rich dupes pay well, whereas the amount of money that can be made by parlor magic is relatively small.

THE girl, Frances, refused to have anything to do with her fiance thereafter, for the fraud he practised both on her and on the insurance company killed her love. She went to the hospital, suffering from a nervous collapse, after her hysteria at the séance, but she recovered, and afterward returned to Chicago.

This Novel Is Guaranteed To Hold Your Interest To the Last Word

Ebenezer's Casket

By J. U. GIESY *and* JUNIUS B. SMITH

IT was a nice casket. Ebenezer Clay was sure of that as he completed the finishing touches and surveyed the results of his work. He put out a hand and ran it over the satin pillow, the lining of the narrow oblong bed, in an almost proprietary way.

It ought to be a nice—a perfectly satisfactory—casket, because he had given special care to making it exactly what it was. And it was the last he would make. He drew back his hand and sighed.

The casket was gray—a soft dove color. He had liked always gray. Claire Markley's eyes were gray. It was rather odd that he had been thinking of them as he worked on this particular "box" in the Armistead Casket Company's plant the last few days. But then, inside those few days, Ebenezer had reviewed the major part of his life, recalling as best he might, in chronological fashion, the activities of his twenty-seven years, though there was an hiatus, of course, between his birth and the time when he was between four and five.

Now the casket was finished. Ebenezer had seen to that. He began removing his workman's apron, though according to the clock there remained several hours yet to work. He put the apron away and donned his street vest and coat. One would have said that, having finished the casket, Ebenezer was going to quit right then and there. And, as a matter of fact, he was.

With a final glance about the room where he had labored at similar tasks for the past two years, he left it, made his way to the office of the plant, and asked for his time. Then he inquired if Mr. Armistead was in, and asked for a personal interview on learning that he was.

He got it, in view of the fact that he was quitting without warning and was one of the best workmen the company had.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Armistead," said Ebenezer, standing in front of the proprietor of the Armistead Casket Company, with his hat in his hand. "I've just finished th' last box that come into my hands. I'd—like to buy it, if you don't mind."

Armistead stared. He seemed a bit surprised. Ebenezer's proposition was unusual to say the least. He frowned. "You want to buy it?"

"Yes sir, for my personal use." All at once a far-away look crept into Ebenezer's eyes. "And I'd like it delivered to the Lynn Undertaking Parlors."

"Your—er—personal use?" The proprietor of the Armistead Casket Company took a deep and sudden breath and laid hold of the edge of his desk with both hands. He regarded the man before him in an actually startled fashion. "See here, Clay—they tell me you're leaving. What's wrong? Have you run into some sort of trouble?"

"No, sir," Ebenezer shook his head slowly. "Leastways, it ain't anything except what comes to every man, sometime, an' I'm quitting now because I need a few hours to get ready for it. You see, sir, I'll be ready for that box after 11:01 p. m. An' I got to see a lawyer an' arrange things with Lynn."

"You—Good God!" Armistead left his chair with a bound. "Clay—you—don't mean—"

Ebenezer nodded. "Yes, sir—I'm going to die. Th' only difference is that most men don't know it, an' that I have knowed it was comin' for some time. That's why I've took special pains to make this box exactly what I wanted, an'—"

"Sit down," Armistead directed almost sharply. "That isn't what I meant. I meant—you—you aren't going to do anything—to yourself?"

"Oh, no, sir," Ebenezer's eyes widened swiftly. "There ain't any reason why I should."

His employer regained his chair. His manner was slightly ruffled, "What's the crazy notion then? Are you sick?"

"No, sir. An' I ain't crazy. It's just that it's been given me to have definite knowledge of when I was goin' to die, in advance. Some people can read the future, an'—I know my time."

"You know it, and you've gone on working till the—last day?"

"Yes, sir. There wasn't anything else I wanted to do very much, an' besides, I wanted to fix this box. So if you'll let me buy it—"

"Hold on." Armistead's expression appeared to indicate that he was far from decided as to whether he ought to accept Ebenezer's assurance that he was sane or not. He leaned a little forward in his chair. "Now let's get this thing straight. You've got a hunch that you're going to die at one minute after eleven tonight, but—you aren't going to commit suicide or anything like that? You just want to buy this particular casket you've fixed up to suit yourself?"

"No, sir. Yes, sir." Ebenezer nodded.

Armistead got down to business. "All right. I hope when you wake up for breakfast tomorrow morning, you'll be feeling better. Now as to the casket. It's my business to sell 'em, though not at retail. You can have it if you want it, at the market price."

"Yes, sir," Ebenezer said, ignoring the middle of his companion's remark and replying only to the first and last part. There was almost an air of condescension about the way he said it, as though from the heights of his superior knowledge he could afford to overlook so trivial a thing as the other man's doubt, now that he was so very, very close to the end of mundane things. He reached into a pocket and produced a roll of bills, began counting out the correct amount. "I brought it with me, this mornin'," he explained, as he laid a number of bills on the end of Armistead's desk, "an' I'm sure you'll find that right. If you'll have 'em deliver it to Lynn's the first thing in the morning—"

Armistead nodded. For the moment he seemed incapable of words. There came a pause, and Ebenezer rose.

"So then—I guess I'll be saying—good-bye." The way he said it gave a strange, bizarre, almost weird finality to the word. The situation was uncanny.

Armistead exploded. "Oh, forget it. Get the fool notion out of your head. Go

see a doctor and come back here any time you want a job."

"Thank you, sir," said Ebenezer, and passed out without further comment, paused at the cashier's window long enough to collect the wages due him, thrust the amount into his pocket and made his way for the last time through the casket company's doors.

On a corner he waited for a street car that would carry him through the business section of town.

It was crowded when he stepped aboard, and he had to hang to a strap. He did so in almost automatic fashion, giving small attention to the crowded life about him. Already it seemed to Ebenezer that they had lost all interest for him. It was after two o'clock and he had less than nine hours to live, and what did any one or any thing matter to a man who had come that close to the grave? That strange, detached feeling, amounting almost to an apathy at times, had been growing upon him for days.

He smiled rather grimly, however, recalling Armistead's parting words. Doctors? What did *they* know about it? A month ago one of the very best physicians in town had told him he was in perfect health and could expect to live for years. Only—even when the man had said it—Ebenezer had known he was mistaken, and the words had served merely to convince him that there were more things in life than were known to medical philosophy, and that had the doctor been examining him for life insurance, say, it wouldn't have been long till his company would have been accusing him of having made a rather lurid mistake.

For Ebenezer knew that a whole lot less than a year would see him stretched out in the classical six feet of earth—had known it with a definiteness of knowledge the medical man's opinion was in no wise able to shake. There had been at the time an almost morbid satisfaction in the knowledge—a sort of unreasoning marvel in his mind, at how blind the future was, after all—at how its veil hung always between mankind and the procession of succeeding days.

And now the last day was reached so far as Ebenezer was concerned. The last day? He gazed dully out at the sunshine in the streets. After a while it was going to fade, and with its fading would come the last night. And after that? Unconsciously, he tightened his grip on the swaying strap.

After a time he punched a signal button and left the car at the corner of two streets. He dodged the traffic officer's warning shout. For a single instant he experienced a sensation of something like contempt at that cautionary warning. "Let him yell," thought Ebenezer. A man died but once, and he wasn't duo to die till one minute after eleven o'clock that night, so why bother about such trivial details as speeding motors and heavily lumbering trucks?

He turned into the doors of an office structure and consulted the directory bulletin before he entered an up-going elevator cage. He waited while the cage filled, eying the passengers as they bustled busily in through the fretted gate. The detached feeling came back upon him—the thought that with them he no longer had a part—that in a very few hours now, Death, the grim prompter, would give the cue for his exit from the world he had heard likened to a stage.

"Ten," he said to the boy at the switch and leaned back against the metal framework as the car slid up the shaft.

He roused and got out when the tenth floor was reached. He walked down the corridor, scanning the number on the doors. Presently he found the one he was seeking and passed through it.

He made known his need of a lawyer to a young woman busily engaged in hammering out some typewritten manuscript.

She took his name, rose and disappeared into an adjoining room from which she returned in a moment, leaving the door open behind her, as she announced that he should go "right in."

Ebenezer accepted the invitation and found himself facing a clean-shaved, middle-aged man, who sat at a desk and regarded him out of expectant dark eyes.

He put his hand into the pocket of his coat and drew out a bit of folded paper.

"I would like you to make out a deed for the property described in this to Miss Claire Markley, of Massillon, Ohio," he said and laid it on the desk.

"Sit down." The lawyer took up the paper and glanced through it, while Ebenezer waited.

"For what consideration?" he presently asked.

"Consideration?" Ebenezer stammered.

"Yes—what price?"

"Oh," said Ebenezer. "Why—there isn't any price. I'm—just leaving it to her. I want she should have it after I'm dead."

"Oh 'Love and Affection,'" said the lawyer.

Ebenezer started. "Love and Affection." For a fleeting instant he seemed to see Claire Markley's face floating before him with its clear gray eyes, just as he had seen it when he had been working on the casket. And then it faded and left him staring back at the attorney. He had forgotten to consider a consideration, but—Love and Affection? What did it matter?

"You could fix it up that way, could you?" he inquired.

The lawyer nodded. "Yes. I'll have it ready for you tomorrow. Will you call, or shall I send it to you?"

"I'll wait for it now, I guess," said Ebenezer. "I want to mail it to her myself, and I can't if I'm dead."

"Well—" the attorney glanced at his client's stalwart figure—"there doesn't seem to be an immediate danger of your dying at present."

There it was again—doubt—unbelief—the acceptance of the mere surface seeming. All at once it filled Ebenezer with a sense of irritation.

"That's all you know about it," he returned sharply. "I'll be dead before midnight all right."

CHAPTER TWO

"YOU'LL—wha-a-at!" The man at the desk lost his air of smiling composure all at once. His jaw seemed inclined to sag and his eyes had the appearance of trying to pop out of their sockets.

"I'm going to die," said Ebenezer, satisfied that he had made an impression at least. "I'll be dead at one minute after eleven o'clock tonight. That's why I've got to have the deed before I leave here. It won't take long to fix it if you get to work."

"But—" the lawyer began, then paused and apparently swallowed something before he continued: "You don't look—sick."

"I'm not," said Ebenezer shortly. "Now if you'll—"

"And—" all at once the man of law looked troubled—"surely—you aren't thinking of—well—doing anything rash?"

Ebenezer Clay took an exasperated breath. He was beginning to feel annoyed. First Armistead and now this man seemed a lots more excited by his approaching end than he was himself.

"Look here," he rejoined in a tone of rising impatience, "is there any reason why I've got to tell you what I'm thinking just because I come up here to get you to draw a deed? You ain't th' man that's goin' to die. I'm goin' to do that myself, an' I want to get that deed into

th' mail before I do it. What business is it of yours? Just because I say I'm goin' to die is no sign that I'm goin' to kill myself."

"But—" the lawyer was breathing deeply, "the *time*, man! You said you'd be dead at one minute after eleven o'clock tonight."

Ebenezer nodded. "That's right—an' I want to mail that deed before then if you'll get to work. I ain't goin' to take poison or shoot myself or nothin,' an' I ain't any too happy about it. But when a man knows a thing he knows it, an'—that's all there is to it, except that I know this is my last day on earth."

"Oh—you mean you feel a premonition?" All at once the attorney's manner was one of relief. His expression altered. From one of intense attention, not unmixed with something like startled horror, it became a thing of awakening understanding. After all, he possibly thought, there were all sorts of cranks on earth, men mildly unbalanced, or swayed by some temporary influence of one sort or another—people who predicted the end of the world with an assurance little short of appalling.

Said Ebenezer with weight on each word and speaking slowly: "I mean I've got a definite date. Are you going to draw up that deed?"

"Of course, of course." The lawyer opened a drawer and produced some forms. He punched a buzzer and the young woman from the outer office appeared.

He gave her the forms and Ebenezer's written memorandum, and instructed her to draw up the deed at once, passing title in consideration of Love and Affection.

She took the papers and went out. Ebenezer watched her. At last he had got things started. He relaxed in his chair and began seeing pictures in his mind—the old home place, adjoining that of Claire Markley's father—where he had started life—where he had expected to go on living, and would have in all likelihood, if he hadn't quarreled with Claire two years ago last spring. He stared out of the office window, without seeing the jumble of buildings beyond it, because, instead, he was seeing the old house to which he had expected some day to bring Claire home—the old house he was deeding to her now in consideration of Love and Affection.

The attorney leaned back in his chair with a squeaking of springs. He regarded Ebenezer with far more calm than he had recently shown. He cleared his throat in preliminary fashion.

"Have you had this—er—feeling long?"

Ebenezer turned his eyes from the window. He had an impulse to reply to the question with a contemptuous laugh. Feeling? This man characterized the steady march of the minutes and hours toward a definite event as a *feeling!* No doubt he rather patted himself on the back for his choice of words. But—mankind had always been like that in the face of the unusual, the surprising, the unexpected. Credulous in many things, they were yet prone to exhibit incredulity when faced by the truth. Ebenezer took that fact into consideration as he answered:

"Somethin' over a month."

"Did it come upon you suddenly, or by degrees?"

Ebenezer eyed his companion. He wasn't a fool and he understood. The man thought him the victim of a delusion—a sort of harmless "nut." And there had always been men who regarded those to whom it was given to know the future, as men of unbalanced brains.

"Why," he said, "I got wise to it all at once. I didn't know a thing about it, an' then, all at once, I was sure."

"That you were going to die tonight? You knew all about it even to the time?"

"Yes," Ebenezer nodded.

"You—er—don't carry any insurance, do you?"

There was a tolerant something in the way Ebenezer grinned. Suddenly it seemed to him that he saw very well what was going on in the attorney's mind.

"Nope," he responded shortly. "An' I ain't tryin' to beat that game. I was to see a doctor about a month ago, after I knew what was goin' to happen, an' he said there wasn't anything the matter with me so far as he could see. Th' trouble with him was he couldn't see as far into th' future as I could."

"And since then—what have you been doing?"

"I've been workin' in th' Armistead Casket Company plant, same as I have for th' last two years." Ebenezer's tone was resigned.

"Oh; you've been making coffins?"

"Finishing 'em," Ebenezer explained. His manner became one of a transitory animation. "Th' last one I fixed is th' best I ever done. I bought it off 'em this afternoon."

"Not—" The attorney stiffened. His eyes widened. "Not for—tonight?" he finished rather lamely.

"Sure," said Ebenezer. "I know it's a good piece of work."

"And—did you tell them why you wanted to buy it?"

Ebenezer sighed. This quizzing was getting to be something of a bore. He cast an eye toward the next room before he said with a somewhat grim humor: "Yep. It won't be a secret much longer. Armistead was surprised, though. I reckon he thought I was just about as crazy as you do—just because it's been given me to know how long I'm goin' to live."

His companion's appearance grew troubled as he paused. Briefly, he, too, turned his eyes toward the outer room. "But, my dear man, have I said I thought you crazy?"

"No, an' you don't need to," said Ebenezer. "Say, wait a minute—can a crazy man make a deed?"

"I—er—" the legal gentleman seemed disturbed by the lucid directness of the question. "He—er—can make one, of course, though in the event of his being proved of unsound mind it would be set aside."

And suddenly, despite the nature of the whole occasion, Ebenezer laughed, without any sound of mirth. "Then—that's what's eatin' you, ain't it?" he suggested. "Well, don't you worry. I reckon you won't think I was crazy any more, when you find out I've died."

"Of course, of course," the attorney nodded. He adopted a placative tone. "But—you must admit that the circumstances are—er—unusual at least."

"Nothin' unusual about it," said Ebenezer Clay. "Dyin' is one of th' commonest things in life. It's on an equal footin' with birth. Th' only unusual thing in this business is that I've happened to get wise to th' thing in advance, instead of havin' it come on me as a surprise. You wouldn't have thought it was unusual at all if I'd died, instead of comin' to you first."

"Possibly not." The attorney let out an audible breath. "Still—your matter-of-fact acceptance of so grave an issue is a bit—well, disconcerting."

"I can't get away from it, can I?" Ebenezer questioned.

"Well—looking at it in that way," said his companion, and apparently ran out of a supply of words.

"Then why make a fuss?"

The door to the outer room opened and the stenographer brought in the finished deed.

Her employer took it with an air of relief, ran it over, verified its correctness, and laid it on his desk. He took up

a pen and dipped it into an inkwell and held it toward Ebenezer with one hand, while he indicated a line on the typed and printed page with a finger of the other.

"Sign here, please."

Ebenezer signed, after he had read the document over and assured himself of exactly what it said. He gave back the pen and spoke in a tentative fashion:

"If you've an envelope, I could use, you can add its cost to your charge. I want to mail this here as soon as I leave."

"Of course." The lawyer produced the article required and slipped the deed inside.

Ebenezer sealed it and took the pen again to scrawl Claire Markley's address.

"I'll put a special delivery stamp on it, too," he announced. "That way she'll be sure to get it, I guess. Well—how much?"

The attorney named his price.

Ebenezer paid it, and thrust the envelope into his pocket. "Listen," said he. "It's given to some men to see th' future. That's all there is to this. An' now I got to be goin'. Good-bye."

"Good-bye, Mr. Clay," said the attorney and watched his client stalk out of the place. The whole thing was most unusual, no matter what the man said about it. He formed a resolution then and there to make a careful search of the morning papers to see if any unexpected death had taken place.

CHAPTER THREE

AS for Ebenezer, he knew exactly what he wanted to do next. He posted the addressed envelope first. He watched it slide into the box after he had affixed a special delivery stamp, with a mental query as to just what Claire Markley would think when the deed was received. But it was only after it was mailed that he found himself wondering whether she were Claire Markley yet or not, in view of the fact that he had heard nothing from her in a little more than two years.

She might have married. Ebenezer paused in the act of turning away from the box. And then he caught sight of a town clock that showed him the futility of such considerations. What did it matter if she were married or not, to a man in his position? He set his lips and started off along the street.

After several turnings, he came to what had been a residence once from its appearance, but was now converted to a very different usage as indicated by the foot-high lettering over the doors at the top of a flight of gray stone steps:

"LYNN UNDERTAKING PARLORS AND MORTUARY CHAPEL."

Ebenezer turned from the pavement, mounted the steps to the door beneath the sign and went in.

He stood in an entrance hall to what had once been a parlor indeed, and was now employed as the chapel on one hand, and a smaller room, palpably used as an office, on the other. After a moment of hesitation, he turned toward the last.

"Good afternoon," said an impersonally sympathetic masculine voice.

Ebenezer regarded a small, almost colorless, man, who sat in a swivel chair in front of a roll top desk.

"Afternoon," he returned. "You're th' manager, I guess?"

"I'm Mr. Lynn," said the other and rubbed his bloodless palms together. "What can I do for you, Mr.—"

"Clay," said Ebenezer. "If you're Lynn, why, all right. I come in to make arrangements with you to bury me, an' pay th' bill. You can get th' body any time after 11:01 tonight. I'll explain that you're to have it, an—"

"Wait!" The man in the swivel chair gasped. He stared. He gaped. He seemed completely upset by the words of his prospective corpse. "Won't you sit down, while we go into the matter more fully?"

Ebenezer complied and drew a long, deep breath. This arranging for one's own demise was a lot more troublesome than he had suspected it would be before he tried it. People didn't seem to be able to associate him with the idea of death.

"There isn't anything to go into," he remarked, "except that I've picked on your firm to do th' job. I've already bought a casket an' it'll be delivered to you sometime tomorrow mornin'. It's a gray velour box, lined with white satin, side bar type of handles, from th' Armistead Casket Company shops. I'll pack a suitcase with what I'm goin' to wear, an' you get it when you go to get th' body. Now what say—had I better be embalmed?"

To judge by his manner and expression, Lynn didn't know what to say, even though the question was one to which he was accustomed to reply. For several seconds he sat regarding Ebenezer with a baffled contemplation, which altered at last to a wakening suspicion. Presently he stiffened slightly. "What is this," he inquired, " a joke?"

"Joke?" said Ebenezer in a tone of irritation, and paused. He thrust a hand into his pocket and produced his roll of bills. "Well—if it is, it's on me. Now let's talk business. Do you want th' job? If you don't, I've got to find somebody what does an' telephone Armistead to send that casket—"

"Wait," Undertaker Lynn interposed for the second time. "If you're really serious about this, I can understand why my question should have made you feel—annoyed. But—really—I cannot recall another instance where a man came in to arrange the details of his interment in advance of the—er—event."

"Maybe." Ebenezer sighed in almost weary fashion. Even an undertaker, it would seem, could be disturbed by talking to a man about death before that man had died. And yet all men died as a matter of course—and he had known he was going to die for something over a month, and—that was it. All at once he saw it. He had grown accustomed to the thought, and these others were startled by his mention of it, even as he had been startled and shocked at first. That was the explanation.

"I see," he went on. "But why shouldn't he if he ain't got no folks, an' knows what's goin' to happen. Now how much for the funeral an' the cemetery lot, with me furnishin' the casket an' clothes?"

The query was businesslike enough in all conscience, but Lynn didn't seem able to get down to business even so. Indeed, he seemed uncomfortable in the extreme.

"But—my dear man," he said, and his voice was husky, "how *can* you know? You've—er—named the time exactly. Surely you can't mean—"

"That I'm goin' to kill myself?" Ebenezer interrupted almost roughly at this third hint of self-destruction. "No, I don't. I just know what's goin' to happen, an' I admit that when I first got wise, it hit me a pretty hard jolt. But I got sort of used to it after a time, 'cause there wasn't nothing to do about it."

Lynn nodded. "Just so," he said rather faintly. "You mean you're resigned."

"I threw up my job," said Ebenezer, "an' come down here to fix things up with you, an' if you'll look at th' clock, you'll see I ain't got so awful much time. Now name your price an I'll pay it, an' go 'tend to a few other things, an' then I'm goin' over to the hospital—"

"Hospital?" Mr. Lynn repeated quickly. "You mean you're going to—

to—" he appeared to trip over the end of his question.

"I'm goin' to die there at one minute after eleven o'clock tonight," said Ebenezer in an actually brittle fashion. "They'll tell you when I'm ready. Now let's get this here settled. It's a matter of life an' death—an' I can go to bed a lot easier in my mind if I know what's goin' to happen to my remains. There oughter be a prayer, an' maybe some singin', an' there's th' rent of th' hearse."

Mr. Lynn caught a breath that was positively unsteady. "And—flowers?" he suggested.

Ebenezer nodded. "Sure. Money ain't no good to me now. I might as well spend it. You get some posies, of course. Now set your figger an' I'll pay it an' get out. I gotta go to my room an' pack my grip."

"Why—er—" Mr. Lynn wet his lips with his tongue. He rubbed his hands together. He looked at Ebenezer, and cast his eyes about the room. Never in all his life had he encountered such a situation. Mortician he might be, but he had never had financial dealings with a subject while yet it was full of intelligent breath. Presently he turned to his desk in something like desperation, caught up a scratch-pad and began jotting down certain figures upon it, while Ebenezer watched. What lay back of the transaction he didn't know, but clearly it wasn't a joke as he had at first suspected, or, if it was it was a joke, of a most peculiar sort. Even if it was, his caller ready to pay for it in cash, and one of his mottoes of life was never to let a dollar escape once he had it in his grasp. As yet he didn't have it, but apparently he would.

"Three hundred dollars," he gave an estimate at last. His peculiar patron had said money was no object to him any longer and he felt he might as well get all he could.

Ebenezer accepted by another nod. He began stripping currency notes from his roll.

Lynn watched him. The thing was past all precedence, but it was happening before his eyes. This man was going to pay him for a funeral, in advance—and he was going to have a casket delivered at his door. The thing was crazy—*crazy!* Of course. That explained the whole thing. The man was mildly unbalanced. He was a bug. He eyed the motion of Ebenezer's lips, keeping time with his fingers in computing the amount, and suddenly he recalled his former remark.

He cleared his throat. "Unless," he said, "you wish to be embalmed."

Ebenezer paused in his counting. He lifted his eyes. "Do you think I ought to be or not?"

"It's a matter of—er—personal choice," said Mr. Lynn, still eying the bills in Ebenezer's hand. "If it was my funeral, I—er—would."

"How much?" said Ebenezer.

"Fifty dollars," said Lynn and caught his breath as his caller resumed his counting, added two twenties and a ten to the sum already named and laid the total on the corner of the desk.

Lynn took it up and verified the count and put it in a folder he drew from an inside pocket. With the act his spirit appeared to lighten. He buttoned his coat across his narrow chest and smiled.

"Quite correct, Mr. Clay, thank you," he declared and once more rubbed his palms together. "We'll give you a very nice funeral, I assure you—a very nice funeral, indeed."

"Well you ought to." Ebenezer picked up his hat and rose. "With me furnishin' everything but th' work, you're hittin' it stiff—but, I reckon you might as well have it as any one else. I'll expect you to do things up in pretty good shape."

Lynn rose also. "I assure you that everything will be done in a fashion that, could you see it, would satisfy you, yourself."

"All right. That's all I'm askin'," said Ebenezer. "Well—you'll see me later. That is, you'll see my remains. Good afternoon." He put on his hat and walked out.

And as he went down the gray stone steps, he was conscious of a feeling of relief at having got so much of his final arrangements off his hands.

He walked to the corner and waited for a car that would take him within a block of his room.

CHAPTER FOUR

IT was a small room in a boarding-house on a side street. But for two years and a trifle over he had called it home. Ebenezer was the type who do not move around. Quiet in his habits, almost automatic in his routine, he had come to be more or less of a fixture in the house maintained by the Widow McCloskey and her daughter Irene.

He met Irene as he came in and she eyed him with surprise. Never before since she had known him had he come home in the afternoon.

"Why, Mr. Clay!" she exclaimed. "You ain't sick, are you?"

"No, Miss Irene," said Ebenezer. "I just wanted to 'tend to some business, an' I'll be goin' out pretty soon."

Going out! The words rather sang themselves over in his brain as he mounted the stairs and unlocked his door and let himself in. *Going out pretty soon.* Yes, it wouldn't be long now until he was going out, indeed—like—like the gas when you turned the button, or an electric light, or a lamp, or a candle—going out never to return.

He sighed as he crossed the room and opened his trunk, and got out some paper and a bottle of ink and a pen. The fact that he was actually *going out* still held its sting. He had accepted it when he had come to know it, as an unavoidable thing. He had even felt a strange wonder that to him, as to so few of his fellows, the definite date should be shown. But he was young, and perfectly healthy so far as his physical life was concerned, and it was rather hard to realize that inside a certain number of days, now dwindled to hours, the spark of his life was going out—that the driving force of life would have run down like a neglected clock, before the morrow's sun.

He carried pen and ink and paper to a little table and sat down. He spread the paper before him and took up the pen.

And then he sat staring straight before him. Claire Markley. He was seeing her face again—and the old house, set down on the edge of his ancestral acres, with its trees, its rose bushes, the barn behind it—all the things he had left when he came west to this city where he now sat in a rented room—the things he had left when he had quarreled with Claire, after the manner of over-jealous youth—the things he was giving to her now in consideration of Love and Affection.

Love and Affection. Oddly enough he thought of Irene. She was going to be married. All at once Ebenezer's eyes lighted. He reached into his pocket slowly and brought out his depleted roll of bills. When one got married, one needed a lot of things, and—Irene had always been mighty friendly with him. So—why not leave to Irene what was soon to be of no possible value to him?

Mentally he made an estimate of the cost of a hospital room. He detached it from the amount in his possession and returned it to his pocket. The remainder he put aside.

And then he uncorked the bottle of ink. Claire? No. He had meant to write her, explaining about the deed, but—there wasn't anything to say to

her really. Let the deed speak for itself, in its terms of Love and Affection. All at once he was glad the lawyer had thought of that consideration. It saved him the effort of trying to explain in labored fashion all those things the three words so tersely said. *Love and Affection.* That's all there was to it. Claire would have the old place just the same as if she had been married to him, and —this thing had come upon him tonight all unexpected.

After all, then, it was better so—it was better that he should be meeting the thing alone—better that he was—as he was—better that he should be leaving the old place to Claire because of love and affection, and the balance of his money to Irene.

He hitched himself into position at the table and began work with his pen:

"Dear Mrs. McCloskey:

"I'm writing this to explain quite a number of things. When you get it, I'll be dead, and it'll be in natural and regular fashion. I ain't killing myself, and I ain't outen my head. When I leave here, I'm going to a hospital and get a room. And I'll die there tonight at 11:01.

"I've knowed this was coming for some time, but I ain't said nothing about it, because there ain't any use in a man's kicking against his time when it comes. But I'm leaving you my things.

"You can have my trunk and what there is in it, and the money in this letter I want should go to Miss Irene. I know she's going to be married and I'd like her to use the cash to get her some things. She's always been mighty nice to me, and so have you. I hope Irene and her husband get along fine. I'm going to be buried from Lynn's. If you call up, he'll give you the time, and I'd like to have you attend the funeral if you care to come. I've made all the arrangements for it, and he says he'll do the right thing.

"I wish I could stay with you longer, but when the Grim Reaper calls, all a human power can do is to stand up and be cut down."

So far Ebenezer wrote and paused. He regarded the last paragraph, frowning. Some way it didn't exactly seem right. Instinctively, perhaps, he felt the malappropriateness of likening himself to a flower, but he could not seem to find other words to express what he had in mind. In the end he let it stand as it was, trusting that Mrs. McCloskey would understand it, and went on:

"So this is good-by.
"Yours very truly,
"Ebenezer Clay."

He rose and found an envelope in the trunk. He put the written page and the money inside it and sealed it up and wrote upon it:

"Norah McCloskey—Addressed."

He propped it up on the table against the bottle of ink, where any one coming in would see it; turned away and found a suitcase and opened it on the bed.

Pulling out the drawers of an old-time dresser, he set to work. Into the suitcase he put a clean suit of underclothing, a pair of fresh socks, and a shirt, a tie, a collar. From a closet he brought a suit of clothes, folded them neatly and added them to the rest.

He sighed again as he closed the case and fastened the snaps. His eyes roamed about the room in a farewell glance. In a moment he was going to walk out of it, as he had done so many times before. But—this time—he wasn't coming back. Something like a lump rose in his throat. His eyes fell on the envelope propped up on the table, where Mrs. McCloskey would find it. He would have liked to say good-bye to her and Irene, but—it was too hard to make people understand. He took up the suitcase and went out and down the stairs softly, hoping he wouldn't meet Irene as he had when he came in.

He saw no one. He let himself out of the front door. He moved off along the street. At the corner he turned and looked back. After that he walked a couple of blocks, and caught a car for the third time that afternoon. Just why he was going to a hospital he hardly knew, except that soon after he had learned what was going to happen, the idea had occurred to him and had taken hold of his mind. It had seemed a better place to die than in the Widow McCloskey's house. Wherefore, he had made it the last step in his plan.

When the car reached the corner nearest to it, he got down. It stood in a stretch of tree-studded ground, and the shadows of the trees were growing long. He noted the fact with an odd quiver, starting into being as it seemed from somewhere in his breast. He paused and put down the suitcase and drew a long breath. That—that strange thrill had probably been in his heart. It would have to be his heart or something of that sort to take him off so suddenly, after he had spent twenty-seven years feeling well. And it was beginning to make itself felt—just as for twenty-seven years it had been fated that it should. That was the way fate worked —there was no haste about it, but—equally there was no mistake.

He took up the suitcase again and started up a tree-shaded, concrete walk. But at the head of a flight of steps, in front of the doors of the institution itself, he once more stopped. He turned his glance to the grass, the shrubs, the trees. He lifted it to the sky, where a few clouds floated like balls of fleece, in a final look. It was the last time, thought Ebenezer, that he would ever see anything of the sort. The last time. Life —save for the restricted element of the hospital itself, would be behind him once he stepped inside its doors. And yet—and yet—he couldn't stand there on the steps. He set his lips a trifle grimly and made his way inside.

There was a door marked *office.* Ebenezer went in. He was breathing somewhat quickly, and there was a drawn expression about his eyes, now that they had looked on the world for the last time. He set down his suitcase and spoke to a woman—a white-clad woman—who sat behind a glassed-in railing.

"I would like to engage a room."

She rose and came toward him, speaking through the grill of the window between them. "Very well. What price?"

Ebenezer's mind went back to the amount he had deemed sufficient, and he named it.

"That will do for a deposit," said the woman, "but we only rent rooms by the week."

"I—I won't need it that long," said Ebenezer. "I—expect to die tonight."

"You—" For an instant the face on the other side of the grill showed startled, and then it smiled. "You don't look as sick as all that."

"I don't feel sick, Ma'm, really," Ebenezer told her. "But—"

"You've never been in a hospital before, have you?"

"No, Ma'm—but—"

"What is your name?"

Ebenezer told her and watched her write it down.

She laid aside her pen and slipped around the end of the railing. "If you'll come with me," she said, "I'll take you to your room."

Ebenezer followed her down a hall, past many doors, in and out of which flitted other women in white. There was a peculiar odor to the place, he noted

now, that made him feel a trifle sick. He sniffed.

They paused before an elevator cage, and went in and up a shaft. On the next floor they got out. There was another corridor and more doors. His companion opened one at last. Ebenezer stepped into a room with a narrow white bed and a table, and a set of drawers, and two doors.

"I'll send you a nurse," said the woman, and went out.

Ebenezer put down his suitcase and sighed. Just as a room, the place was very nice. He began taking off his coat and vest.

With the garments in his hand, he stopped. The door had opened without warning and a young woman in white popped in.

"Oh," she exclaimed, "are you going to bed? Ring the bell when you're ready, and I'll come in and take your temperature and pulse."

She withdrew and Ebenezer flushed. She had been a rather pretty girl, but—she hadn't even rapped. He went over and found a button on the door and turned it, sat down and began untying his shoes.

Having completed his disrobing, he turned the button back the other way, pulled down the covers and stretched himself out. She had told him to ring, but it really didn't matter whether she came back or not. He had laid his watch on the table beside the bed and he glanced at its dial. It was nearly six o'clock. He turned his gaze out of the window. He could see the top of a tree and the blue of the evening sky.

A door opened at his back. He turned, to face another nurse.

She was older, he judged, than the first, and she had a bunch of papers in her hand. She drew up a chair and sat down by the side of the bed.

"Good evening. You're Mr. Clay, aren't you?" she inquired.

"Yes, Ma'm," said Ebenezer.

"Your age?"

"Twenty-seven."

"Born where?"

"Massillon, Ohio."

"And what is your complaint?"

"I—I don't know, Ma'm," said Ebenezer, watching as she wrote down his answers, "but I think it's my heart. I guess it doesn't matter though, really. I'm goin' to die tonight."

Like the woman in the office, this one, too, looked startled, and then, like the other, she smiled. "You don't look like a heart case exactly," she responded. "Who's your doctor?"

"I haven't any," said Ebenezer.

She nodded. "I'll have one of the house doctors come in to see you. Now who would you want notified in event of your death?"

For a moment Ebenezer stared. He was conscious, all at once, of a distinct sensation of relief. Here at last was some one who wasn't shocked into a state of mental collapse by the mention of his impending demise. And, of course, he knew nothing of hospital records or other forms of medical red tape.

"Why," he said in a tone approaching animation, "I ain't got no folks, so—no one I guess, or—hold on! You can telephone Lynn's Undertaking Parlors after I'm dead. My funeral is all arranged."

CHAPTER FIVE

"AR—RANGED?" The nurse's eyes went wide. She sat with her pencil poised above the paper on her knee, while she regarded Ebenezer in an almost horrified way.

Presently her bust rose and fell again slowly. A contraction ran up and down the rounded pillar of her throat. Her lips parted.

"Really, Mr. Clay—" she began in uncertain fashion.

"You see," Ebenezer interrupted. "I thought I might as well attend to it myself, and then I'd be sure what was done with my remains, instead of just lyin' down an' leavin' it to other folks. So I fixed it with Lynn this afternoon before I come up here, an' I told him he could come an' get me any time after one minute past eleven o'clock p. m."

"I see." The woman nodded. Just what she saw she didn't mention, but it seemed to be something that threw her into a state of incipient panic, whatever it was. To Ebenezer it seemed that she had grown a little bit pale as she jumped up, rather than rose. "I'll—send in one of the doctors," she said, moving toward the door. "You lie quiet until you see him, won't you?"

Ebenezer bobbed his head. Her actions filled him with a fresh disgust. Armistead wasn't so bad, or the lawyer, but undertakers, nurses—surely they ought to be accustomed to the thought of death. So he didn't even trouble to put his acquiescence into words. He had thought her a sensible person at first, and now it would seem that she simply hadn't understood. He closed his eyes and relaxed upon the pillow.

The door opened and closed, and he knew she had disappeared. But he didn't open his eyes. He simply lay there, letting the minutes slip irretrievably away, dully conscious of the muffled sounds of footfalls, of tinkling bells, that drifted in from the hall.

And then his door opened again, to admit the little nurse, who had entered before he was undressed. But she came in quietly now, rather than bounced. On tip toe as it seemed, so silent was her progress, she approached the bed, encountered Ebenezer's watching glance and paused, then smiled.

"You're—quite all right—aren't you, Mr. Clay?" she inquired.

"Of course," said Ebenezer.

"Miss Winslow sent me to stay with you," the girl explained. "She said—she said—"

"That I was going to die tonight?" All at once it came to Ebenezer that the little nurse was scared—that she was scared stiff—of him.

She nodded slightly. "Yes. At—at—"

"One minute after eleven."

"Yes, Mr. Clay."

"Well," said Ebenezer, "don't you care, little girl." All at once he felt he liked her. "Folks are dying around here right along, aren't they?"

She nodded again. "Oh, yes, but—I think you upset Miss Winslow by mentioning the time."

"Sit down," said Ebenezer. "I upset her all right, I guess. She got out of here like we'd been talkin' about her funeral instead of mine."

Once more the door opened and two men came in. They were young men, clad in white trousers and coats, and they carried a variety of things Ebenezer had never seen. Also they carried an air of importance as they gave their various burdens into the little nurse's hands.

Ebenezer eyed them. He felt annoyed. Just as he was about to have a visit with the brown-haired, blue-eyed girl—they appeared. He had thought he could come here and lie down, and die in peace, and thus far this hospital was the least restful place he had ever known in his life.

For a moment the two men spoke with the nurse in lowered tones, and then the more important appearing of the two approached the bed and stood looking down at Ebenezer.

"Well, well, old man," he said in brusquely friendly fashion, "what's wrong?"

Ebenezer tried to make the best of the situation. Miss Winslow had said she would send him a doctor, and doubtless here were two of them.

"I don't know, Doc," he accordingly shaped his answer. "All I know is that I ain't goin' to last long."

"Well—what's this stuff you were pulling about 11:01 p. m.?"

"That's my time, Doc," said Ebenezer.

' If it is," said the interne, grinning, "you're cutting it mighty fine."

He reached down and threw back the covering from Ebenezer's chest, turned and took a bit of hard rubber and a small soft rubber hammer from the nurse's hands.

Laying the bit of rubber on Ebenezer's breast, he began tapping it with the hammer very much as Ebenezer himself was wont to tap finishing nails, except that there were no nails employed in this operation, of course. But as the doctor hammered, he cocked his ear to the resulting sounds. His companion came to the bedside and listened also. Ebenezer found that he was listening, too, after a time.

Tap, tap, tap tap—over and over—all over his breast and up and down his sides. And then they turned him over and began hammering on his back. A sort of deeply muffled note resulted from the process.

"Say Doc, ain't I about beat tender?" Ebenezer questioned after a time.

The interne removed his rubber disk and let him turn upon his back. He faced his fellow.

"Make anything out of it?" he suggested.

The other man shook his head. "Not a thing."

"Ahem," said the senior interne, reached into his pocket and produced a bell-shaped device equipped with rubber tubes which he inserted in his ears, before he resumed his inquisitive attack on Ebenezer's chest.

The junior joined him with another instrument and began working on the other side. Ebenezer watched them moving their little rubber bells about for a time, and then spoke again:

"I say, Doc, there ain't anything the matter with my lungs."

The senior looked at the junior. "Find anything?" he inquired.

And the junior shook his head. "Not a thing."

"There ain't," said Ebenezer. "I was to a doctor a month ago."

"Try the heart," suggested the senior, and bent again to his task.

Presently he straightened and sighed. "Strong as a horse. I think we'd better take a sample of his blood."

Ebenezer lifted his voice. The calm, almost impersonal manner of these white-clad men of science, filled him with something like a sense of resentment. They treated him like a man of wood. They paid no attention to what he said.

"See here," he burst out, "if my heart's all right, there ain't anything the matter with me, I guess—or if there is, you don't seem able to find it. I come here to die, and I'd like to do it in peace."

"You came here to die, did you? Well—what are you going to die of?" the senior interne questioned, taking notice of what Ebenezer said at last.

"I don't know. I ain't a doctor," Ebenezer flared.

"Then—what's the notion?" The interne's intonation was rather crisp. "How do you know you're going to die, if there's nothing the matter with you?"

"When a man knows a thing he knows it, don't he?" said Ebenezer in somewhat weary fashion.

The interne nodded. He looked at his junior. A meaning glance passed between them. "All right, Miss Coombs," he said to the little nurse. "We'll take a little blood and make a test."

Ebenezer sighed. This was going beyond anything of which he had ever dreamed, but, in a way, dimly he knew it was useless to resist. He watched in helpless fashion while the little nurse produced a number of things.

He lay supine while the senior interne approached. He winced slightly as he bent and laid hold of the lobe of his ear and scratched it and drew a drop of blood into a small glass pipette. And he smiled rather wanly as the little nurse dabbed the scratch in his ear with a bit of cotton, and asked him softly if it hurt. He listened while the two men spoke to her in lowered accents, and when they went out of the room together, he drew a sigh of relief—even though he had a premonition that they would be back.

Thereafter a number of things occurred. The little nurse gave him a bath. He explained that he didn't need it, but it did no good. She explained that it was one of the rules. Ebenezer submitted. He began to feel that he would have been wise had he elected to die almost anywhere else. He had thought of a hospital as a place of peace and restful quiet. He hadn't looked for all this fuss. Still the little nurse was very pleasant, and he would have enjoyed talking to her if she hadn't kept looking at him in such a peculiar fashion while she worked.

"You don't need to think I'm crazy," he said at last.

"Of course," she assured him quickly, and caught her breath.

Judging by the form of her words, she might have meant that he was not or that he was, but Ebenezer didn't trouble about it. She was a nice little thing and he liked her. All at once he remembered that he had a few dollars left, aside from his vanished roll of bills.

"See here," he said, "would you mind getting me my pants?"

"What for?" She eyed him.

He shook his head. "I ain't goin' to try to get up. I just want something in the pocket."

She brought them to him from the closet slowly and laid them on the bed.

He thrust a hand into the pocket and dug out the loose change. "Here," he said, and held it toward her. "I won't need this any longer."

"Why, Mr. Clay!" She drew back and eyed him.

"Take it," he insisted. "I like you. 'Taint much, but I want you to have what there is."

"I—I—" she took it and dropped it into a pocket on her apron. "I'll keep it for you," she stammered. "We aren't allowed to—"

The door opened and the two internes came in.

The senior reached the bed in a stride and caught up the trousers. "What did he take?" He turned on the little nurse in accusing fashion, with the garments dangling from his hand.

"Why—why—" suddenly Miss Coombs' expression was that of one aghast. "Nothing!" she gasped. "He—he said he wanted them, and I brought them to him."

The senior threw the trousers from him and spoke to his companion. "Beat it— get hold of a stomach tube, quick!"

Ebenezer roused to the occasion, as the junior interne darted from the room. "Look here, I didn't take nothing. I wanted something in one of my pockets an' I couldn't get it myself with her in the room."

"Shut up!" said the house man shortly. "I know darned well you did, an' we'll find out what it was when we get that tube. I began to get wise to you, all right, when I didn't find anything wrong with your blood. You don't get away with it this time, my man. Not while I'm on the job. Miss Coombs, get a pitcher of water, and a glass. Hah—got it, did you?" He whirled to the junior interne, who came bursting in

with a length of red rubber tubing in his hand.

"But I tell you—" began Ebenezer.

"You don't need to," snarled the senior, turning to him with the rubber tubing. "Now open your mouth."

Ebenezer eyed the length of rubber. He asked a question. "Do you expect me to swallow that thing?"

"You're going to swallow it before we've finished." The interne lifted the tip of the tube and held it before Ebenezer's face. "Come on now—open your mouth."

That tip was at least three-quarters of an inch across. The idea was sufficient. "I can't," said Ebenezer rather sickly. "I—"

"Here," said the man with the tube, to his companion, "you hold him. Now see here, Clay, no more fooling. Ready Miss Coombs with the water? Now Clay take the tip of this tube in your mouth and take a drink and swallow. Come on—you might as well do it first as last."

Ebenezer turned appealing eyes toward the little nurse, who stood with the pitcher and glass in her hand. He wasn't a boaconstrictor, or any other sort of snake, and he knew that trying to swallow that yard of red rubber was going to make him sick.

But as she met his glance her soft lips parted.

"Please Mr. Clay," she said. "They think I let you take something, and—we've got to prove they've made a mistake."

The appeal of woman! Ebenezer set his jaws and then relaxed them again. He sat up in bed. He'd—he'd do it for *her sake*. He'd got her into this by trying to give her a little sign of his personal appreciation and he had to get her out again, of course. He grabbed the tube and thrust it into his mouth. He took the glass of water she held toward him, and tried to swallow the combination and—choked, and began coughing, while the junior interne pounded him on the back.

Thereafter followed an interval of physical discomfort more acute than any of which Ebenezer had ever before been able to think. He tried to swallow that massive bit of tubing—he choked and gagged. In the end, when a cold sweat of nausea dewed his forehead, the senior interne grabbed the thing and literally thrust it down his throat—and it—stuck! No matter how hard Ebenezer gagged, he couldn't get it out because the junior interne held his hands. And Miss Coombs was holding yet another glass of water before him and begging him to "Drink!"

He took the water. He swallowed. The tube slid down. With something like a whirling fascination, Ebenezer watched it disappearing. The impossible was being accomplished. Pallid and shaking, he sat dizzily on the bed with the thing hanging out from between his jaws. But his brain seemed swirling, and the room and all it held was going round and round. And—the senior interne was pouring more water into the funnel shaped outer end of the tube, and letting it run out again—was catching the escaping fluid in a basin Miss Coombs was holding in her hands.

He turned his blearing eyes upon her. He thought she smiled in grateful fashion, but he couldn't be certain about it. He couldn't be certain of anything. The tube in his throat was choking him slowly but surely. He swallowed—and swallowed again. Waves of deathly nausea assailed him. He felt strangely, appallingly weak.

And then, suddenly, the tube was sliding out from between his teeth. It was gone. He sank back on his pillow with a gasping breath. Half consciously, he watched the internes leave the room—knew that he and the little nurse were alone.

But it didn't matter. Nothing mattered any longer except that, strive as he would to choke back the spasms of nausea that engulfed him, they were strangling his breath. Exhaustion and the languor of it laid hold upon him. His very eyelids felt heavy. He let them droop and then forced them open again.

"What time is it, Miss—Coombs?" he questioned faintly.

"Nearly eleven," said the little nurse.

"Nearly eleven." All at once Ebenezer understood. That was why he felt so terribly weak.

"How near?" he managed in a gasp of comprehension.

"Five minutes to, Mr. Clay. Try and get a little sleep. I'm sorry you're so sick."

Five minutes to. *Six minutes!* Ebenezer stretched himself out in bed. It wasn't the tube that had made him feel as he did. It was just fate. He closed his eyes. He drew up his hands and crossed them over his breast. He began breathing deeply—

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H. P. LOVECRAFT Is At His Best
In This Strange Tale

THE WHITE APE

LIFE is a hideous thing, and from the background behind what we know of it peer demoniacal hints of truth which make it sometimes a thousandfold more hideous. Science, already oppressive with its shocking revelations, will perhaps be the ultimate exterminator of our human species—if separate species we be—for its reserve of unguessed horrors could never be borne by mortal brains if loosed upon the world

If we knew what we are, we should do as Sir Arthur Jermyn did; and Arthur Jermyn soaked himself in oil and set fire to his clothing one night. No one placed the charred fragments in an urn or set a memorial to him who had been; for certain papers and a certain boxed *object* were found, which made men wish to forget. Some who knew him do not admit that he ever existed.

Arthur Jermyn went out on the moor and burned himself after seeing the boxed *object* which had come from Africa. It was this *object* and not his peculiar personal appearance, which made him end his life.

Many would have disliked to live if possessed of the peculiar features of Arthur Jermyn, but he had been a poet and scholar and had not minded. Learning was in his blood, for his great-grandfather, Sir Robert Jermyn, Bt., had been an anthropologist of note, whilst his great-great-great-grandfather, Sir Wade Jermyn, was one of the earliest explorers of the Congo region, and had written eruditely of its tribes, animals, and supposed antiquities. Indeed, old Sir Wade had possessed an intellectual zeal amounting almost to a mania; his bizarre conjectures on a prehistoric white Congolese civilization earning him much ridicule when his book, "Observations on the Several Parts of Africa," was published. In 1765, this fearless

explorer had been placed in a madhouse at Huntingdon.

Madness was in all the Jermyns, and people were glad there were not many of them. The line put forth no branches, and Arthur was the last of it. If he had not been, one can not say what he would have done when the *object* came.

The Jermyns never seemed to look quite right — something was amiss, though Arthur was the worst, and the old family portraits in Jermyn House showed fine faces enough before Sir Wade's time. Certainly, the madness began with Sir Wade, whose wild stories of Africa were at once the delight and terror of his few friends. It showed in his collection of trophies and specimens, which were not such as a normal man would accumulate and preserve, and appeared strikingly in the Oriental seclusion in which he kept his wife. The latter, he had said, was the daughter of a Portuguese trader whom he had met in Africa; and she did not like English ways. She, with an infant son born in Africa, had accompanied him back from the second and longest of his trips, and had gone with him on the third and last, never returning.

No one had ever seen her closely, not even the servants; for her disposition had been violent and singular. During her brief stay at Jermyn House she occupied a remote wing, and was waited on by her husband alone. Sir Wade was, indeed, most peculiar in his solicitude for his family; for when he returned to Africa he would permit no one to care for his young son save a loathsome black woman from Guinea. Upon coming back, after the death of Lady Jermyn, he himself assumed complete care of the boy.

But it was the talk of Sir Wade, especially when in his cups, which chiefly led his friends to deem him mad. In a rational age like the eighteenth century it was unwise for a man to talk about wild sights and strange scenes under a Congo moon; of the gigantic walls and pillars of a forgotten city, crumbling and vine-grown, and of damp, silent, stone steps leading interminably down into the darkness of abysmal treasure-vaults and inconceivable catacombs. Especially was it unwise to rave of the living things that might haunt such a place; of creatures half of the jungle and half of the impiously aged city — fabulous creatures which even a Pliny might describe with scepticism; things that might have sprung up after the great apes had overrun the dying city with the walls and the pillars, the vaults and the weird carvings.

Yet after he came home for the last time Sir Wade would speak of such matters with a shudderingly uncanny zest, mostly after his third glass at the Knight's Head; boasting of what he had found in the jungle and of how he had dwelt among terrible ruins known only to him. And finally he had spoken of the living things in such a manner that he was taken to the madhouse.

He had shown little regret when shut into the barred room at Huntingdon, for his mind moved curiously. Ever since his son had commenced to grow out of infancy he had liked his home less and less, till at last he had seemed to dread it. The Knight's Head had been his headquarters, and when he was confined he expressed some vague gratitude as if for protection.

Three years later he died.

WADE JERMYN'S son, Philip, was a highly peculiar person. Despite a strong physical resemblance to his father, his appearance and conduct were in many particulars so coarse that he was universally shunned. Though he did not inherit the madness which was feared by some, he was densely stupid and given to brief periods of uncontrollable violence. In frame he was small, but intensely powerful, and was of incredible agility.

Twelve years after succeeding to his title he married the daughter of his gamekeeper, a person said to be of gypsy extraction, but before his son was born he joined the navy as a common sailor, completing the general disgust which his habits and mesalliance had begun. After the close of the American war he was heard of as a sailor on a merchantman in the African trade, having a kind of reputation for feats of strength and climbing, but finally disappearing one night as his ship lay off the Congo coast.

In the son of Sir Philip Jermyn the now accepted family peculiarity took a strange and fatal turn. Tall and fairly handsome, with a sort of weird Eastern grace despite certain slight oddities of proportion, Robert Jermyn began life as a scholar and investigator. It was he who first studied scientifically the vast collection of relics which his mad grandfather had brought from Africa, and who made the family name as celebrated in ethnology as in exploration.

In 1815, Sir Robert married a daughter of the seventh Viscount Brightholme and was subsequently blessed with three children, the eldest and youngest of whom were never publicly seen on account of deformities in mind and body. Saddened by these family misfortunes, the scientist sought relief in work, and made two long expeditions in the interior of Africa. In 1849, his second son, Nevil, a singularly repellent person who seemed to combine the surliness of Philip Jermyn with the hauteur of the Brightholmes, ran away with a vulgar dancer, but was pardoned upon his return in the following year. He came back to Jermyn House a widower with an infant son, Alfred, who was one day to be the father of Arthur Jermyn.

Friends said that it was this series of griefs which unhinged the mind of Sir Robert Jermyn, yet it was probably merely a bit of African folklore which caused the disaster. The elderly scholar had been collecting legends of the Onga tribes near the field of his grandfather's and his own explorations, hoping in some way to account for Sir Wade's wild tales of a lost city peopled by strange hybrid creatures. A certain consistency in the strange papers of his ancestor suggested that the madman's imagination might have been stimulated by native myths.

On October 19, 1852, the explorer Samuel Seaton called at Jermyn House with a manuscript of notes, collected among the Ongas, believing that certain legends of a gray city of white apes ruled by a white god might prove valuable to the ethnologist. In his conversation he probably supplied many additional details; the nature of which will never be known, since a hideous series of tragedies suddenly burst into being.

When Sir Robert Jermyn emerged from his library he left behind the strangled corpse of the explorer, and before he could be restrained, had put an end to all three of his children; the two who were never seen, and the son who had run away. Nevil Jermyn died in the successful defense of his own two-year-old son, who had apparently been included in the old man's madly murderous scheme. Sir Robert himself, after repeated attempts at suicide and a stubborn refusal to utter any articulate sound, died of apoplexy in the second year of his confinement.

Sir Alfred Jermyn was a baronet before his fourth birthday, but his tastes never matched his title. At twenty he had joined a band of music-hall performers, and at thirty-six had deserted his wife and child to travel with an itinerant American circus.

His end was very revolting. Among the animals in the exhibition with which he traveled was a huge bull gorilla of lighter color than the average; a surprisingly tractable beast of much popularity with the performers. With this gorilla Alfred Jermyn was singularly

fascinated, and on many occasions the two would eye each other for long periods through the intervening bars.

Eventually Jermyn asked and obtained permission to train the animal, astonishing audiences and fellow-performers alike with his success. One morning in Chicago, as the gorilla and Alfred Jermyn were rehearsing an exceedingly clever boxing match, the former delivered a blow of more than usual force, hurting both the body and the dignity of the amateur trainer.

Of what followed, members of "The Greatest Show on Earth" do not like to speak. They did not expect to hear Sir Alfred Jermyn emit a shrill, inhuman scream, or to see him seize his clumsy antagonist with both hands, dash it to the floor of the cage, and bite fiendishly at its hairy throat. The gorilla was off its guard, but not for long, and before anything could be done by the regular trainer the body which had belonged to a baronet was past recognition.

ARTHUR JERMYN was the son of Sir Alfred Jermyn and a music-hall singer of unknown origin. When the husband and father deserted his family, the mother took the child to Jermyn House; where there was none left to object to her presence. She was not without notions of what a nobleman's dignity should be, and saw to it that her son received the best education which limited money could provide.

The family resources were now sadly slender, and Jermyn House had fallen into woeful disrepair, but young Arthur loved the old edifice and all its contents. He was not like any other Jermyn who had ever lived, for he was a poet and a dreamer. Some of the neighboring families who had heard tales of old Sir Wade Jermyn's unseen Portuguese wife, declared that her Latin blood must be showing itself; but most persons merely sneered at his sensitiveness to beauty, attributing it to his music-hall mother, who was socially unrecognized.

The poetic delicacy of Arthur Jermyn was the more remarkable because of his uncouth personal appearance. Most of the Jermyns had possessed a subtly odd and repellent cast, but Arthur's case was very striking. It is hard to say just what he resembled, but his expression, his facial angle, and the length of his arms gave a thrill of repulsion to those who met him for the first time.

It was the mind and character of Arthur Jermyn which atoned for his aspect. Gifted and learned, he took highest honors at Oxford and seemed likely to redeem the intellectual fame of his family. Though of poetic rather than scientific temperament, he planned to continue the work of his forefathers in African ethnology and antiquities, utilizing the truly wonderful though strange collection of Sir Wade. With his fanciful mind he thought often of the prehistoric civilization in which the mad explorer had so implicitly believed, and would weave tale after tale about the silent jungle city mentioned in the latter's wilder notes and paragraphs. For the nebulous utterances concerning a nameless, unsuspected race of jungle hybrids he had a peculiar feeling of mingled terror and attraction; speculating on the possible basis of such a fancy, and seeking to obtain light among the more recent data gleaned by his great-grandfather and Samuel Seaton amongst the Ongas.

In 1911, after the death of his mother, Sir Arthur Jermyn determined to pursue his investigations to the utmost extent. Selling a portion of his estate to obtain the requisite money, he outfitted an expedition and sailed for the Congo. Arranging with the Belgian authorities for a party of guides, he spent a year in the Onga and Kaliri country, finding data beyond the highest of his expectations. Among the Kaliris was an aged chief called Mwanu, who possessed not only a highly retentive memory, but a singular degree of intelligence and interest in old legends. This ancient confirmed every tale which Jermyn had heard, adding his own account of the stone city and the white apes as it had been told to him.

According to Mwanu, the gray city and the hybrid creatures were no more, having been annihilated by the warlike N'bangus many years ago. This tribe, after destroying most of the edifices and killing the live beings, had carried off the stuffed goddess which had been the object of their quest; the white-ape goddess which the strange beings worshiped, and which was held by Congo tradition to be the form of one who had reigned as a princess among those beings. Just what the white apelike creatures could have been, Mwanu had no idea, but he thought they were the builders of the ruined city. Jermyn could form no conjecture, but by close questioning obtained a very picturesque legend of the stuffed goddess.

The ape-princess, it was said, became the consort of a great white god who had come out of the West. For a long time they had reigned over the city together, but when they had a son all three went away. Later the god and the princess had returned, and upon the death of the princess her divine husband had mummified the body and enshrined it in a vast house of stone, where it was worshiped. Then he had departed alone.

The legend here seemed to present three variants. According to one story nothing further happened save that the stuffed goddess became a symbol of supremacy for whatever tribe might possess it. It was for this reason that the N'bangus carried it off. A second story told of the god's return and death at the feet of his enshrined wife. A third told of the return of the son, grown to manhood—or apehood or godhood, as the case might be—yet unconscious of his identity. Surely the imaginative blacks had made the most of whatever events might lie behind the extravagant legendry.

Of the reality of the old jungle city described by Sir Wade, Arthur Jermyn had no further doubt; and was hardly astonished when early in 1912, he came upon what was left of it. Its size must have been exaggerated, yet the stones lying about proved that it was no mere negro village. Unfortunately, no carvings could be found, and the small size of the expedition prevented operations toward clearing the one visible passageway that seemed to lead down into the system of vaults which Sir Wade had mentioned. The white apes and the stuffed goddess were discussed with all the native chiefs of the region, but it remained for a European to improve on the data offered by old Mwanu. M. Verhaeren, Belgian agent at a trading-post on the Congo, believed that he could not only locate but obtain the stuffed goddess, of which he had vaguely heard; since the once mighty N'bangus were now the submissive servants of King Albert's government, and with but little persuasion could be induced to part with the gruesome deity they had carried off.

When Jermyn sailed for England, therefore, it was with the exultant probability that he would within a few months receive a priceless ethnological relic confirming the wildest of his great-great-great-grandfather's narratives—that is, the wildest which he had ever heard. Countrymen near Jermyn House had perhaps heard wilder tales handed down from ancestors who had listened to Sir Wade around the tables of the Knight's Head.

ARTHUR JERMYN waited very patiently for the expected box from M. Verhaeren, meanwhile studying with increased diligence the manuscripts left by his mad ancestor. He began to feel closely akin to Sir Wade, and to seek relics of the latter's personal life in England as well as of his African ex-

ploits. Oral accounts of the mysterious and secluded wife had been numerous, but no tangible relic of her stay at Jermyn House remained. Jermyn wondered what circumstance had prompted or permitted such an effacement, and decided that the husband's insanity was the prime cause.

His great-great-great-grandmother, he recalled, was said to have been the daughter of a Portuguese trader in Africa. No doubt her practical heritage and superficial knowledge of the Dark Continent had caused her to flout Sir Wade's tales of the interior, a thing which such a man would not be likely to forgive. She had died in Africa, perhaps dragged thither by a husband determined to prove what he had told. But as Jermyn indulged in these reflections he could not but smile at their futility, a century and a half after the death of both of his strange progenitors.

In June, 1913, a letter arrived from M. Verhaeren, telling of the finding of the stuffed goddess. It was, the Belgian averred, a most extraordinary object; an object quite beyond the power of a layman to classify. Whether it was human or simian only a scientist could determine, and the process of determination would be greatly hampered by its imperfect condition. Time and the Congo climate are not kind to mummies; especially when their preparation is as amateurish as seemed to be the case here. Around the creature's neck had been found a golden chain bearing an empty locket on which were armorial designs; no doubt some hapless traveler's keepsake, taken by the N'bangus and hung upon the goddess as a charm. In commenting on the contour of the mummy's face, M. Verhaeren suggested a whimsical comparison; or rather, expressed a humorous wonder just how it would strike his correspondent, but was too much interested scientifically to waste many words in levity. The stuffed goddess, he wrote, would arrive, duly packed, about a month after receipt of the letter.

The boxed object was delivered at Jermyn House on the afternoon of August 3, 1913, being conveyed immediately to the large chamber which housed the collection of African specimens as arranged by Sir Robert and Arthur. What ensued can best be gathered from the tales of servants and from things and papers later examined. Of the various tales, that of aged Soames, the family butler, is most ample and coherent. According to this trustworthy man, Sir Arthur Jermyn dismissed everyone from the room before opening the box, though the instant sound of hammer and chisel showed that he did not delay the operation. Nothing was heard for some time; just how long Soames cannot exactly estimate; but it was certainly less than a quarter of an hour later that the horrible scream, undoubtedly in Jermyn's voice, was heard.

Immediately afterward Jermyn emerged from the room, rushing frantically toward the front of the house as if pursued by some hideous enemy. The expression on his face, a face ghastly enough in repose, was beyond description. When near the front door he seemed to think of something, and turned back in his flight, finally disappearing down the stairs to the cellar. The servants were utterly dumfounded, and watched at the head of the stairs, but their master did not return. A smell of oil was all that came up from the regions below.

After dark a rattling was heard at the door leading from the cellar into the courtyard; and a stable-boy saw Arthur Jermyn, glistening from head to foot with oil and redolent of that fluid, steal furtively out and vanish on the black moor surrrounding the house. Then, in an exaltation of supreme horror, everyone saw the end. A spark appeared on the moor, a flame arose, and a pillar of human fire reached to the heavens. The House of Jermyn no longer existed.

The reason why Arthur Jermyn's fragments were not collected and buried lies in what was found afterward, principally the thing in the box. The stuffed goddess was a nauseous sight, withered and eaten away, but it was clearly a mummified white ape of some unknown species, less hairy than any recorded variety, and infinitely nearer mankind—quite shockingly so.

Detailed description would be rather unpleasant, but two salient particulars must be told, for they fit in revoltingly with certain notes of Sir Wade Jermyn's African expeditions and with the Congolese legends of the white god and the ape-princess. The two particulars in question are these: The arms on the golden locket about the creature's neck were the Jermyn arms, and the jocose suggestion of M. Verbaeren about a certain resemblance as connected with the shriveled face applied with vivid, ghastly, and unnatural horror to none other than the sensitive Arthur Jermyn, great-great-great-grandson of Sir Wade Jermyn and an unknown wife.

Members of the Royal Anthropological Institute burned the thing and threw the locket into a well, and some of them do not admit that Arthur Jermyn ever existed.

REX HALL'S Eerie Tale of An Egyptian Mummy

Down Through the Ages

AS Professor Darius signed the express receipt and saw the men carry in a mummy case he drew a deep sigh of relief.

His precious discovery was safe in his hands at last.

Perhaps, in that case, lay the mummy of some Egyptian King or Queen.

He had counted the days since he had left the ruins, and, his shipment placed in the hands of a shipping company, had hurried back to the United States to prepare his fellow members in the Society of Archæology for the treat he had in that case for them. He had promised that they should share in the honor of any discoveries made during his last trip. Now the time was at hand. What mystery would the case reveal?

Professor Darius had discovered the case while exploring in parts of Egypt as yet untouched by searchers' hands. Digging into a dune far removed from the Pyramids he had uncovered a tomb. Removing the single mummy it had contained, he had hurried home.

The examination would be made before the society. Then, perhaps, a decision would be made for further expeditions. He, himself, would be the leader. They would carry on until they had uncovered all the ancient burial places of Egypt.

He noted, with satisfaction, that the seal he had placed on the case was unbroken.

Although his fingers fairly itched to open the case, he banished the idea and, dropping into an easy chair, gave himself up to pleasant reflections.

He had done fairly well in the fifteen years just past in the study of Egyptian Archæology, for he had gathered one of the richest collections of antiquities outside a museum. Roughly figuring, his collection would run close to the million dollar mark if he should care to sell at the value he placed upon it.

The Professor was nearing the half century mark in years, but still his muscular frame throbbed with the warm blood of health and vigor. He was strikingly handsome, clean-cut and upstanding, and while there were many women who would have considered it an honor to marry him, he was still a bachelor.

His research work had started while he had been on a tour of Egypt. He had fallen in with Trenfold near the Sphinx some fifteen years before. Trenfold had asked him to join in a search for relics. As he had nothing else to do, he had taken the offer. Trenfold had been killed by a fall of rocks, but the fever had entered the Professor's blood. He had kept on searching. The work grew into a passion. Something seemed calling from the dark past, spurring him to continue his searches. On the brief trips he made back to the States he felt ill at ease. Felt a lost lonesome feeling and a sense of guilt as if he were neglecting some duty.

Now, at last, it seemed he had found his reward. He felt as if a tension had been let down somewhere, and that he was at peace with the whole universe. He felt that for the first time in his life, he would be glad to stay at home. In this pleasant frame of mind he locked up the office and went out for lunch.

"GENTLEMEN," said Professor Darius, as he noted the entrance of the last member and the expectant air prevailing, "I see you are all anxious, so I'll not keep you waiting. There is the case. You see it bears my seal. I have never examined the mummy."

The seal was examined with ceremony and the case opened.

There was nothing out of the ordinary upon first examination. There were the same musty swathings and the dust of ages, yet, after a few layers had been removed there stole into the room an odor of perfumery.

The Professor stopped in his work and looked from one face to the other.

"As I live, the odor of violets!"

"Remarkable!" exclaimed Professor Smith. "Nevertheless, its here."

The subject was fully exhausted before the society carried the examination on. Finally they came to the last winding and, with an exclamation, Professor Darius exposed to view a piece of papyrus.

Here was work for the society, and plenty of it. They worked that night and for many others, until at last they had it translated.

"This translation," remarked Darius, "claims that the mummy is one Attalia. She was a worker of magic through the power of a harp she played. She met her death, after selling her soul for more power, through disobedience to her master, the Evil One. A certain Haggai is mentioned here as her enemy, and the cause of her death. Her great love was Jabneel, a temple priest, who, for her sake, broke his vows. It is through this harp that she hopes to reclaim her lover and take revenge on Haggai, who seems to have been a rival magician of ill repute."

The Professor dropped the papyrus on the desk.

"Remarkable. Out of the ordinary, I should say. Most of these writings generally represent the wonders of the one they are written about, their kindnesses, their battles and how they were favored by their gods. I've never read a paper such as this.

"According to this papyrus, Attalia has been a wicked woman. She will place a curse on the unlucky devil disturbing her last resting place. I found no harp. It must have been with her, but in my excitement I evidently overlooked it."

A worried expression shadowed his face.

"I believe, gentlemen, I—er—I'm of the opinion that I should go back and find her harp."

"Why do that? Are you afraid of a mummy curse?" asked Professor Smith.

Professor Darius' face flushed. He snapped his fingers.

"That's what I care for her curse. She has been dead for thousands of years. Haven't I pulled through this far? Of course I disturbed her. It was against her wishes, but I had no way of knowing it until after we read the warning. I fear nothing."

"Ha! ha!" laughed the youngest member, called "the upstart" by the older men, "Attalia's got him worried, or I miss my guess. Scared by some gibberish on a piece of papyrus three thousand years old! Take my advice, Darius, and go back after that harp, if you want to save your neck."

The Professor bent a cold gaze upon the upstart.

"Young man, you still have much to learn, but you heard what I said. I am going back, not to save my neck, as you put it, but because something tells me to go. I can't say just what it is, that something. It is intangible, but I *must* go back."

"When are you going?" asked Jones.

"Just as soon as I can make arrangements. I'll promise you gentlemen one thing, however. I'll be back in six months."

"We'll hold you to that," cautioned Jones. "Make a definite date and time, so we can all be here together."

"I'll do that, too. This is June the first. Meet me here in the office at eight o'clock on the first day of November."

"You're on!" laughed Jones, "we'll be here, and if you bring back the old girl's harp, I'll show you how to play on it."

"What did you say you would do?" asked Professor Darius.

"Play the harp," laughed the upstart.

"I repeat, you have a lot to learn," declared the Professor.

"Perhaps I have," chuckled Jones, "but I'll play the harp if you bring it back."

The Professor drilled the upstart with a side glance out of cold blue eyes.

"If you would devote more of your time to the study of our society and spend less time in the art of parlor magic for the amusement of a bunch of your rattle-headed friends, you might, in the course of twenty or thirty years become a valuable member."

Jones grunted.

"Do you wish me to think that you don't like me, Professor? Well, I'm not going to think that you do. In place of getting angry, I'd like to show you my latest magical trick. Do you care to see it?"

"Never mind. Good night, gentlemen. I'll let you know when I leave for Egypt."

IT was an expectant group of members that awaited the arrival of Professor Darius six months later.

Young Jones glanced at his watch and laughingly remarked:

"I packed Attalia's mummy back into the storeroom today while the janitor was cleaning up for the homecoming. Thought it would be a good thing to do. She might see her harp, and start something."

The distinguished body ignored this remark.

"Strange," droned Professor Smith, "that we have had no word from the Professor."

Jones was not so easily silenced.

"Oh, he'll be showing up presently. I'll bet ten dollars he has no harp."

Eight o'clock arrived, and, with it, the Professor.

As he staggered into the office, his friends gave a gasp of horror and astonishment. A terrible and unbelievable change had been wrought in the man's appearance. Instead of the hearty, good-natured man of six months previous, there now stood, leaning heavily against the desk, a mere wreck. Deep lines of suffering furrowed his chalky brow. His eyes burned with an unnatural light and were sunken in their sockets. His hair was snow white, and he trembled in every joint.

As he walked with faltering steps to the chair which Jones hastened to place for him, he said weakly:

"Gentlemen—the six—six months are up and I—I am here."

"What in heaven's name has happened to you?" asked the upstart, aghast.

"Find out—later. You remember, I laughed about the curse of a dead woman—Attalia."

"Yes."

"The tale I am going to tell will make you doubt my sanity. Perhaps I *am* crazy, for I've been through enough to drive a man insane. When I finish, draw your own conclusions. I have been sick with a terrible fever—should be in bed now—"

"You better rest now, Professor," suggested Jones. "We can wait."

"No. I must tell you. There isn't much time left."

"What do you mean by that?" asked Professor Smith.

"You'll know when I finish."

"Did you find the harp?" asked Jones.

"Yes. It is in the package."

"What package?"

The Professor half started to his feet and passed his shaky hand through his white locks in a bewildered manner. He seemed laboring under great excitement and apparently was trying to gather his scattered wits. In a moment he sank back into his chair, trembling and weak, saying:

"Oh, yes. The harp. Now I remember. It is outside in the hall. Get it quick!"

Jones went outside, and returned with a bulky package. He placed it at the Professor's feet.

Darius drew a sigh of relief.

After resting for a few minutes, he told his story.

HE had had no trouble in relocating the tomb. The only thing bothering him was a slow burning fever, overtaking him shortly after his expedition had started.

He had taken a small army of blacks with him to do the heavy work. Day after day the blacks searched for the harp, while the Professor lay tortured by the fever.

One day a black came to his tent and told him that they had found the harp.

"I went to the tomb and saw it. It was rather crude-looking and was made from some bronze metal covered with the thinnest beaten gold, and the workmanship was beautiful.

"I was feeling weak, so I ordered one of the blacks to pick up the harp and bring it to my tent. He started to obey. A terrible thing happened! The black gave a mortal cry of anguish and dropped dead before my very eyes!

"For a second or two I was speechless, and more so when I noticed the odor of violets float into the tomb.

"It was the same odor we noticed when we examined the mummy so many months ago.

"I wondered what could be the explanation for the black's death. Could it be possible that Attalia's curse was working? The odor in the tomb seemed to be the answer. The thought that this unhappy woman, who could hand down her black magic after so many years, was present in the very tomb gave me a creepy feeling.

"It may sound heartless, but I tried a cruel experiment. Perhaps the black had died from a natural cause. I would try another one, to make sure. I went outside the tomb to get a man still in ignorance of what had happened and brought him back with me. Poor devil. I shall never forgive myself. The moment he touched the harp he gave a scream of anguish, dropped the golden thing and threw out both arms as if trying to ward off some approaching evil. His eyes were terrible to look at. Then he, too, dropped stone dead beside the other.

"Once more the odor floated through the tomb, and then died away. Beyond a single doubt, it was the work of the sorceress, and in a frenzy of fear I cried aloud to the two dead men to the walls of the tomb in my fear and agony."

The Professor paused to rest. Great beads of sweat were standing on his furrowed brow. The members of the

society cast uneasy and apprehensive glances at the harp at his feet.

"I cried aloud, 'Attalia, if you are present, show me a sign. Will I be permitted to take the harp?'

"I waited a second or two, then it seemed I had my answer. The tension let down and I felt easier, while through the tomb floated the delicate odor once more, but fresher and stronger. It seemed as if something had brushed past my face. I thought that someone stood beside me. Suddenly the tension tightened, and I felt called upon to exert my will to the utmost to combat something intangible trying to overcome me. Two or three times I felt as if I must go under the strain. The tension broke, and I felt myself growing calm and peaceful. With trepidation, I picked up the harp and stood shaking in my shoes. I expected death, but it did not come. I left the dismal place. Straight to my encampment I hurried, with the determination to leave at once for America.

"I placed the harp near my berth and went to bed. My fever was raging again, and I felt strangely weak.

"I could not sleep. My mind insisted on dwelling upon the events at the tomb.

"As I lay wide awake, the place was filled with a strange light. I glanced around in astonishment to learn the cause. When I saw the reason, I closed my eyes and sank back on the pillow, gasping for breath. I had looked upon one of the most radiant and beautiful women that man has ever gazed upon.

"She was an Egyptian, and she was dressed in the clothing worn thousands of years ago. Her hair was as black as the night and was bound over her ears with a band of gold. In her ears were long golden charms or rings. Her head was regal in its poise and her eyes were liquid wells of jet which seemed ever burning with changing lights. She smiled and pointed at the harp.

"'Fear not. You have brought the harp. It is well. Now mark my words well. Take the harp to my body in the far land. Then will come Haggai to taunt. Then shall my revenge be complete and my soul find rest.'

"'Who are you?' I asked.

'Attalia, once high priestess to the master of darkness.'

"'Attalia is dead,' I told her.

"'In the flesh, only. There is no death to the spirit. I have wished for it, yea thousands of times, when I found that down through the ages I could not reclaim my lost love, Jabneel. I could obtain no such mercy. I must ever go as I am, a tortured soul, until I have my revenge, and can be free to join him.'

"I told her that she was flesh and blood. She bade me touch her and see. When I reached out to take her hand I found nothing but thin air. Then she stooped over, as if to kiss me, and I sensed the odor of violets.

"'Now do you believe?' she asked.

"I asked her what I had done to displease her. She said that I had disturbed her body and had taken it to a far land. She said that she had willed it so. Her will had directed me to the spot. Now, if I would take the harp back and place it with the mummy her plans would be complete. She would get her revenge on Haggai. I asked her who Haggai was, and what revenge she craved.

"She told me that death was her revenge for Haggai. He was a handsome devil and powerful in the art of magic. He was so powerful that the master feared him. There was only one other bidding to equal the power of Haggai, and that was Attalia. She had made a bargain with the master to bring disgrace upon the high priest at the temple. Jabneel was the priest, and the master hated him. For this favor the master would give her the magic harp and she could win power over Haggai.

"When she went to the temple, she fell in love with the high priest. She refused to keep her part of the bargain. Jabneel was found in her arms and put to death, and for her failure to keep her bargain she had been cursed to go down through the ages, never being allowed to claim the soul of her lost lover, Jabneel. *Then she said that I was Jabneel.*

"I asked how that could be possible. She said that I had passed from one body to another, and, during that time, she had searched for me when my soul was free for a spell, but that I was kept from her by the power of Haggai. She said that Haggai was living in a body at the present time. His power was waning, for he had learned during the years of the evil he had wrought. The harp must be placed with her body. That was the only way to break the curse of the master.

"I told her that I would do my best, and then I asked her why she had killed the black servants.

"'They were dogs,' she replied.

"She lingered for a spell, and then, bending over, kissed me and faded away. I found myself bolt upright in bed and wet with a clammy sweat, and the tent was dark.

"Had it all been a terrible nightmare? Had it been the result of the fever? These questions were coursing through my tortured brain. I could not answer them. Everything seemed too real.

"I called for a black to bring a light, for I was afraid.

"As soon as he entered, I looked for the harp. *It was gone!*

"The harp had suddenly grown to be my dearest possession. It was necessary that I keep it to claim Attalia and help her get her revenge. I must confess that I was wildly in love with her. Now I had the solution of what had kept me digging in the ruins of Egypt. It was as plain as day. The love for my lost bride of three thousand years ago. During all this time she had lived in the spirit world, watching for me. Now the harp was gone. Two minutes before, the tent had been filled with her radiance and the harp in plain sight. Now it was gone, and with the full knowledge of what the loss meant to Attalia and myself, something snapped. That's the last I know until I came to myself in a coast hospital and saw an anxious doctor and nurse standing over me.

"'He is coming out of his delirium,' I heard the doctor say, as I opened my eyes.

"A look of quick disappointment spread over his face when I asked with my first breath for news of Attalia and the harp.

"He told the nurse that I was crazy, and while they talked about me Attalia came in and smiled at me. I called the doctor's attention to her, but he gave me a soothing powder and told me to try and go back to sleep.

"Attalia talked to me for hours and told me to go to the far land as soon as I was able to travel. The harp would be placed in my hands in some way. It all seemed hazy to me, then the nurse gave me some more medicine, and I went to sleep.

"I dreamed that I was with Attalia, far out on the burning sands of the desert. In the distance burned a tiny campfire and swarthy men were around it, playing with the harp.

"Attalia commanded me to go and demand it. I walked into their midst unarmed. When they saw my condition, they charged me with drawn knives. Came a tinkle of laughter, a clap like thunder, and the men were blasted and lay dead before me.

"As I stood in amazement I heard the laughter growing fainter and fainter, then a voice bidding me farewell for a space.

"When I awoke in the morning the harp was lying beside me on the bed.

The nurse said that a black had brought it in.

"As soon as I was able to travel I set sail for home. I feel that my time is very short. There was something in that farewell on the desert that told me so."

SILENCE reigned for several minutes, during which the members glanced at each other in amazement.

Young Jones broke the oppressive silence:

"Darius, you must have gone through hell to get that harp. I'm going to take a look at it."

The Professor assented, warning him to be careful.

Jones took out the harp.

"Who put the strings on it?" he asked.

"I did," admitted the Professor. "It was her order."

Jones swept his fingers over the strings. They gave out strange weird music. He smiled into the Professor's face.

"So this is the harp that our Attalia charmed them with, is it? I wonder how much of a hit she would make playing in one of our jazz bands?"

"Put that harp down!" exclaimed the Professor.

"Why? What harm can I do to it, Professor? I mean no disrespect to your Attalia, but I'm of the opinion that you have had trouble enough. You need cheering up. I'm the boy to do it, Darius. Watch me!"

Young Jones thumped wild sounds from the weirdly sounding harp and shocked the members of the society with his idea of an Egyptian dance.

"Take warning, Jones! Put down the harp! She told me something else. Stop! I'll tell you what it is."

"Wait until I finish—"

"No! Stop now, before it is too—"

But Jones was dancing and singing to the accompaniment of the harp, his noise drowning the feeble croaking of Professor Darius.

"Out of my way, men!" he shouted, dancing toward the storeroom. "Something is dragging me on! Wow! I can't stop! I'm going to dance for Attalia!"

With the Professor croaking for the other members to stop him, Jones danced gaily up to the hideous, shriveled mummy. Darius had just reached his side with repeated warnings, when Jones gave a scream, threw down the harp and staggered from the storeroom covering his eyes with his arms.

As he swept past Darius the mummy gave a lurch and fell with a crash face down. With a wild scream, Darius clutched his heart and fell sprawling across her. When the other members of the society came to his assistance, he was dead.

Jones was found trembling in an office chair.

When told that Darius was dead he turned as white as a sheet. Then:

"No wonder he is dead! I am inclined to believe that story he told. When I danced in front of that thing, I'll swear to my dying day that she smiled at me! It was one of the wickedest smiles I ever want to see."

He shuddered:

"Who knows? I must have been Haggai."

The Human Sacrifice of Mexico

ALTHOUGH the ancient people of Mexico had made more advances to civilization than, perhaps, any other nation of the new world, yet these were much more than counterbalanced by the horrible barbarities they committed in their religious ceremonies, and in which they exceeded every nation on earth. Human sacrifices were indeed in use among all the ancient heathen, but such prodigious massacres at the dedication of their temples are unheard of in any other history. Most of these unhappy creatures perished by having their breasts opened, and their hearts pulled out; some were drowned, others starved to death, and sometimes they were burnt. Prisoners of high rank were allowed to die by what Clavigero calls the "gladiatorian sacrifice"; which was performed in the following manner: Near the greater temple of large cities, in an open space of ground sufficient to contain an immense number of people, was placed a large round stone, resembling a millstone in shape, but larger, almost three feet high, well polished, and having figures cut upon it. On this stone, which was called "temalcatl," the prisoner was placed, armed with a shield and short sword, and tied by one foot. Here he was encountered by a Mexican officer or soldier, better armed than himself. If the prisoner was vanquished, he was carried dead or alive to the temple, where his heart was taken out, and offered in the usual manner; but if he conquered six combatants, he gained his life and liberty. This horrific sacrifice took place upon the great idol temple, or "Teo-calli," of Mexico. "Teo-calli," in the idiom of the country, means "House of the God." These temples were of very singular form. They were pyramids with several terraces, the sides of which stood exactly in the direction of the meridian, and the parallel of the place. They were raised in the midst of a square and walled enclosure, which contained gardens, fountains, the dwellings of the priests, and sometimes arsenals; since each house of a Mexican divinity, like the ancient temple of Baal-Berith, burnt by Abimelech, was a strong place. A great staircase led to the top of the truncated pyramid, and on the summit of the platform were one or two chapels, built like towers, which contained the monstrous colossal idols of the divinity to whom the Teo-calli was dedicated. This part of the edifice must be considered as the most consecrated place, and it was here that the priest kept up the sacred fire. From the peculiar construction of the temple we have just described, the priest who offered the sacrifice was seen by a great mass of the people at the same time; the procession of the priests, ascending or descending the staircase of the pyramid was beheld at a considerable distance. The inside of the edifice was the burial place of the kings and principal personages of Mexico.

Historians differ concerning the number of victims who perished annually in these sacrifices. Clavigero inclines to think it was 20,000, but others make it much more. Zumarraga, the first bishop of Mexico, says, in a letter of the 12th of June, 1531, addressed to the general chapter of his order, that, in the capital alone, there were above 20,000 victims annually sacrificed; and the authors say that 50,000 were annually sacrificed in the various parts of the empire.

A Powerful Story of Life After Death
With an Unexpected Climax

THE GREAT ADVENTURE

By BRYAN IRVINE

CALL it the soul, call it the subconscious mind, call it plain personality, call it what you will, but even if you have not given it a name, even though you do not confine it to words or letters, this—shall I say "intelligence?"—lives on after the mortal or material body has gone back to dust. This hypothesis or theory is, of course, as old as the hills. It is heard, read, preached in every clime and by every race on the globe.

I contend, and I have very strong convictions on which I base that contention, that the activities of that "intelligence" after the death of the mortal body is governed solely by suggestions impressed upon it during the life of the material body. I believe—yes, I am positive—that the human mind after material existence has ceased, will obey to the letter the commands impressed upon it by autosuggestion during the life of the fleshy body and brain.

Proof? I have that yet to advance. I cannot give it until after this so-called death has visited me. After my death the proof shall be forthcoming. My mind—"intelligence"—will not die, and through the medium of a mortal being my ambition, my work shall live on. I shall write as I am now writing. I will tell my readers all about this last great experience, this so-called death. My fiction will appear as usual and my articles on the subject of Life After Death will go on. Wait! Watch!

I am impelled at this time to reveal to my readers a secret that I have heretofore jealously guarded. Why have I selfishly kept it to myself? Because I am vain enough to believe, considering

the wide circulation of the magazines and papers that have published my stories and articles, that no less than five millions of America's most exacting readers of fiction have followed my writings regularly.

Five millions; I am vain enough again to say that is a conservative estimate. Considering this, then, is it not only reasonable to believe that my publishers and a majority of my readers will attribute this article to a—well, a mental aberration? Read this and you will probably say: "At last it has come; Crutchfield is insane."

But here is the secret: For the past five years I have been merely a medium for the spirit of some literary genius whose mortal existence ceased perhaps a thousand years ago. The spirit of whom? I do not know. I do know this, however, that five years ago I had not written a line that the editors cared to publish. My stories were cheap mechanical constructions on commonplace themes. They failed utterly to arouse human emotion or portray human attributes. I ceased writing only when the editors told me frankly that I was an utter failure.

Then came the call. I awoke one morning to find myself sitting before my desk. Before me on the desk was a sheet of paper on which was written: *You wish to write. So do I. I have written nothing for centuries. Put not your own weak mortal mind to the task. Lend me your hand, oh, unhappy scribe. Fame and fortune shall be yours. Inject not your own insane thoughts. Put to sleep your mortal mind. Lend me your hand.*

The handwriting was my own!

Without any effort of my own mind, I obeyed that spirit command. I wrote. I have changed nothing in those daily dictations. They have appeared in print just as I have received them. Sitting at my desk, perhaps in the still night hours, perhaps while the sun shone and the world was awake and busy, I have written without a single thought of what I recorded.

Insane? Perhaps. In that case, insanity has brought me the fame, the fortune promised in that brief message from the astral plane.

Why do I tell this now? Why, at this late hour, awaken in the minds of my skeptic readers a doubt as to my sanity? Well—premonition. Life is like the pendulum of an old clock; at any moment it may stop. I have—if you will pardon a new but good Anglo-Saxon word—a hunch.

THUS ended the last article written by that literary genius, Cyrus Crutchfield, whose writings, especially those soul-gripping stories, had entranced the fiction reading public. Even before this last article appeared in print, Cyrus Crutchfield was found dead in his paper cluttered den. His dead fingers still clutched the revolver. The bullet had entered his brain squarely between the eyes. On the desk was a brief note written in his own peculiar style:

"I am impatient. Why should I wait? Watch for my successor; for, immediately after pulling this trigger I will go in search of him. The world has lost nothing in my material death. Watch for my stories.

"CRUTCHFIELD."

Perhaps I, Amos Hillworth, was more intimate with the eccentric Cyrus Crutchfield than any of his friends. It was in my magazine, *The Pastime*, that his first published story appeared. I readily recall the surprise of our entire staff when that story came. It was read first with little hope on the reader's part of its being worth a second reading.

It was so intensely gripping that we were inclined to doubt that Crutchfield wrote it. For, be it understood, we had patiently read his stuff for several years. We saw it go from bad to worse until it was utterly hopeless. Then, like a bolt from a cloudless sky, came "The Starboard Light." What a story! It was as unlike Crutchfield's previous attempts at fiction as night is from day. Those short, snappy sentences, each conveying a distinct thought, each being an indispensable part of the story. It required no editing whatever. No blue pencil marred the copy. To the very punctuation it was technically perfect. "The Starboard Light" was a perfect gem.

But, we wondered, could he, would he ever do another story so well? He did—even better. And from that day until Crutchfield sent a bullet into his brain he had written nothing that did not bring home to him the top rate from the cream of America's and Europe's periodicals.

Simultaneously with Crutchfield's plunge to the head of our army of fictionists, five years previously, came his articles on "Life After Death" and kindred subjects. I will not go into that again. Enough to say that his queer theory of one's hereafter being governed solely by autosuggestion before death, was as greedily bought and as greedily read as were his stories. Both his articles and his fiction were written with the distinctive, inimitable Crutchfield "style"; a style that baffled those who would copy, and captivated those who read.

Why Crutchfield selected me as a sort of confidant I cannot say. Perhaps it was because my own humble domicile was only a block from his palatial home on Cottonwood Drive. Perhaps it was because, during his first frantic efforts to get into print, I patiently criticised, advised and encouraged. In any case, it was not a sense of gratitude on Crutchfield's part that won for me the coveted guest's chair in his study. Neither was it sentiment.

Sentiment seemed to be the least factor in Crutchfield's character. He was utterly unlike his stories or the famous characters in them. "Sentimental puppets!" he often remarked while discussing his characters, and his long, sallow face usually took on an expression of contempt.

I can see him now as he used to sit in his study. His male stenographer and I were the only ones who ever saw the actual preparation of his stories. There he would sit, his long, gaunt frame stretched out in a half lying position in a great easy chair, reading from penciled rough draft while the typist typed it. Now and then a cynical smile flitted across his thin lips as he read some particularly tense situation in the story. Occasionally he held up his hand to stay the flying fingers of the typist and turned his gray eyes on me. His deep voice was ever seasoned with sarcasm.

"Now, Hillworth," he would say, "take this character Moody in this yarn. He is a damn snob. It would have been a much better story if I had killed Moody in the first paragraph. I hate him. Then Sylvia, the girl—isn't she sickening? Just like all women, a soft-hearted idiot who will win our hero, then throw him over for a longshoreman or a soda dispenser. Rotten story! But you fool editors and the fickle public like such rot, eh? Very well; it is for sale and many more like it where it came from."

He was, I began to realize in time, in deadly earnest while voicing this iconoclastic sarcasm. Which takes us to Mariam, his wife.

Mariam was a woman of perhaps twenty-five while Crutchfield was crowding forty-five. How that dark-eyed beauty ever endured life in that gloomy mansion, I could not—at that time—understand. Certainly it was not through love for her eccentric husband, for I, among others, was instinctively aware of her fear for the man and his unnatural beliefs. They were seldom to-

gether, Crutchfield and his wife; and she, for some mysterious reason, chose not to make friends.

I, however, won Mariam's regard after several chats with her. I could not help but believe that her husband was the cause of her evident unhappiness. She actually seemed to be a prisoner in that great house; held, I thought at that time, by some strange mental power of her taciturn husband.

One day I ventured beyond the usual chat on commonplace topics. We, she and I, were sitting in her conservatory. Her husband—she always spoke of him as "Mr. Crutchfield"—was, she informed me, in the city.

"Mariam," I began, "perhaps I have no right to ask you this question; but please do not think it is asked through mere curiosity. "Why are you not happy?"

"Oh, please, Mr. Hillworth," she sighed, hurriedly rising and looking about the conservatory, her eyes wide with what I took to be fear, "please do not ask me that."

"But I do not want to see any of my friends unhappy," I persisted. "I want to be your friend, Mariam. I want to help you—lift this burden which seems to make you discontented," I ran on. "Cannot I do or say something that will help, if only slightly, in making you happier? You can trust me implicitly, Mariam, to—"

"Oh, I know I can trust you, Mr. Hillworth," catching my sleeve and smiling faintly. "You—you—oh, you are so human, so unlike those who would smother our most cherished and sacred hopes of what is to come, of the hereafter."

She sank into the chair, still clutching my sleeve like a frightened child, and I stood looking down upon her dark hair as she sobbed softly. I knew more was to come. Those pent-up sorrows and fears, I knew, would flow forth now. I knew, also, that the queer tightening sensation about my heart presaged something more than mere friendship between Mariam and me. For several months, in fact, my visits to the Crutchfield home had been becoming more and more frequent, though I had forced myself to believe that it was Crutchfield's stories that attracted me.

Mariam looked up, brushing the tears from her eyes with an impatient movement of her hand.

"Mr. Hillworth," she resumed, "why cannot mortals leave their destinies to the one great Master of destinies? Why should man presume to refute the laws of nature, of God? What a terrible belief, that we die only to yearn again for our earthly ambitions and our material lives! Who wants to leave this earth only to wish to return to it as mere shadows of our former selves? The scheme of things is not, could not, be so barren of something better beyond the grave. Why—"

"There, there, Mariam," I soothed, patting her hand. "Why should these outlandish beliefs affect you and your wholesome convictions? I am positive, though, that those queer, weak theories of others are not the real cause of your unhappiness."

"No," she confessed hesitatingly, "there is something else; something that I dare not—" She stopped abruptly and stared beyond me at the door.

I knew before I turned about that Crutchfield was there. Even as I looked at him the dark scowl on his lean face vanished and the characteristic cynical smile took its place. Mariam arose and flitted away among the flowers as I arose to greet him.

I wondered guiltily how long he had been standing in the open doorway, how much he had overheard. I was relieved when he asked me in his nonchalant manner to accompany him to his study and listen to him read "another silly yarn that I hope to sell to some fool editor."

CRUTCHFIELD'S death came as a shock, especially to those editors who had contracted with him for material. I, for one, was patiently waiting the completion of a serial. He had prepared about half the story when he committed suicide.

At that time the characters in the story were entangled in a complex plot that completely baffled my powers of deduction. There were three entirely original dramatic situations that, to me, seemed beyond the possibility of logical handling or a convincing denouement. Very inconsiderate of Crutchfield, I thought, to take himself off at that time. What rankled the most was the fact that he did it merely in hope of proving an insane theory.

I worried less about the unfinished serial, however, than I did about Mariam. I secretly hoped that Crutchfield's death would mean more freedom and a healthier state of mind for Mariam. But, strange to say, she appeared to be more despondent than ever. Did she fear or expect Crutchfield's theory to work out? She finally consented to close her gloomy home and become the guest of my mother and myself for several months.

About the continuation of Crutchfield's work through a living medium; I cursed him for a fool even after his death. Of course, stories came. We were expecting them. There were not a few cranks among Crutchfield's readers who believed they could put it over. Some of the stories were fair imitations, too; but none of them had a very marked Crutchfield "style."

All of the submissions were from persons who had previously endeavored to break into print. Regardless of what others thought or expected, I resigned myself to the conviction that Crutchfield and his literary work were irrevocably defunct. Strangely enough, I regretted his abrupt leavetaking less than I did his neglect to finish that serial. I dutifully gasped when I heard of his rash act; I dutifully attended the funeral, then I washed my hands of him. But still I bemoaned the unfinished story.

Having made a liberal advance payment on the story, Mariam insisted that I take it and turn it over to one of our staff writers. This I did, but I was not surprised when the staff writers, after giving the manuscript a careful reading and analysis, figuratively threw up their hands and passed it back to me. I could not blame them. There were the situations as Crutchfield had worked them out up to the time of his death; a complex though fascinating plot cut off at the very apex of suspense and defying now all attempts to work it out consistently or logically. I even turned the manuscript over to Henrick Hennessy, the renowned criminal investigator. He returned it ten days later.

"A most profound puzzle," was Hennessy's remark. "Personally, I do not believe that Crutchfield himself knew what to do with it. Perhaps," he added, smiling whimsically, "that is the reason he committed suicide—to escape the task of finishing the story."

I shrugged my shoulders and chucked the now soiled manuscript on to the desk. "Guess it's a dead one, Hennessy," I reflected gloomily. "Never read anything in my life like it, either. If that idiot Crutchfield had only lived long enough to finish it I could almost forgive him for blowing his brains out."

Hennessy chuckled as he calmly rolled a cigarette. "If I was an editor," he drawled, "I wouldn't take twenty thousand dollars for the unfinished story."

I bounded from my chair. He did not have to elucidate. I got the idea immediately.

"Got me, eh?" the detective laughed. "Publicity, eh? Advertising of the very

best kind. The name, Crutchfield, is a byword in every other home in the land. All know him and his fiction and his peculiar ideas about worldbound ghosts. Big prize for anybody who can finish the story logically and with the renowned Crutchfield style, eh? But I see you have the idea. I ought to be a publicity man instead of a poor 'dick'."

I felt like embracing Hennessy, but I didn't: I rounded up my staff.

In six weeks fifty of the largest daily newspapers in America were running our full-page ad in their Sunday editions. Ten weekly magazines were also carrying us in half-page announcements. We were offering $10,000 for the best concluding instalment of "Cyrus Crutchfield's Unfinished Story." Full particulars were flaunted before the reading public, with the result that every writer and would-be writer in the country was impatiently waiting for the opening instalment in our magazine, to say nothing of the thousands who, for the first time in their lives, were watching the magazine.

We concluded to run the unfinished story in three installments and close the contest two months later.

I no longer attempted to convince myself that I was not in love. Mother had long since diagnosed my case and frankly passed the diagnosis on to me, wishing me the best of luck. The prognosis was unfavorable, however. Mariam was certainly in no mood to listen to me, though I noted with satisfaction that she was easily persuaded to remain in our home.

I wondered if—but, no; it was undoubtedly the cheerful ministrations of my dear, sympathetic old mother that kept Mariam under our roof. But why did she not become more natural? I was sure—in fact, she had even hinted to me—that she had never loved Crutchfield. Had her daily contact with him, her constant fear of him and his morbid thought, corroded her soul? Had he crushed from her sensitive nature those instincts and desires that make up the foundations of wholesome thought and a contented life?

It was maddening to see her fighting—a losing fight—against an invisible enemy that for some reason she chose to fight alone. Crutchfield was gone, his works had died with him, and Mariam was now free to seek happiness and forget the whole miserable business. Yet, she remained despondent and moody.

I found myself wondering if, even in death, Crutchfield's hard, cynical nature—or personality—did not haunt her. I heartily hoped I would meet his shade some dark night so I could tell him—or it—what I thought of him and his devilish works. Love, it seems, had caused me to forget, even despise, the one-time commercial value of his ravings.

From an advertising standpoint the "Crutchfield Unfinished Story Contest" was a tremenduous success. But we found nothing among the thousands of manuscripts submitted that bore any more than a transparent semblance to the Crutchfield style. "Style" was what we wanted; a style that would at least carry some of the marked features of the dead author's. Five logical and truly laudable endings of the story had come in from as many writers. In each case of these five the Crutchfield style was conspicuously absent. Three unknown writers had in a measure copied Crutchfield's style; but they, to use the vernacular, made a flivver of the story's ending. It was a discouraging task, and only three weeks remained before the closing of the contest.

Then, one morning in my mail I found a brief letter from one Ansel B. Heckler, of Silver Center, Wyoming. It was very much like a number of other letters I had received from persons who professed to be in communication with the spirit of the departed Crutchfield. It read:

"Dear sir: Perhaps you know something about a Cyrus Crutchfield who, I take it, died some time ago. I know nothing of him, as I am a farmer and have little time to read. But one morning several weeks ago I awoke to find myself sitting at the kitchen table, when, according to my regular schedule, I should have been in bed. I had nothing on but my pajamas. I remember distinctly that I had retired as per custom at nine-thirty the previous night. In my sleep, while sitting at the table, I had written a lot of trash on a piece of wrapping paper. Though this rot was written in my own hand, the name at the bottom was Cyrus Crutchfield.

"I gathered from what Crutch says that he is dead and that he wants me to write for him. He said something about your magazine, something that I cannot make out, as the writing is very irregular and indistinct, and he mentioned other magazines.

"I am not superstitious and I do not even attempt home brew, but, believe me or not, that very evening I felt like writing something and I did. I just sat there and turned my hand loose and it wrote a story. I had no idea what I was writing until it was finished and I read it.

"Am sending you the story just as it came off the pencil point and as I wrote it on the kitchen table. I have no typewriter and wouldn't know how to use it if I did have one. If the story is any good it is for sale; if you don't care for it, burn it up. "Yours truly,

"Ansel B. Heckler.

"P. S.—Since writing the above I read in a newspaper in town something about your offer of ten thousand dollars to any one who can write the best concluding instalment of a serial left unfinished by Crutch. Our weekly paper, The Herald, only mentioned it briefly. Will you kindly send me the magazine in which the story—what there is of it—is printed? I want to read it, and if Crutch really means business, perhaps he will come across with the finish of the story. I can use ten thousand dollars very nicely, as I want to make many improvements on my ranch."

I was on the point of consigning the letter to the waste paper basket when Holden, my associate, rushed into the office.

"Love o' Mike!" Holden gasped. "It's come, chief, it's come! Listen to this yarn!" He continued to gurgle incoherently as he waved the handwritten manuscript about before my face and dropped into a chair.

"'NIGHT WINGS,'" he read the title breathlessly, 'by Ansel B. Heckler. Dictated by the spirit of Cyrus Crutchfield.' Gosh, chief, it's all here; story, plot, Crutchfield style, all but typewritten copy!"

As befits a practical and unsuperstitious editor, I grunted and ordered Holden to read.

Was it there? As Holden read, my scalp tingled unpleasantly, little Arctic shivers chased up and down my spine, I mopped my forehead with my coat sleeve, and I actually expected to hear Cyrus Crutchfield's low, grating chuckle of triumph coming from out of nowhere. It *was* there!

A hundred little Crutchfield tricks of expression were there; tricks that I and thousands of others would recognize instantly, but could not imitate in a thousand years. Not a single break in the true Crutchfield form in the story's six thousand words. It was there, a short story masterpiece and written with a

lead pencil on both sides of foolscap paper!

Gad! Was Crutchfield right, after all? It was positively uncanny, depressing!

We dispatched a check post-haste to Ansel B. Heckler of Silver Center, Wyoming. Also, we sent by registered mail full particulars of the "Crutchfield Unfinished Story Contest," and the story as it had appeared in the magazine and as Crutchfield left it. I wrote a very pleading letter to Farmer Ansel Heckler in which I implored him to write his version of the incomplete story as soon as possible.

It was thought best to say nothing of Heckler or "Night Wings" until we had made our decision in the unfinished story contest. Therefore, I swore Holden to secrecy and locked the handwritten manuscript in the office safe.

I did not sleep well that night. I felt very much as the small boy feels when he walks near a graveyard at night. I carefully avoided reference to Heckler or his letter or story while in the presence of Mariam. When I thought of her I was sorry Heckler had written. What if that Wyoming farmer did actually convince us and the public that he was Crutchfield's earthly medium? What would the effect be on Mariam? She wanted to forget Crutchfield and his works. I found myself secretly hoping that Heckler's "Night Wings" was merely a strange coincidence; that he would fail miserably in any further attempts to imitate—if it was imitation—the dead author's work.

Through it all and while we waited for another outburst from Silver Center, Wyoming, I frequently caught myself in the act of rehearsing a little plea that I intended some day to make to Mariam. Even then, only three months after Crutchfield's death, I was on the point several times of asking her to try matrimony as an eradicator of the past.

Her brave but vain efforts to appear cheerful invited my advances. The droop of her mouth as she gazed moodily out at a window or caressed a flower in mother's garden seemed to be a mute appeal for masculine protection. Those faint sighs that were not intended to be heard, but which I always managed to hear, spoke eloquently of a dark, mysterious struggle in her mind and heart; a silently fought conflict of which she cared not or dared not speak.

Only three days remained before the closing of the Unfinished Story Contest. At this time we had selected the work of three writers as containing enough Crutchfield style to merit consideration in our decision. They were poor imitations, but the prize must be awarded to somebody. Would Heckler's version come? I sincerely hoped not.

But it came, and my worst fears were realized. Crutchfield himself could not have done better. Why, it was Crutchfield's work! Heckler said so, and I was forced to confess that the Crutchfield style was there in all its inimitable peculiarities.

That Wyoming farmer had handled the concluding instalment in an entirely different manner from any of the thousands of other contestants. The characters, the situations, the apparently impossible solutions had been handled like so many checkers, righting themselves in a wholly consistent manner. The intricate situations led logically to the final paragraph, then dissolved in an entirely unexpected, though perfectly probable, *denouement*.

While my staff was wildly excited and enthusiastic, I was strangely depressed.

THE result of the contest, together with the publication of Heckler's "Night Wings" and his numerous subsequent stories, is obvious. In a short time Heckler had literally jumped into a dead man's shoes, into the fame left by the eccentric Crutchfield. His likeness appeared in a dozen magazines and scores of newspapers. Newspaper representatives besieged him on his quiet little Wyoming farm. Psychologists and spiritualists alighted from the branch-line train at Silver Center almost daily.

Heckler's many visitors found a quiet-mannered man of perhaps thirty years who loved his farm, his horses, his cows and the windswept Wyoming prairies. "Heck," as he was familiarly known to his old friends down Silver Center way, had a sense of humor and seemed inclined to take it all as a joke. But, too, it was noted that at times a look akin to fear came into his eyes when questioned closely regarding his communications with the spirit of Cyrus Crutchfield.

"I can't account for it," he was repeatedly quoted as saying. "I never attempted to write until that queer request came. I cannot say that I like all this. I was happy and contented here with my ranch work, and, really, I am sorry old Crutch selected me for the job. It—it—well, it isn't natural, it isn't right."

Nevertheless, the stories continued to come. Without a single exception, they were bought by the greedy editors, not because of their peculiar and uncanny origin, but because they were undeniably Crutchfield stories.

Heckler had no objection to being watched while at work. The men of science had watched him repeatedly. There he would sit, his eyes half closed and looking anywhere but at the paper on which he wrote. Any conversation, any trivial interruption, seemed to break the spell and necessitate a wait of hours, days perhaps, before the so-called urge gripped him again.

Months passed. Mother had apparently adopted Mariam. I was now daily on the point of asking Mariam to marry me. But that old inexplicable despondency was still with her. Only once I spoke. Floundering helplessly about in a maze of meaningless words that I had not planned at all to say, I was surprised when she suddenly burst into tears and ran away from me. Then I began to plot with mother. Trip out West, new scenes, new pleasures, climbing mountains, moonlight on the Western ocean, sunsets on the snow-covered Sierras, then the question. It had been done a thousand times in the stories I had bought. Why not again in real Life?

We stopped at Silver Center. Everybody went out of his way to see Ansel Heckler. Even Mariam evinced curiosity, though she exacted a promise from me that we would not tarry long near "that queer farmer."

Over the rolling hills in our touring car we sped toward the Ansel Heckler ranch. In the afternoon we drew up before the old frame structure. A dapper young man, evidently Heckler's typist, met us at the door.

"Mr. Heckler is out in the garden, I believe," the officious young man replied to my query. "Appointment?"

I passed him my card and his manner underwent an immediate change. "I am sure Mr. Heckler will be delighted to see you, Mr. Hil'worth. Please come in and I will go after him."

"Could we be allowed the privilege of —er—sneaking up on him in the garden?" I requested.

"Why, certainly, sir. He is not easily startled."

He escorted us around the house and pointed to a vegetable garden some distance away.

We found Heckler busily engaged in pulling weeds. "Good afternoon," he greeted cheerily as we came upon him. "Don't happen to be looking for work? Weeds are getting—" but there he stopped and the smile faded from his tanned face. His eyes had rested on Mariam.

Sensing a tenseness in the situation, I looked about at Mariam who had fol-

loved with mother. She was clinging to mother's arms for support and her face was deathly pale, her eyes wide and staring at the man before her.

"Mariam!" I exclaimed, stepping to her side. "Are you ill, Mariam?" But she eluded me and the next moment she was sobbing brokenly on Ansel Heckler's shoulder while he patted her shoulder soothingly and said, "There, there, Mariam." Mother and I composed a mystified audience and merely looked on in wordless perplexity.

"Oh, Will!" Mariam sobbed, looking up in Heckler's face, "Will, please tell me you did not do it! I—I cannot endure this suspense another day. It will drive me mad, Will! Tell me, Will, did you do it? Did you kill—"

"Why, Mariam!" the man interrupted brokenly, drawing her closer to him. "Who told you that? You know I didn't kill—yes, I did kill him. I—no—Mariam, are these your friends?" indicating mother and me.

"Yes, yes, Will, they are my dearest friends," Mariam answered a bit hysterically. "We can trust them, Will. Let's tell them all and have this terrible nightmare over with for once and all. Please tell me Crutchfield lied; that you did not do it."

A grim smile appeared on Heckler's lips. "I am beginning to understand now. And you, you poor, loyal little woman! You have suffered for five years to protect me! Come, Mariam; introduce your friends and we will do as you say, explain all for better or for worse."

I was painfully aware during the introductions that I had lost Mariam. How and why, I did not know; but the conviction was there that Mariam was not for me. Nevertheless, though my heart was heavy as lead, I was determined to stand by her to the very last in this mysterious business—whatever the deuce it was.

Heckler—the man Mariam called Will—silently escorted us to the house. In the modest living-room he dismissed the typist. He insisted that Mariam, who was yet very pale and shaken, lie down on the old-fashioned davenport. Next, he opened a small box safe and drew forth some letters. One of these he passed to me. "Read it aloud, Mr. Hillworth," he requested. "You will probably recognize the handwriting."

I did recognize that peculiar script immediately. It was Cyrus Crutchfield's.

"Dear long suffering William: You will undoubtedly be overjoyed to learn that I am about to launch myself in the great adventure. Yes, I am tired of life. But don't smile yet, because my death will not mean your freedom—unless, of course, you elect to see a person who is very dear to you arrested and charged with the murder of my friend, Arthur Baldwin.

"Carry the work on, William, for Dan Hopwood has not forgotten what he saw on Moonstone Beach that night five years ago. Am inclosing full instructions, William, as to how you must carry on the work for the several millions of fools who have been reading 'Cyrus Crutchfield's' stories for five years. Remember, too, that Dan Hopwood is keeping tabs on you and Mariam constantly. The minute you grow weary of your task Hopwood will spill the beans as per instructions from me, then your dear Mariam will face a murder charge.

"Good-bye, old wise boy,
"CRUTCHFIELD."

Mariam had struggled to a sitting position on the davenport. Heckler—or William—was quickly at her side.

"He—he said I killed Arthur Baldwin?" she queried in a dazed way.

"Exactly," answered Heckler. "And I could not help but believe it after the way Baldwin insulted and compromised you. I—I was afraid, Mariam, to say anything. In my mind, you would have been justified in killing Baldwin, and I was determined to remain silent to protect you, believing as I did that the beach patrolman, Hopwood, had seen Baldwin killed. I—"

"But," Mariam interrupted. "Crutchfield told me that it was you who killed Baldwin; that you killed him because he had insulted me. I—I married Crutchfield to protect you, Will. And you have been writing all this time? Crutchfield never wrote those stories?"

"Yes, Mariam, I have written every line that Crutchfield ever sold. I had to, dear; don't you see? Crutchfield wrote me letters regularly in which he threatened to turn you over to the police if I did not continue to write and send the rough draft stories to him. I—"

"Just a moment," I interrupted. "Is your name Ansel Heckler or—"

"My name is William Middlerow."

"Ah!" I ejaculated. "Pen name, Jellicoe. You are the writer who disappeared so mysteriously about five years ago. It was believed you were drowned at sea."

"The same." Middlerow smiled ruefully. Then: "You will recall, too, that you wrote me several letters which Crutchfield enclosed with his letters, you not knowing where I was. In those letters you begged me to remain silent for 'your sake.' I inferred from your brief letters that you really had killed Baldwin. I understand now that you believed I had killed him and that you feared I would be arrested and sent to prison or hung."

"That was it, Will." Mariam began to weep again. "I wanted you so! I always lived in hope of finding you someday."

"Why did Crutchfield wreak this terrible vengeance on you, Mr. Middlerow?" I queried.

"For several reasons. First, because Mariam had consented to marry me. Second, because he got the insane idea in his head that I had stolen a story plot from his apartment at the Beach Hotel. You will probably recall the story. It was my first book-length novel, "Blood Red." Crutchfield had placed his whole future as a writer on this novel. It was merely a coincidence that I conceived a plot almost identical with his. His third reason was because, when he accused me of the theft, I gave him an unmerciful beating."

"Have you seen this beach patrolman, Hopwood, since Baldwin was killed?" I asked.

"Twice. I made two trips to Florida—Moonstone Beach—with the express purpose of getting at the bottom of the matter. I could get nothing from Hopwood except that he had seen Baldwin killed, knew who killed him and that if I wanted to know who did it to just start something. This attitude of Hopwood's only strengthened my belief that Mariam had shot Baldwin in a fit of desperation. Understand, Mr. Hillworth, that Baldwin and Crutchfield were both madly in love with Mariam and had repeatedly been rejected by her. Baldwin had a concession on the pleasure pier and was a gambler on the side. There was nothing left for me to do after the murder but come back here to my father's ranch where I was known as Ansel Heckler, that being my father's name. I was an adopted son."

We talked it over for an hour, during which time I found myself liking Middlerow more every minute. He had absolutely none of the characteristics of a man who would kill. True, I had lost all hope now of making Mariam my wife; but already I could see that a great burden had been lifted from her mind and heart, and I was glad.

The result of our talk was that I telegraphed to my detective friend, Hen-

drick Hennessy, requesting him to come to Silver Center immediately.

Hennessy lost no time on the road. All was explained to him. Then, leaving mother and Mariam on the ranch with Middlerow, Hennessy and I proceeded to Moonstone Beach, Forida.

After a conference with the beach authorities at the pleasure resort, Hopwood was brought before us.

"Why have you remained silent about the Baldwin murder mystery, Hopwood?" was Hennessy's incisive query.

The heavy-jowled Hopwood smiled. "Because I know nothing about it", was his prompt answer.

"Read this, Hopwood." Hennessy passed a worn slip of paper to the apparently unmoved patrolman. The paper looked like part of a page torn from a note-book or diary. One corner of it was burned as if it had been raked from a fire. "Found it in Crutchfield's fireplace about a week ago," said Hennessy. "Part of a page from a diary, I presume. Crutchfield had burned a number of letters and papers just before committing suicide, but the fire evidently overlooked this one very incriminating little slip of paper."

I noted that Hopwood's hands shook slightly as he read:

"Since the night I killed Baldwin. Though I have no fear of Hopwood talking, I know that some day the truth will be known. Losing game any way I look at it. Dan Hopwood—"

Here the writing had terminated on the charred edge of the paper.

"And, too," Hennessy went on calmly, "Crutchfield very foolishly wrote a number of letters to William Middlerow; letters in which he frequently mentioned your name. It's an open and shut case, Hopwood. Why did you protect Crutchfield?"

The big man wet his lips and attempted to smile. It was a dismal failure, that smile.

"Of course, you understand," Hennessy went on mercilessly, calmly, "we believe that it was you, not Crutchfield, that really did the killing. We have evidence enough to—"

"That's a damn lie!" the shaken patrolman blurted. "Crutchfield killed Baldwin because Baldwin threatened to tell that girl Mariam Willows who stole the Countess DeMurrae's jewels from her apartments at the Beach Hotel. They —they fought on the beach. Crutchfield killed him. It was Crutchfield who stole the jewels and he and Baldwin started a swell gambing joint with the money they got for them from a fence in Jacksonville. I saw the killin.' I needed money. Crutchfield gave me ten thousand dollars to keep my trap shut. I've been bleedin' him ever since. I—"

Well, he told it all in a frantic effort to save his own neck.

As I have said, I lost Mariam. She is Mrs. William Middlerow now. But I still have mother, and that Crutchfield Unfinished Story Contest did wonders for my magazine.

About that half burned slip of paper? It was very carefully prepared by Middlerow and Hennessy on the ranch. Middlerow can write so near like Crutchfield that old Crutch himself would think it was his own handwriting.

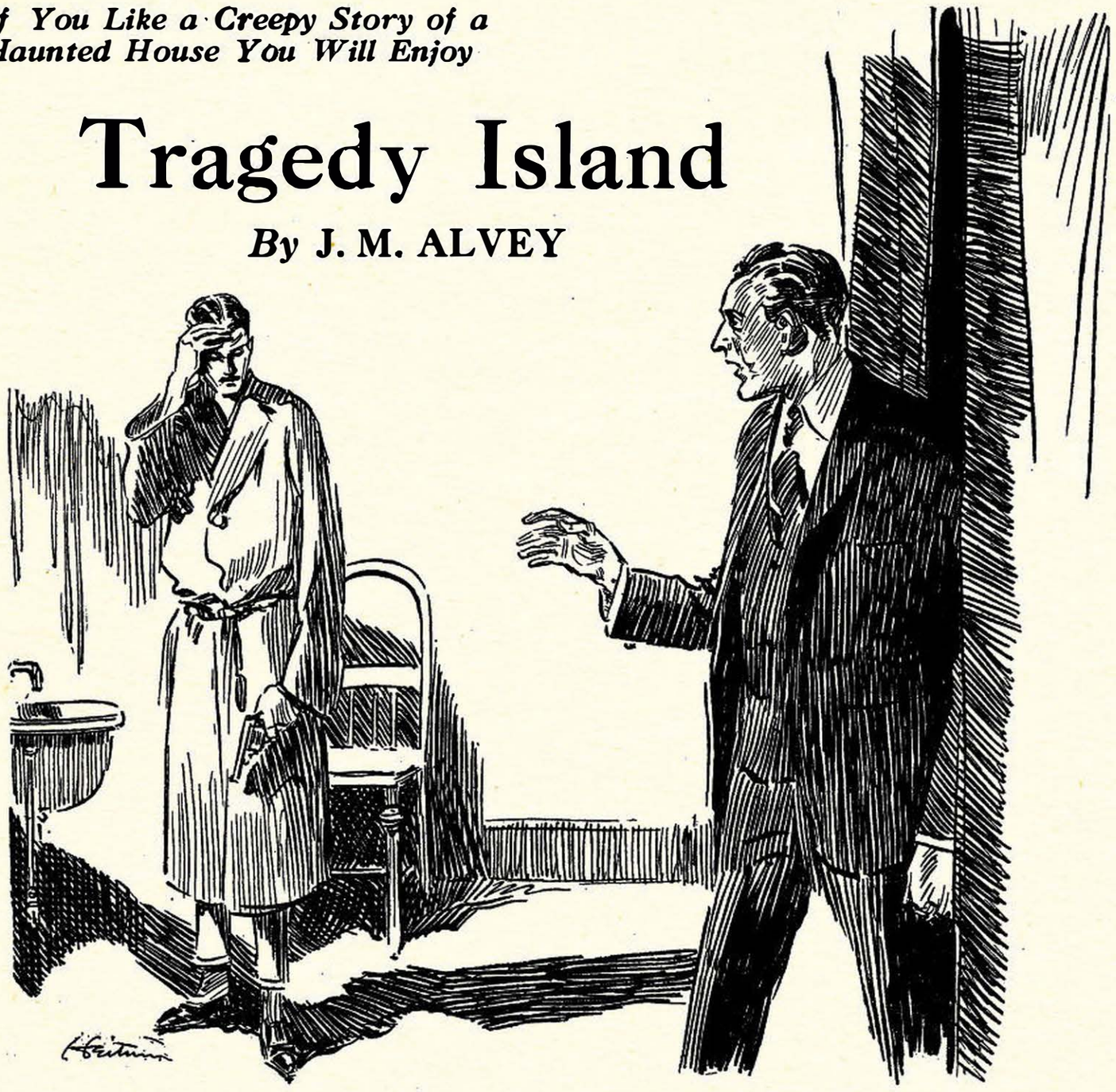
The Singing Valley

"A FEW days since a party of gentlemen from Pottstown (Pennsylvania) rode to the celebrated Klingleberg, or Singing Valley, about three miles distant. Although our expectations were very highly raised by the reports which we had heard, still they were more than realized on our arrival there. A large and irregular mass of ill-shaped stones presented themselves to our view at first. They appear to have been thrown together by some terrible convulsion of nature. From the appearance of the stones, probably at some former period, a volcanic eruption must have taken place here. By striking on the stones the most varied sounds imaginable are produced. The chime of the finest bells in the world could not exceed in variety the sounds produced here, from the most sonorous bass to the most delicate air, the gradations beautifully fine. Near the Klingleberg there is a considerable cave, which extends some distance under the rocks, and is really worthy the attention of the curious. Many visitors heretofore have been at this place, but of late it has been almost deserted. When a traveler is much troubled to kill time, there is not a place that would better compensate him than a visit to this celebrated Singing Valley.

If You Like a Creepy Story of a Haunted House You Will Enjoy

Tragedy Island

By J. M. ALVEY



HALF a mile out from the mainland lies Tragedy Island, a few hundred acres of rugged old earth that have withstood the assaults of sea and sky these many years. Mostly sharp sand and jagged rock and coarse grass is Tragedy Island, although a few cultivated patches stretch up the hill to the small forest of old trees that cluster round the ancient house.

The house itself is more than a century old. The main section, built of brick that crossed the Atlantic as ballast in a Dutch merchant vessel, has had wings added and little rooms built on and porches thrown out in whimsical irregularity. It has thirty-two rooms and to go from one room to another you must either go up a few steps or down a few steps, so that you might say none of the thirty-two are on the same floor.

Each of the thirty-two rooms has a mystery and a ghost story or so of its own, and dueling swords have clashed up and down the great stairway, and murdered men have bled to death on the parlor floor.

The place is haunted, so to speak, by a whole company of ghosts. Ghosts in wigs and knee breeches; ghosts with smoking pistols in their hands; white-robed ghosts, according to popular fancy, and ghosts with fair complexions and gay laughter; all make unearthly visits to the old house and there rehearse old times within its storied walls. Believe me, it is quite a ghostly place.

But, wild as Tragedy Island is and weird as the house is which stands there, far wilder and more weird, much stranger and many times gloomier have been the men who were masters of the place.

Said an old boatman to me one day: "If you want to know what I think o' Tragedy Island it's just this: Heaven may be over it, and the sea all around it, but Hell's at the bottom of it, and the devil himself lives there.

"Man alive! Talk o' tragedy! The island's well named, sure enough. It's had six masters in a line and everyone o' them has made away with himself. Guess that's tragedy enough for one wee hunk o' island, eh? But folks hereabouts have growed 'customed to it. When word comes in that another

Hagenhaufuer has upheld the family tradition people just say, 'Well, let's see. Who's the next heir to the suicide estate?' Right creepy, ain't it?"

"Horrible," said I.

"A young man's master o' the place now. I guess you know more o' him than I can tell you. You visit him every so-so. It's none o' my business, and it ain't my way to nose into another's doings, understand, but take care, friend. Better watch out. It's one thing to hear o' this here creepy, bloody goings-on, but it would be another thing to see it take place."

I laughed at the old boatman then, and often afterward, but I remembered what he said and thought of it more than once.

Guy Hagenhaufuer was the seventh master of the fateful old mansion. He was a young man when he came into his grim inheritance and he was yet a young man at the time of which I write.

We had been classmates at our Alma Mater, and it was during those college days that a close friendship grew up between us and I came to learn of the curse of the Hagenhaufuers and the uncanny history of Tragedy Island.

In our senior year Guy did not return from the Christmas holidays. It was during that jolly season of the year that he had his inheritance passed on to him.

I went down to Tragedy Island for the first time that June.

YOU go from the city by train to a little village on the sea coast. From the village you walk three quarters of a mile down a lonely road that follows the shore to an old shack on the beach. A crazy old pier runs out into the surf, and at the end of it waits the Hagenhaufuer launch, piloted by the gardener, to take you out to the island, which seems to ride at anchor out at sea like somebody's farm, buildings and all, carved out of the solid earth and floated off to that inconvenient mooring.

Another rickety old pier runs out into the water to meet you at the island and take you ashore where a boathouse stands on the rocky coast. A sandy path leads over a grassy, marshy stretch to the cultivated land, where a sort of farm lane runs up the hill and through the trees to the house.

There, on that June afternoon, I found Guy, in overalls, painting the porch.

"Fixing up a bit. Got to make the place cheerful, you know. Going to do lots of improving this summer. This can be made a wonderful summer home, you know. It really can, you know."

During the week I stayed there I tried to reason him into shutting up the old house and come away to the city. But he had made up his mind to stay, and at the end of the week I left him with the thirty-two old rooms and the ghosts and only the gardener to share them with him.

During the first year or two I went back for week-end visits pretty often. Then I left for a distant part of the country.

Three years later I came back. On a Wednesday morning I dropped Guy a line to the effect that I would run down to see him on Friday as per my old custom for a week-end visit. Friday morning's post brought me word from my old school fellow that he would be glad indeed to welcome me back again.

My train brought me to the seaside town in the early evening. It was September and beginning to grow dark early. I walked down the lonely road to the old shack on the beach and out on to the rickety old pier to which I found the same old launch tied up. But there was no gardener. I waited a while. Still no one came.

So I went back to the village and made inquiries concerning the gardener. He had not been seen.

Back to the launch I went. I stood out over the surf and looked off to where Tragedy Island lay, a dark blotch on the dark sea.

I at last decided to go over by myself.

Getting the launch started was not hard work and getting it out into the open water was not hard, either, but heading it for the island was quite a job, for I suddenly missed something. It was the light that burned in the boathouse. It was not there.

I had a long search for the landing pier, but after a considerable time I made it and tied the launch up. Then I set out for the house. And as I went I had vague misgivings, for there was no light there, either.

Not a living soul did I see. Not a sound did I hear. I stopped before the house. I called out. I listened. I called again. I gave our old familiar whistle. I called his name a dozen times. I went up, feeling creepy, and pounded on the front door.

IT seemed to burst open, and there stood a tall figure that I could only *feel*, instead of *see*.

A voice said:

"Who are YOU?"

"Why, Guy!" I cried, for I knew his voice. "What's the matter? What's the matter?"

"The matter?" said the voice: "Come in and look at me."

I groped my way along to where a light showed through a door that stood ajar. He entered it ahead of me. I followed him.

Good Lord! What a sight! Everything upside down. Furniture piled up against the windows, rubbish littered all over the floor. In the midst of this wild scene stood my old friend, pale and haggard, a revolver in his shaky hand.

"What's the trouble? What's wrong?"

He passed his hand across his brow.

"In the morning," he said, "You will understand. Don't ask me now."

He looked at me as we moved about, and his actions seemed to be his own actions, but the look was like the look of another person, just as though some one else was inside of him and was peering out at me.

We cooked our own supper and ate it.

When it was over he said:

"I'm tired. If you don't mind let's go to bed?"

"Of course I don't mind," I said. "It's getting late, and I am tired, too, but before we go will you please tell me what's wrong?"

Again he passed his hand over his forehead and again he said:

"In the morning you'll understand. Don't ask me now."

I did not go to bed. I sat up in my room and listened. Then I lay down on the bed and listened. Then I dozed off.

It was Guy who awakened me.

"Did you hear it?" he whispered.

"What? When?" I mumbled, scrambling to my feet.

"Just now," he replied. "A shot."

"Guy," I said, "For the love of Heaven, what's going on here? Where are the servants? No one met me at the pier tonight. Good God, man, what's it all about?"

He laughed.

"Are you afraid?" he asked.

I was, and yet I was not. I did not answer.

"The servants ran away, the cowards. They took the launch and left at sunset. That's how you found it with no one to bring you over. You are quite a sailor, old man, to get here alone in the dark."

He walked out of the room.

I sat by the open window. It was then that I heard a low moaning sound that rose and fell on the night air.

As I listened someone touched me on the arm. It was Guy.

"You hear it, too," he said. "What the devil is it?"

"It's two o'clock in the morning," I told him. "I understood you were tired. Why don't you go to bed instead of wandering round this place in the dead of night?"

He went away again. I heard him go through the rooms, up a few steps here, down a few steps there, and on to his room and shut the door. His footsteps sounded heavy and drear through the weird house at that stilly hour.

I dozed by the window. Suddenly I was wide awake. I looked out and saw a light at the landing pier. I watched it.

"Whoever is causing all this is getting away," I thought. "I'll follow and see what I can."

I went to Guy's room. Not a sound. At last he was asleep. So I hurried out of the house and through the dark woods and down the lane to the sandy patch of marsh and along the path to the boathouse.

As I came near the launch started. The "put-put" of its motor snapped out on the night. It moved off to the north and went out of sight around the curved shore.

I ran up the shore, and as I ran the low moaning rose and fell, and grew nearer and nearer.

Then I discovered it.

WELL to the back of the island the sea had worked in under the rocks, and as the tide rose it ran in and whirled round in a little rocky cavern with a moaning sound. When the wind was northwest, as it was that night, I figured this sound could be heard at the house.

I felt relieved to make this discovery and turned back to the house. I went to Guy's room and listened again. I opened the door. I went in. He was not there.

I hunted him through the house. He was not to be found. Out into the night I went to find a track of him. Another light attracted my attention. I ran back to the landing pier. The light came on and on. Nearer and nearer it grew. It was a dory rowed by the gardener and my old friend the boatman.

"He is gone!" I cried. "He is not here. It was he, no doubt, who left in the launch about two-thirty. He went off to the north."

"He went off this afternoon," said the gardener. "Off in the head. Master's gone plum crazy."

"Crazy?" I repeated. "Crazy?"

"He ran us off the place just afore supper. I got this man to come back and see what had happened. He was the only one would come."

It was dawn now.

"It's bad business," said the boatman. "There's always such things as this when something's about to happen here. What's that?"

"A shot," I said.

"And listen," said the gardener. "The launch, our launch. I know that engine. There! There it comes!"

We ran out on the pier and looked north.

It came fast. Straight for the pier it headed. It grew nearer and nearer, the spray dashing up over its prow. By not so much as a foot it missed the pier and went racing off to the open sea.

As it went by I saw the figure at the wheel. It was a limp, lifeless figure, lying over the wheel and holding the launch true to its course. It was Guy Hagenhaufuer with a bullet hole in his pale forehead just where he had been passing his hand in the night.

The Prowess and Ferocity of Some Crusading Chiefs

THE women of Antioch lined the ramparts; they were vociferous in their exhortations to their husbands to fight; and the Christians pretended to distinguish the sincere shouts of the Turkish wives from the artificial cries of the female Greeks and Armenians. But Baghasian had ill measured the strength and valour of the combatants; and he re-opened the gates for the preservation of the fugitives. The historians of the battle command us to believe, that if all the Christian soldiers had fought with the heroic valour of the Dukes of Lorraine and Normandy, (of whom stupendous feats are related), few of the Turks would have escaped the edge of their faulchions. Godfrey cut one of his foes through the middle. The upper part of the body fell to the ground but so firmly did the miscreant sit, that the lower members remained on the saddle, and the affrighted horse galloped into the town. Another wretched Moslem he clave asunder from the neck to the groin, by taking aim at his head with a sword; and the weapon not only performed its prescribed duty, but cut entirely through the saddle and the backbone of the horse. The sword of Robert of Normandy cleft the skull of a Saracen from the crown to the shoulders; and seeing one of the parts rolling over the ground, he charitably dismissed it to the powers of hell. Tancred enjoined his squire not to publish his deeds; but we must not let the modesty of the hero diminish our admiration of his courage. A son of Baghasian, twelve emirs, and two thousand men of common rank fell in this dreadful battle; and if night had not suspended the victorious heroes' ferocity, Antioch would have fallen. The spoil reconciled the Christians to the disasters which they had experienced. On the earliest dawn of the ensuing day, the Turks quitted the city, collected the dead bodies of their friends, and buried them in the common place of interment without the walls. Familiarity with scenes of horror had extinguished every feeling of humanity; the Christians pulled the corpses from the sepulchre, and despoiled them of their dresses and ornaments. They severed the heads from the trunks; and fifteen hundred of them were exposed on pikes to the weeping Turks; and some were sent to the caliph of Egypt in proof of victory.

A Fantastic Little Story of a Man Who Met the "Green Goddess of Dreams"

THE BROWN MOUSE

By EDWARD PARRISH WARE

AS I climbed the stairway I was conscious only that I was bent upon overtaking the vague form of a man, slim and youthful, whose face attracted me strangely. The question beat in my brain:

Who is he?

If I could get my hands upon him, compel him to look straight into my eyes, his identity would immediately become fixed; of that I was sure. But he seemed to float, rather than walk, always just out of my reach.

The chase, begun in a cafe on lower Broadway, had led me through many weary miles of streets, slippery with rain, and almost deserted. Miles away the pursuit ended in a grim old studio building much favored by writers, artists, and others who follow loose trades. I knew the place; in fact, someone whose name I could not quite recall lived there.

On the stairway of the building I overtook my quarry, but he would not suffer himself to be taken; he mounted upward; so did I. Presently, on the second landing, he relented—stood still. I approached with hands outstretched, poised on the balls of my feet, lunged—

With mocking laughter trailing behind him, he rose, seemingly without effort, and floated to the head of the stairs. There he paused on the topmost tread, turned—

God in heaven! It was *myself* I looked at! *Myself*, only younger—ages younger!

Then the figure faded, lost its importance. There was something in my mouth; something smooth and round, like an apple, but I could not bite it. For an instant, just an instant, I became almost normal; sufficiently so to recognize my surroundings.

I was on my knees before the door of my own apartment in the studio building, and the door knob was in my mouth. With a key, or it may have been my pocket knife, I was striving to unlock the hall radiator, which was near at hand.

Back of me, someone laughed. I got up and looked toward the sound. Something danced in my vision; something brown, formless. It had eyes, though; brown ones. I could see them, nothing more. No hands, no head, no mouth—Then I saw that it did have a mouth, and the mouth was smiling.

I became indignant. I threatened, but to no purpose; the figure remained—approached. The smiling mouth shaped words:

"He who shaketh the cocktail, by the cocktail shall he also be shaken!" were the words the mouth shaped.

I took the matter under advisement. Someone wanted me to shake a cocktail. Well—If I could only find out who wanted it! Was it person, or thing, there near me?

Then I recognized it.

"Mouse!"

By its eyes I knew it!

"Mouse!" I repeated, laughing immoderately. "Little brown mouse! Little brown mouse! Little br—"

NOW it requires at least an hour for the average man to make up his mind to get out of bed on the morning after such a night as I had spent—had been spending for many, many months. I am different. My powers of recuperation are, as yet, scarcely impaired.

That morning I did not awake of my own accord. A mouse, a brown one, gnawed at my hand and brought me bolt upright; I shook it off, and it became a woman—a brown-eyed woman; a woman who laughed. I buried my head in the covers, and when I looked out again the vision had gone.

Sitting there upon a couch, fully dressed except for my shoes, which stood on a chair nearby, and my coat, which hung over the back of it, I pieced together the events of the previous night—all that I could recall.

I had lunched with an editor, that day; an editor who used to think well of my work, and who once held the opinion that it would, in time, even excel that done by my father, in his time considered a master of the short story. His opinion had undergone a change, however; he no longer even considered my work—the little that I did—but, for old times' sake, he desired to reason with me concerning my future, which, he said, I was throwing away.

"You are allowing the fortune your father built up with his pen, to become a stumbling-block in the way of yours," was the way he summed it up.

As a result of that luncheon, I promised to get down to work, and to send the results to my former friend as soon as any materialized. I meant to do so, of course, but habit proved too strong. I left the cafe where we had lunched, and sought one farther down Broadway—where one could get, in a secluded room in the building, tiny glasses of that precious fluid that is at once a curse and an exaltation—a bitterness, and a sweet of all sweets!

Absinthe!

Dear God above! What vicious stuff it is that they give us now, in the name of absinthe! Once, in its clear, green, sparkling thrall, one might find the sweet exaltation of noble dreams—the spiritual elevation wrought by a vision of the streets of heaven, with soft-eyed angels hovering near! Now, in its yellow, muddied depths one sinks as if in a false woman's arms—to deception, confusion, death!

Yet we cling!

But why complain? The power to soothe is there, and to deaden the brain; the brain throbbing with the fading pulses of things that might have lived!

It was in that cafe that the chase of the night before began—that pursuit of an absinthe-created vision of my former self. The self I might have been!

I GOT up from the couch, and stood looking at my shoes, side by side upon the chair. The laces had been untied, instead of merely slipped, in hard knots, off the catches as they were wont to be, when I was indisposed. That seemed odd to me. My coat, too, should have been lying upon the floor, instead of being carefully draped over the back of a chair. None of those things was my handiwork; that I knew.

The conclusion was inevitable: Someone had assisted me into my room, and removed a part of my clothing.

I became conscious of a penetrating odor—the odor of violets.

Was it the woman? I remembered her, now; laughing lips, merry brown eyes and all. "Brown Mouse," I had called her.

Who was she? Was she real, or just a fancy of my own? The coat and shoes argued that she was very real indeed. I wondered if she was someone I knew, but could not believe it so. I had to give it up; my mental condition did not sanction lucid thought.

That night, and the next, and the next, I returned home more like my old self—the self of the stairway—than I had been in months, but I saw nothing of the woman whom I could think of only as the "Brown Mouse."

Then, one night a week after our first encounter, I saw her again. She knelt on the rug before the grate in my room, tugging at my shoes; one of them came off, and a wad of bank notes fell out. She looked up at me with a face that was white and drawn—pinched; she started to speak, then, getting up, she placed the bills in a dresser drawer. I found them there the next morning.

The odor of violets was strong in the room.

How she came and when she went, I could not recall. Just one glimpse of her, there on the rug, was all my memory would yield.

During the week that followed, I fairly haunted the old building, actually making myself offensive peering into the faces of the women who came and went. Nothing came of it. I could not rid myself of the thought of her; at night she haunted my dreams. During the next month I was conscious that she had been with me upon at least four occasions; a new picture of her would flit across my mind, elusive, as always; or the odor of violets would saturate my senses. Needless to say, I was not myself upon any of those occasions.

On one of those scarcely remembered visits she had wept—pleaded with me; but what it was she pleaded for, or who the object of it was, I could not remember. I could recall, though, that she no longer smiled—and I wondered.

On a night six weeks after I first saw the Brown Mouse, as I still thought of her, I came home—bad, very bad. Worse than I had ever been before. When I awoke, the following morning, I knew that she had been with me the night before; her presence, typified by the violet perfume, still lingered. I strove to bring her back to me, as she must have looked when there, but my brain was too dead—too sodden. Then I realized that my hand was gripping something tightly; it was a slip of paper, covered with writing in a fine hand. My eyes, attaining a normal focus, I read:

"The Brown Mouse will not come again. It is afraid, terribly afraid, and it is going—away. Perhaps, if it had been possible for you to have helped me, you would. I know you would. That night, when the money fell from your shoe—Oh, how I was tempted! I needed it so! Hunger makes us do such strange things. It cheapens virtue—destroys it. But it shall not cheapen or destroy mine! Oh, if a 'mouse' could indulge a human hope, it would be that you will draw back from the abyss before it is too late! May it hope that you will?"

No heading, no signature—gone!

I leaped out of bed.

What did the Brown Mouse fear? Was she afraid of me? Or was it something else that threatened her?

My brain reeled dizzily; I felt very ill. Try as I would, I could not fathom the meaning of the words she had written.

Curse the day the Green Goddess of Dreams first laid her cloying lips on mine!

Was the Brown Mouse afraid of me? Oh, no, no, no! I wouldn't harm her for the world! But—

I read the letter again, and understood!

Starving—going down in the unequal battle of feminine frailty pitted against the world—she had sought help from me. And I was in no condition to help anyone—not even myself!

Money? I could have given her that—would have beggared myself for her!

Then a terrible thought shot through my brain!

Could it be that she was afraid of herself, as I had often been of myself? And did she contemplate the easy way out, as I, too, had contemplated it? Was that what she meant when she said she was going away?

Slipping into a dressing gown, I ran out into the corridor. I would find the janitor; he would know if she lived in the building. He had denied all knowledge of her when I questioned him before, but now he would tell, or I would choke the words out of him!

At the rear of the long hall I stopped suddenly. From a partly opened doorway came the odor of violets—strong, sickeningly strong!

With mad longing to find her, and to protect her from that thing she feared—no matter what it might be—I pushed the door ajar and entered.

The room was in darkness, save where the light from behind me trailed across the floor, and out of the gloom something leaped at me. It was the sickening odor of violets, so intense it seemed to my distraught mind a thing alive!

I stepped further into the room, and something swayed before me—something white and vague; then it took form in the semi-darkness.

A slender, white body, scarcely veiled by the shapeless gauze thing about it, swung gently to and fro beneath the chandelier—one rigid, white foot reaching downward as if seeking something to rest upon!

Someone shrieked. Long afterwards I knew that it was I. Blindly I fell beneath the swaying figure under the chandelier. I took the rigid foot into my hands and breathed upon it, trying to warm it—muttering, over and over, broken, senseless, useless words!

An Aviator's Fatal Encounter With the Monsters of the Air

EXHIBIT "A"

By ANNE HARRIS HADLEY

"THE wreckage of the 'plane has all been cleared away and disposed of according to orders, sir," continued Lieutenant Gorham. "It was undoubtedly Captain Rowell's 'plane, although this is a thousand miles from where the flight started; and it is very evident that he broke the altitude record as he had been trying so hard to do. Now, sir, if you will read this—" Lieutenant Gorham extended a small black notebook. "I found it in the breast pocket of his leather outside jacket. I can not imagine why the 'plane did not take fire in falling from such a terrific height. And you will perhaps be interested to know, sir—" he hesitated—"that that same queer odor you can still detect on the book was quite noticeable as we were clearing up."

The Major sniffed the book.

"Um—odd," he said. "All right, I'll look it over."

Lieutenant Gorham saluted and went out. The Major opened the little book and read, at first casually, then intently:

"I am writing this" [ran the words written in Captain Rowell's familiar, irregular handwriting] "in the hope that it may fall into the hands of human beings and reveal the things I have found up here. It now seems improbable I will be able to return and report personally my amazing experiences.

"It is impossible to measure accurately the lapse of time, as my watch has stopped, but I broke the altitude record more easily than I had hoped for the continued mounting. The cold was intense, breathing became increasingly difficult. I must have become dizzy, for the next recollection I have is of a sensation of lightness, as if my body were about to rise out of the still mounting 'plane and soar ahead of it. I assume I had then reached a point so distant from the earth that the attraction of some other heavenly body about counterbalanced the earth's pull. My life belt, however, held me securely, and I lapsed again into unconsciousness.

"The next conscious moment found me lying prone on the softest, most restful substance I can conceive of. I had a sensation as of gentle zephyrs puffing into my face and I opened my eyes. There was an indefinite, shapeless mass above me. As I watched it, I became convinced that it was endowed with intelligence and that its actions were the source of the pleasant, revivifying puffs of air I felt.

"Observing more closely, the mass above me looked somewhat like a huge oyster about the size of a man and of a cloudy semitransparent substance. Its outline was not clearly defined. Imagine my sensations when I realized that it appeared able at will to put forth from any portion of itself streams of its substance which remained connected with the main body and performed the functions of arms! Think of it! An extra arm or two or three—any number of them projected at will from any part of the body! The unnaturalness of it, the slimy horror the formless gray mass induced made me shiver. Though its actions appeared friendly, though it made no effort to harm me, yet an icy sweat broke out all over my body as I gazed fascinated at the unearthly being.

"I found afterward that it transported itself from place to place without apparent bodily movement and by means of some interior energy instead of by the use of legs, of which in fact the creature had none. It was just as if an aeroplane could glide along without movement of the propeller, driven by sheer inner impetus of its engine.

"As my mind became clearer I realized that the strange creature was projecting a portion of itself into an apparently stationary object, and then gently waving the part so transported over me, thus puffing the currents of air which were reviving me. The eerie, creepy sensation this gave me is indescribable. I felt it must be part of some fantastic dream, and yet I knew all too well that I was awake, that no sudden, grateful earth-noise would jar me back to the realm of familiar things.

"Somehow, by what strange trick of Fate or machinations of this pallid, semitransparent creature I know not, but while I sat unconscious, my swiftly mounting 'plane had passed from the realms of the known to this ghostlike region, the borderland between the earth and the moon, that thin portion of space where the gravity of the earth is almost exactly counterbalanced by that of the moon. And I, a human being, a dweller on old Mother Earth, was here in this unutterably strange place—and one of the beings who dwell in it was reviving me. Doubtless he recognized me as earthborn and knew my inability to live comfortably in the thin atmosphere of the place, hence he was pouring air in my face as a man on earth might pour water in the face of one who had fainted.

"As my senses revived my amazement knew no bounds. I sat up, very awkwardly to be sure, for the least effort moved me much farther than I anticipated.

"'How do you do?' I said, by way of showing I was ready for whatever might be in store.

"The creature emitted a queer, whistling noise, which I found afterward is the manner of speech of these creatures who inhabit the zone at the point and near where the gravity of the earth and that of the moon neutralize each other. On account of the small density of their bodies and the great power of their interior means of locomotion, which for lack of a better name I will call engines, these creatures can go a considerable distance on either side of the plane of neutrality and return, but are careful not to go far enough so that the gravity of either earth or moon can exercise on them a pulling power greater than their engines can resist. Later on I made an effort to find out if any had ever done so, but on account of the difficulty I had in making myself understood, I could get no satisfactory information.

"They have great intelligence and have perfected antigravity screens, though I do not understand fully for what purpose they are used. I do know, however, that they are used as resting places for such as are disabled in any way, especially when trouble is experienced in their locomotive apparatus.

"It was on one of these screens that I was lying when I regained consciousness. This screen was a huge affair, in appearance like a thin layer of rose-tinted cloud, yet it bore the weight of myself and my machine, which I rejoiced to see close by.

"I stood up, feeling quite light-headed and dizzy, but the creature, who had revived me and whose captive I apparently was, indicated to me that I should keep still, then he placed near me the object into which he had been dipping. This object was oval in shape and reminded me of a semisolidified cloud.

"The creature made queer noises and wavings of those surprisingly out-thrust portions of his body. At last I understood that I was to make use of the cloud-bowl. I discovered that it was filled with air, breathable by a human being—containing real, life-sustaining oxygen.

"Whenever the thin atmosphere around became too devoid of oxygen and breathing became difficult, I would dip my hands into the bowl and dash oxygen in my face. The effect was quite lasting. The oxygen (or whatever the oxygen-containing substance was, for of its exact nature I am uncertain) permeated surrounding space as perfume does the air, and for many minutes I could breathe comfortably.

"Seeing that I understood what was expected of me, my captor began making mysterious motions near the edge of the cloud mass which was in reality a gravity screen, and I watched, wondering what would happen next. After a minute or so I moved over to my 'plane, carrying the oxygen-bowl along.

"The sensation of moving about was extremely odd, and that of carrying the bowl was no less so. Nothing seemed to have any appreciable weight. This was due at least partly to the gravity screen, which was adjustable to counterbalance part of the pull of either earth or moon as need might be and thus make the attraction of the two bodies practically equal at a given spot. The result of the use of such screens is that the neutral zone, instead of a plane a hair's thickness, becomes for their purposes portion of space perhaps some miles in depth.

"I examined my machine, which seemed to be in good condition, although the gasoline was quite low. The being watched me curiously, then suddenly attached itself to the gravity screen by a tentacle put out, and started hurtling through space drawing the screen which bore me and my 'plane behind him. This dissipated the oxygen around me and I found the only way I could breath was by dipping my head into the bowl. Then I managed with fair comfort. After some time I felt the speed decrease and raised my head to look around.

"All about me were numbers of beings of all colors and sizes, but fundamentally similar to my strange captor. Among these strange creatures color apparently denotes rank or occupation. Their voices or whistles, which more accurately describes what they have in place of voices, are all in a very high key and vary from the sweetest fairy notes of dreamland to the siren note of a factory whistle. I noticed that those of dark, indistinct color had the siren-whistle voices, while some of the orange and pink and blue bodies gave forth extremely sweet sounds.

"My appearance caused great excitement among them; and I can not begin to describe my own sensations as I stood on that soft, cloud-like screen and leaned for companionship against the only familiar thing in sight—my 'plane. All about me was a confusion of these extraordinarily high-pitched whistle voices, and everywhere these indistinct, variously-colored bodies put forth most surprisingly the tentacles that served for arms and as surprisingly drew them back. And I was the subject of the hubbub. Evidently there was a difference of opinion as to what to do with me and my 'plane.

"And while the discussion went on, they observed due regard for my person. Not one of them touched me, but their long tentacles came darting out here and there touching, investigating the 'plane and its mechanism. They recognized and respected me as a sentient being. The 'plane was a created object as were their gravity screens. As I realized their consideration, I could not but wonder, even in the midst of this strange scene, if a crowd of human beings coming suddenly upon one of these unearthly creatures would show equal courtesy.

"At last the hubbub suddenly quieted and I witnessed another surprising occurrence. The strange forms stood still, expectant, moved by the approach of something unseen by me. Then while I, too, waited, breathless for the next development, I saw coming from the direction toward which attention seemed turned a glowing, orange-colored being, bearing a blue-white sphere that quivered and sparkled. The bearer of the sphere came forward and paused in the midst, then suddenly put forth two tentacles in addition to the ones with which it bore the glowing sphere. With these second two tentacles it separated the sphere into halves, and a gas strange —a cloud of perfume, the most exquisite I could imagine—came forth. I could think of nothing but the almost divine sweetness of the odor. I drank in all my lungs could hold, and breathed deeply again and again.

"I found afterward that the odor is to them what food is to us, and is distributed at intervals by orange-colored beings. I also noted that the gray and brown ones always shifted the gravity screens and seemed to be most interested in the intricacies of my ship, hence I infer they are the mechanics of this strange community.

"After breathing in that wondrous odor, I remembered nothing more until I found myself alone. Where my strange captors had gone I could not guess. Impenetrable screen masses were above and below me. My 'plane was nearby and undisturbed. The space between the cloud masses had been flooded with oxygen, the source of which is still unknown to me.

"Whether these creatures have homes and gardens and laboratories, I do not know, but certain it is that somewhere beyond what I have seen, there must be abodes, apparatus with which to work, to prepare the oxygen, the heavenly food-odors, to make the intricate gravity screens. I am consumed with a burning desire to penetrate beyond the cloud-screen barriers and learn more of the life and wisdom of these eerie but highly intelligent beings.

"Finding myself alone, I wandered about between the cloud masses, but dared not attempt to force my way through them lest I should impair their ability to counteract the force of gravity and should find myself falling headlong toward earth or moon. No, it is better to wait and wonder. And after a while, worn out by the wonder of it all, I lay down and slept.

"When I awoke, three of the gray creatures had returned and were curiously investigating my 'plane. I rose from the cloud-screen, on which I had been sleeping, and joined them. They were eager to learn about the machine, and I was quite willing to explain, but since we had no common language, no common gestures, not even similar limbs in common with which to gesticulate, we made rather poor headway. . . .

"These things have gone on for some time. How long I cannot accurately tell, as my watch has long since stopped, and the periods of twelve hours light and twelve of darkness of course do not obtain here. I imagine from the growth of beard on my face that about three

days have passed. And now a new and ominous disturbance has arisen—ominous for me.

"More of these beings than I have seen before have gathered and are hurrying about, first in one direction, then in another. Some are quite angry. They swish back and forth like specters in a dream, moving with incredible rapidity and always most unexpectedly putting forth those surprising tentacles. As they mull about, first one and then another, and sometimes several at once, emit those odd, unearthly, whistle-like screeches, my blood runs cold. I am the cause of the disturbance, just how and why I do not understand, but I am the issue at stake.

"Now they are tearing at the gravity screens. Some pull in one direction, some in another. I do not know the strength of the beings or of the screens, but if a screen should break—

"Well, I have my 'plane ready—as ready as I can make it. Possibly the engine will pick up and start when the fall begins. But suppose the fall should be away from the earth and toward the moon—what then?

"I have taken my seat in the 'plane and adjusted the safety belt. There is nothing more I can do. My action seems to have added to the excitement, but there is still dissension among them.

"They are tugging in good earnest at the screens. They surely cannot stand the strain. The one beneath me is parting. Instead of cloudiness, I see merely space beneath me.

"My engine—"

There the account ended.

The Major sat staring a long time at the little black book and sniffing the odor, faint, elusive, but still delightful beyond anything he had ever encountered. Then he shook his head, sighed, and, picking up a pencil, marked in red letters prominently on the cover "Exhibit A," before he laid the little book carefully in the top drawer of his desk ready to accompany his report to Washington.

Neglected Warning

JAMES IV, King of Scotland, being persuaded by the clergy and bishops to break with England, and declare war against Henry VIII, contrary to the advice of his nobility and gentry, who were to bear both the expense and the blows of a battle, thus overruled by the clergy, raised an army and prepared to march to the frontiers; but the evening before he was to take the field, as he was at vespers in the chapel royal at his palace of Linlithgow, an ancient man appeared to him with a long head of hair of the colour of amber, (some accounts represent it as a glory round his head) and of a venerable aspect, having on a belted plaid girt round with a linen sash. This man was perceived by the king before he came up close to him, and before he was seen by any of the people; and the king also perceived him to be earnestly looking at him, and at the noble persons about him, as desiring to speak to him.

After some little time, he pressed through the crowd, and came close up to the king, and, without any reverence or bow made to his person, told him with a low voice, but such as the king could hear distinctly, that he was sent to him to warn him not to proceed in the war which he had undertaken at the solicitation of the priests, and in favor of the French; and that if he did go on with it he should not prosper. He added also, that if he did not abstain from his un-Christian practices, they would end in his destruction.

Having delivered this message he immediately vanished; for though his pressing up to the king had put the whole assembly in disorder, and everyone's eye was fixed upon him when he was delivering his message to the king; yet no one saw him any more, or perceived his going back from the king; which put them all into the utmost consternation.

The king himself was also in great confusion; he would fain have believed that the specter was a man, and would have spoken to him again, and asked some questions of him. But the people constantly and with one voice affirmed that it was an angel, and that it immediately disappeared after the message was delivered; that they plainly saw him and felt him thrusting to get by them as he went up, but not one could see him go back.

The king upon this was satisfied that it was not a real body, but an apparition; and it put him into a great consternation, and caused him to delay his march a while, and call several councils of his nobility to consider what to do.

But the king being still overpersuaded by those engines employed by Monsieur La Motte, the French ambassador, continued in his designs for a war, and advanced afterward with his army to the Tweed, which was the boundary of the two kingdoms.

Here the army rested some time, and the king being at Jedburgh, a known town in those parts, as he was sitting drinking wine very plentifully in a great hall of the house where his headquarters was then held, supposed to be the old Earl of Morton's house, the specter came to him a second time, though not in the form which he appeared at Linlithgow, but with less regard and respect to the prince, and in an imperious tone told him he was commanded to warn him not to proceed in that war, for if he did, he should lose not the battle only, but his crown and kingdom; and after this, without staying for an answer, went to the chimney, and wrote on the stone over it, or that which we call the mantelpiece, the following distich:

Lasta sit illa dies, nescitur origo secundi,
Sit labor an requies, sic transit gloria mundi.

That the king did not listen to either of these notices, our histories, as well as Buchanan, the historian of Scotland, take notice of very publicly; and also that he marched on, fought the English at Flodden Field, and there lost his army, all his former glory, and his life.

And So Ends
The Last Thrilling Words of

The Transparent Ghost

By ISA-BELLE MANZER

The next after-noon Doctor, Daily inhealed some more of the liquid Fimiliarto Transparent gas. to make him invisible! for he had decovered that he was coming back in his natrel body agsin and he had found out that the Transparent Gas would only make him invisible for three days untill he would begin to turn back into his naturel self again and if he wanted to play ghost it was necessary for him to take more of the gas, he had decided to take a long walk On all sides the desert stretched away to the haze of nothingness -aland of the marage; scens which the jealous desert steals from arid land s and hold up to the eyes of desert men to lure them on Rock River with its cool, watter rippling which seem only a few feet away, then fade out to show a waste of dust and the graym mesquite, which rattles in the hot winds, On a rock plateau of this range stood this town of Kent City. and it's streets are paved with the solid rock of the mountains. At the upper end of the street the cliffs arose sheer for several hundered feet, at the lower end was a succession of broken ledges, which sloped off to the sand desert, where the winding trail come in from the rest of the world. To the left of the Town of Kent-City was a deep Rocky gorge, so grotesque in formation that it did not appear to be a Work of nature, but just around the curve was a grassy spot it was a Grave yard. and just as Doctor Daily Ghost terns the curve he saw that A Funeral was in progress, or rather, had been in progress, The corpse Was there in the rough casket; the grave was gug and the pall-bearers stood aside, reverently holding there hats in their hands. I reckon they're plantin some body, gess I go over." the ghost crossed over but he diden attract any attention. The crowed seemed to be waiting for some-One Two men were standing near the grave, talking earnestly The Ghost asked one of them who the dead man one of them looked up and saw that there was no one he could see He walked abruptly away from his companion and halted a few feet from a white-bearded man. Podner, by your whiskers yo're a preacher; are yuh? I. youster be he said slowly and with his hand he stroked the white beard whitch hung nearly to his waist line. then the man turned on his heel, facing the crowd. Folks, we're in luck

The Funeral will proceed just like nothing happened

Extraordinary,"

Just a moment said the preacher "What happened to be the matter? "Not a damn thing, we needed a preacher bad and you showed up. There yuh Got it!" But Sir have you no preacher? Not now We did have untill last night you see he for got the honest rules in a gaim of poker which give him smaller then kingsup in ten deals and the others got small cards all the time, but sir where is this poker-playin preacher Now?" Well His Soal in Hell's Delight!" and his body in the casket! Iplumb forgot that he coulden say his own oration, That 's where you come in handy, like a gun in a holster. the old preacher crossed to the grave and looked down at the rough coffin while the audience moved in closer He preayed his voice was deep and musical, as he lifted his bared head and let his eyes travel around the assemblage, friends, I have been asked to say a few words over the mortal remains of one of God's anointed men who hs labored in this Town of sin and sinners that the true Gospel might be Brought home to you all He is with you no more, except in spirit but his many good works will live long after his name has bee forgotten

Just then a Hand Tuched the old preacher sholder and the voice of the Doctor, Ghost interrupted the man who deliver the sermon, I dont like to stop a preacher from a sayin what he know a bout a man but thair know need of you telling a lie. to these men they all knowed that old fogy of a preacher

The preacher turned and looked a round but he saw know one who was speaking to me he asked, I did i reckon parson. I. Doctor Daily Transparent Ghost. and I don't believe in sayin good of a old raskel like old preacher Baker if he is a dead man, and i dont belive that you a preacher if you a preacher where is your Bible?? the man who clamed to be a preacher was so frightned he coulden anser the ghost some of the other men stagered and nearly fell in the grave. don't get scart men if i am a ghost i not harm a one of you that done me any harm but this old white haird man is know preacher he a raskel and a gambler let me have that deck of dards in your pocket will you? as the ghost finished all the men glanced quickly at the gambler who was prentending to be a sent, then the ghost said men I'll prove to you that this man is

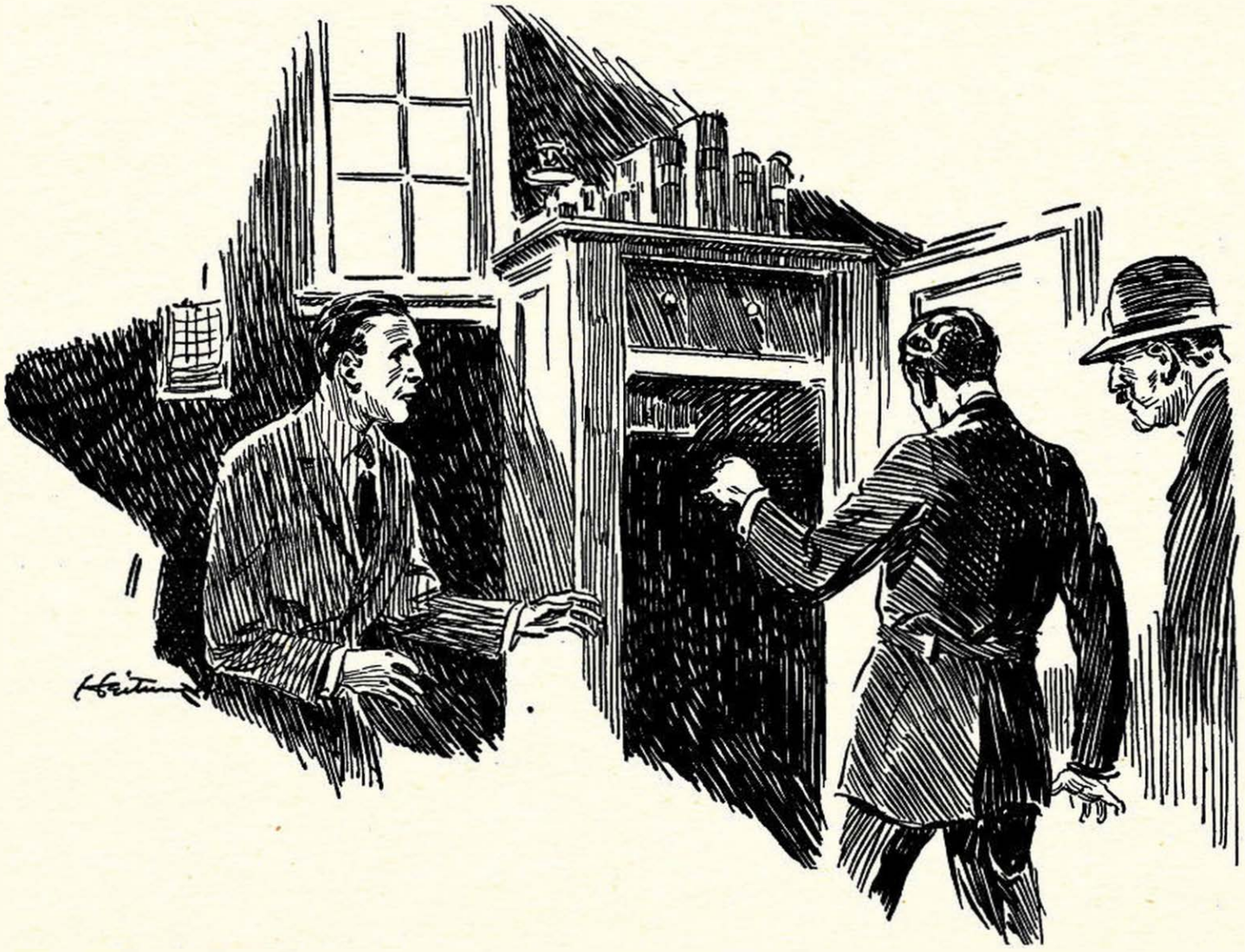
Know Man of Divine Providence he not A man of God. but He A Cur. In human shap, and is the most despicable human being in all the World. Men. how much of a reward is offord for the man who shot Preacher Baker The men Turned to see who was speaking at last a man spoke up One thousand Dollars Mr Ghost It was Detective Wright in disguis the Ghost laughed "I'll get your man for half the reward. get the man and mr ghost the five-hundred is yours.

The Preacher wfs nearly Collapsible but scarcely had the Dtective got Through speaking untill Doctor's Ghost took off his long white beard and then quick as a flash of lighteing he jurked off the preacher wig and And held it out in his hand Before them stood a man with Hair as black as coal and eyes opened he stared at the croud around him his voice was not that of a saint in its place was a harsh, rasping enunciation, toneless, colorless he stood He turned away and staggered against the stome-wall, but the ghost held him fast take it easy, old timer, advised the ghost the detective came up and took the man by the arm but he drew back against the rock then the Ghost said to the croud "Look at him will all of yuh? he is the man who shot preacher Baker in a poker game. and as you got your man I reckon 'I'll be going I'll see later Detective Wright, and the ghost turned and went into the misty space of the desert—alone.

Like Poe's Raven, the Parrot in This Story Was a Bird of Doom

THE DEVIL BIRD

By HAL HALBERT



PERHAPS you who read this story, you church-going, God-fearing people, will not understand a man of my stamp. I have always been of the earth earthy. I have believed in neither God nor the Devil. It has been my belief that when one dies he is dead and fit prey for the worms—nothing more.

I have been a gross materialist. I have believed that religion and God are a panacea invented by the ruling classes to keep the people contented. But a strange and terrible happening has come into my life to make me doubt my philosophy. Perhaps there is a just and avenging God, after all.

My name is Arthur Blum. Only three years ago I was a respected citizen of a certain Southwestern city. I held a responsible position in a flourishing commercial establishment. I was doing well, but not well enough, I thought. I became discontented. The crux of it was I didn't think I was paid enough to reward me for my services, which were valuable and arduous. The owner of the business was a crabbed commercial shark with a pious Sunday face and a shriveled weekday conscience. His name was Julius Perriott.

He would not raise my wages; and so I set out to rob him. I was the cashier. I filled out the checks and he signed them with a flourishing, intricate signature of which he was very proud.

I practiced writing the signature and I became so expert that I could duplicate it. Any bank teller will tell you that an involved signature is easy to forge. The rest was easy. I took money as I needed it, charging on the books to various accounts. I was shrewd. I stole in small amounts, here and there. But the inevitable happened. I cashed a check for one hundred dollars, charging it to advertising. Before I could destroy the canceled check he saw it and became suspicious. An audit fol-

lowed and I was arrested. I had covered my tracks well, but not well enough. I was given a three-year term in the state penitentiary.

Did I do wrong? Yes, according to the customs of ordered society; but I did no wrong according to my philosophy of life. I merely was not efficient. I got caught. Old Perriott robbed and swindled his customers every day. But he was more efficient than I was. The customers did not catch him. He got away with it. He robbed his emp'oyees with pittance wages. Some stole sneakingly while others starved—nobly perhaps. I alone tried to strike back with vigor, but he was too much for me.

I didn't harbor any great hatred for him. He was a man after my own heart. I should have done the same thing in his place. But something, as I have said, has happened that has served to put a great doubt in my mind as to the wisdom of my materialistic philosophy.

I served my term and came out an expert broom maker; but I had no idea of making brooms. Deep down in my heart, I think, there was a hatred for the smug society that had robbed me of the bright years of my youth. I proposed to make it pay. I would take of its wealth. I would gamble my liberty, even my life, against its hoarded property. If necessary, I would strike to take my share.

I WAS released from prison on the first day of September. Two days later I dropped off a freight train as it slowed into the yards of a big southern town that abuts on a wide and muddy river. You can understand that I was a bitter and desperate man. I had come to rob, plunder and to steal.

The bluecoated policeman, who looked at me perfunctorily as I passed, would have served his employers well had he shot me down. But he only looked at me with his searching professional stare, while I endeavored to shake my cheap clothing into a semblance of respectability. All the while I was making my way across numberless tracks toward the river front. From plans made long before, I had definitely fixed in my mind where I wanted to go.

I reached a dirty street upon the river front. It was an ugly neighborhood. I could see the muddy river moving toward the sea not fifty yards away. Before me was a sign reading:

PERRIOTT and SON
Jewels, Curios, Antiques

It was a dingy sign, but I well knew that immense wealth was concealed in that building before me. Here old Perriott, connoisseur and miser, collected his jewels and antiques from the five continents and the seven seas.

As I stepped into the shop a premonition of evil seized me as if a hand were clutching my throat. My spirits dropped to the zero point. It was the lowering atmosphere of the place, I think. The dirty, dingy shop seemed to exude an aura of g'oom.

I caught a glimpse of an ancient spinning wheel doddering on its last legs. A clutter of curiously wrought brass vessels gave off a somber sheen. I started nervously as a tall grandfather's clock solemnly intoned the hour of six in the evening. I shrugged my shoulders vigorously in an effort to shake off the unaccountable depression. And from the dark meaningless lumber of artic'es at the back of the shop appeared a stooped little man. A faded black skullcap was drawn down on a long oval head and from beneath this covering a few straggly gray hairs struggled to escape.

"Something, sir?" he asked ingratiatingly, rubbing his hands together. His voice sounded low and far away to me, as if he were speaking from a distance. I looked at him closely before replying and I was startled by his resemblance to his brother. A little smaller, a little older, a little grayer—that was all. I pul'ed myself together and handed him a letter.

"I came south, sir, for my health," I explained. "My blood pressure is high and the doctors say that I must live near the sea."

There the letter was, self-explanatory; and there was the flourishing, intricate signature at the end that we both knew so well. It represented me in restrained terms as a frugal, hard-working, honest man—a capable clerk and a competent office man. If there be a God, he'll not forgive me that lie.

He finished the letter and looked up at me with his great dark eyes.

"You would work?" he queried. That was all. No inquiry as to his brother.

I put on an humbly straightforward manner.

"I am but a poor man, sir, and I must live in the lowlands. I have a bit of money saved up, but I would work for my board and a pittance for my tobacco. Perhaps, sir, you would find me useful?"

I caught a gleam of avarice in his eye. Ah! yes, he was a true brother of my former master.

"Come back to the office," he invited, civilly enough. We entered a sort of grilled cage with a bookkeeping desk and a few chairs. It was a dark and dingy place; but a bright, shining thing of brass, steel and concrete showed that old Perriott knew how to protect his wares by the latest thing in burglar-proof vaults. My spirits immediately rose. I was getting near the treasure.

"Peanuts! Peanuts! Peanuts!" shrilled a nearby voice.

I jumped nervously, and then looked around me in astonishment. Swinging from the ceiling was a wide perch and on the perch a blackish bird balanced himself. He ruffled his feathers and cocked a dark eye in our direction in a most impatient manner.

"Ah! Hungry, Othello?" quavered the old man, eying the bird affectionately.

Perriott fumbled in his pocket, mounted a chair and held up a few kernels to the bird. Othello gobbled them greedily.

"An English starling," explained Perriott. "He's a good bird and never complains unless he's hungry."

I looked at the bird with curiosity and he returned my stare with glittering eyes.

"He's got the devil in his eye," I muttered.

But old Perriott did not hear me, for when I turned back to him he was regarding me with sly greed.

"You may start to work in the morning," he said. And he named a wage astoundingly low.

My heart hardened within me, but my voice was becomingly grateful.

"Very well, sir," I said humbly. "I'll be here."

I WAS put to work in the office, sometimes aiding in the shop during the infrequent rushes. The customers came from all over the United States, from Canada, and even from Europe itself. They were mostly pseudo-connoisseurs, collectors of various kinds and curio hunters. They bought medieval mirrors, the worn household gods of famous men, documents signed by history-making statesmen, and many other things that I knew not of.

But the most precious of Perriott's wares were his jewels. He claimed to have a great emerald that once was warmed on La Pompadour's bosom and a ruby that had graced the hilt of the Black Prince's sword. I don't know about such things, but the glimpse I caught of the jewels when old Perriott opened the vault made my heart beat with excitement and joy. There were rare emeralds, pearls and diamonds from every clime. There were amethysts and

rubies in antique settings, opals, agates, turquoises, garnets—their brilliance imprisoned in that impregnable vault.

I was not ordinarily allowed to go near the vault when it was open. He unlocked it, brought out the books himself and then closed it and whirled the dial. It became an obsession with me to get into that vault, but the old miser carefully hid the twirling dial with his body. Yet my opportunity came.

One morning he came hurriedly into the office to get the famous emerald to show an impatient prospective customer. He began to whirl the dial preparatory to working the combination. Othello was on his perch, rocking to and fro.

"Peanuts! Peanuts! Peanuts!" he began to scream.

The old man was intent on his task, but his attention was distracted by the bird and he looked up impatiently.

"Feed him," he ordered somewhat pettishly, offering me a sack of nuts.

The perch of the bird was directly in front of the vault door. I mounted a chair and stood there pretending to feed the bird while he whirled the dial and threw open the door. In those few moments I stored the numbers safely away in my brain.

I offered my palm filled with peanuts to Othello. But that strange bird fluffed up his feathers and retreated toward his cage, eying me with his head cocked tauntingly on one side. I threw the kernels into the cage and he plunged in after them.

It may have been my fevered imaginings, but somehow I felt that that black imp Othello hated me. He would flutter his wings at me contemptuously and open his beak as if to cry out, but no sound came. He seemed to be continually jeering at me. I grew to hate the bird. Perhaps it was a guilty conscience—if I have a conscience—for all this time I was preparing for the robbery of that vault. I had already taken an impression of the keys to the shop and had tediously filed out their duplicates. I had also traced the intricate meanderings of the burglar alarm and knew exactly where to snip the connection. I was only waiting a favorable time to strike.

The time came one dark and muggy night about ten days after my arrival. A heavy mist rolled over the river and the old-fashioned street lamps were almost obscured by the clinging vapor. My plan was so simple and easy that it could hardly fail to succeed. Old Perriott, a widower, rarely came back to the shop after the evening meal, and the son, a newly-married man, never. Ten minutes would suffice for me to loot the safe. Wrapping the plunder into a mailable package, I would drop it into a nearby postoffice station, directed to my sister a hundred miles away. I had already written her that I was mailing her some books and that she might expect me soon. Fifteen minutes would see me back at my boarding-house, where I would establish an alibi. The crime would be attributed to some light-fingered Jimmie Valentine. A reasonable time and a good excuse for departure, and I could enjoy the spoils in comfort.

AS I slipped into the shop, my keys working perfectly, the grandfather's clock was tolling the hour of seven in the evening. Its hoarse voice reverberated metallically throughout the building. First I cut the connection of the burglar alarm. Then I made my way carefully to the office, through the eerie shapes of odd furniture, brassware, and the lumber of past ages that made up the stock in trade. A moment later I was flashing my dark lantern on the polished brass dial of the vault. Back and forth I spun it from the numbers in my mind and the *click* of the falling tumblers told me that my memory was good. A final *click*. I turned the wheel and the massive door swung open. I inserted a jimmy between the two inner iron doors and the final barrier fell.

There before me in orderly array lay a Midas fortune. Before the concentrated rays of my electric torch, opals shed their pale radiance, rubies burned, emeralds gave forth their greenish sheen and diamonds twinkled like fallen stars. I did not touch the cash. It was not great and I was after bigger things. I gathered up the jewels, row on row, and laid them carefully in the box by my side. I wrapped the box hastily, but with care, and addressed it to my sister. I was just rising to leave the vault when the opening of the shop door caught my ear. My heart dropped like a weight in my bosom. Some one was coming in the door!

It flashed over me then that it must be old Perriott, for I had locked the door securely behind me. I looked carefully from my covert and saw a light flash on. It was Perriott and he was giving directions to a burly drayman. I remembered a Chippendale wardrobe that had gone out to a customer in the city that day. It evidently had been returned, and old Perriott, fearful of its loss, would not be satisfied until it was safely under lock and key. The drayman grunted and swore over his task, but Perriott was a hard taskmaster and made him handle it with the greatest care. My heart lightened as I waited for its completion, for I felt sure that old Perriott would go home when it was done to his satisfaction, leaving me to finish my plundering in safety. The drayman with many grunts edged the wardrobe into the niche prepared for it, received his fee and departed. Perriott looked around the shop and turned toward the door.

And then I heard something stirring over my head. There was a rustling on the perch above me, a fluttering of wings, and then a screeching voice turned my blood cold in my veins.

"Peanuts! Peanuts! Peanuts!" yelled the black devil. "Peanuts! Peanuts! Peanuts!"

I have never known whether it was my own movements or the flashing of the light and the bustle in the front of the shop that aroused the sleeping villain. But there he was, an imp of Satan above my head, screeching out my doom.

Old Perriott fumbled in his pockets, half turned toward the rear, hesitated and then came on. I believed that he loved that bird as well as his shriveled heart could love anything. If so, it is certain that that poor, pale ray of tenderness had cost him his life. The desperate thief lurking in the back of the shop was determined not to give up the glowing jewels, not to go back to prison again.

The old man shuffled down the narrow aisle and into the grilled office. He pressed the button that flooded us with light. What must have been his astonishment when he saw his rifled vault! What his horror when he saw the fearful being before him clutching an iron bar! I half pitied him even as I struck. But the blow went wild and his lips, shriveled by fear, opened in a bleat of pure terror.

"Mercy, Blum! Mercy, Blum! Mercy! Mercy!" he screamed.

I averted my eyes as I struck again. The screaming ceased, but the memory of that animal cry for mercy lingers with me to this day.

Old Perriott had fallen like an ox under the second blow. There he sprawled, a clumsy, inert thing. Was he dead? I was not sure. But even I had not fallen so low as to strike a fallen man. I listened for an instant to see if the screams had attracted attention, but there was no sound save the lurch of a heavy wagon over the cobblestones outside.

I thought a moment. If by any chance he should revive I were a lost man. There was but one thing to do—put him in

the vault. There the imprisoned air insured that he would not come out alive.

I softly closed the massive door, twirled the dial and looked about me for the starling. I was resolved that he should die. I looked on his perch, in his cage. He was not in the office. He had disappeared.

I let myself stealthily out of the shop, leaving the door unlocked. Fifteen minutes later I joined a laughing group at the boarding-house. The package of jewels was in the postoffice and the jimmy resting on the bottom of the river. I had been gone exactly thirty minutes.

"Where have you been, Blum?" asked one of the laughing group.

"Just having a quiet pipe in my room," I answered easily.

My alibi was perfect.

I RETURNED to the shop the next morning exactly on my schedule. I found the office as I had left it, orderly, commonplace enough in the morning light. Old Perriott had been missed and the son had 'phoned the police. A policeman and a plainclothes man were there. The unlocked door had aroused the son's fear for the old man's safety, but the closed vault and undisturbed stock precluded the idea of robbery. They were discussing a general alarm.

As for me, I was confident. I had no fear. I was eager for the test to come, for I was certain that I would not even be suspected. I addressed young Perriott.

"Will you open the vault, sir? I wish to do some work on the books."

I watched him collectedly while he whirled the dial. The door swung back. There lay old Perriott. He was lying on his face with one hand toward the door. I had left him on his back.

The consternation was terrible. I alone was calm.

"He has been dead for many hours," announced the officer, his voice appropriately solemn.

My heart felt joyous within me. Dead! Now I knew I was safe.

And then something came stalking out of that vault, a black demonic creature. It was Othello. He fluttered up to his usual perch and ruffled his feathers diabolically. He was staring at me, I thought, and his black eyes glittered with a fiendish light. He opened his beak tentatively perhaps a dozen times, but no sound came. Suddenly he let out a strident plaint that I will hear to my dying day:

"*Mercy, Blum! Mercy, Blum! Mercy! Mercy! Mercy!*" he screamed, and it seemed to me that his voice was wailingly triumphant.

"*Mercy, Blum! Mercy! Mercy!*" I thought that he would never stop. There he was on his swinging perch, a devil incarnate, screaming me away to certain death.

I fell back, my face ashen, and stared with terror at the bird. A fiend he was from hell itself, screeching out his eternal refrain. I could stand it no longer, with murder in my heart I started toward the bird. The detective stopped me with leveled revolver.

"I arrest you for the murder of Andrew Perriott," he said.

TOMORROW I die. I read in today's paper of the electric chair newly installed in the state penitentiary. I will be one of the first to rest myself in that deadly seat. But I do not think of that. My mind keeps going back to that black devil, Othello. Whether an emissary of God or Satan, I would die happy could I but once get my fingers around his neck!

Infernal Machine

THE Journalist of the reign of Henry III of France, under the month of September, 1587, records the execution of a Norman, who invented an infernal machine, which he caused to be conveyed to the Seigneur de Milland Allegre. It was a box, containing thirty-six pistol barrels, each of them loaded with a couple of bullets. This box was so contrived, that on opening it each of these barrels was to discharge its contents, firing off seventy-two balls. It was sent with a forged letter as from De Milland's sister, signifying that she desired his acceptance of a curiosity, which the bearer would instruct him how to open. This bearer was the inventor's servant, who had been taught the manner of opening the box, but was a stranger as to what it contained. Accordingly, by De Milland's direction, it was opened, and in his presence, when the pistols were all discharged; but the gentleman and servant happened to be but slightly wounded. The inventor was thereupon apprehended and broken upon the wheel, for his murderous invention.

The Final Installment of

Coils of Darkness

By SYBLA RAMUS

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

BACK TO ENGLAND

"IT'S the most delightful thing imaginable—" Lady Annabel Howard paused to have her cup refilled.

"You remember," she resumed, "two or three months back, when Will took that little run around India. Well, he met her then, and came back positively raving about her. I told you all about it, Helen, at the time. You surely must recall it."

"I haven't the faintest idea what you mean, Ann. If you can ever learn that we are not mind readers, and form the habit of beginning at the beginning, instead of hindside before—"

Pretty Helen Ridenorth helped herself to cake before turning a glance of gentle reproof upon her animated friend.

"Helen! You've simply no memory, my dear, or else you haven't followed me. Why, of course every one knows her."

The ensuing pause in Lady Howard's remarks, due to the passage of the sandwich plate, was hastily filled in by her husband.

"My dear Helen, there's only one way of getting at the beginning of my wife's stories, and that is to sit tight until the end of them. They work on the same principle as the boomerang—"

"Lawrence, you are simply impossible! How can Helen understand if you persist in distracting her from the point? Now, as I was just saying—where was I?—what was I talking about?—O yes! Well, when Will met her in India, he absolutely—really, I don't ever remember seeing Will so taken with anyone—positively not! I said to him then he'd quite lost his head."

"Annabel, I insist—"

"Give her time, Helen. Don't hurry her." Lord Howard soothed the impatient listener as his wife paused for breath.

They were joined by several others, one of whom tactfully took upon himself the task of relieving the tension. Lord Lesquith's handsome sister was notorious for prolonging a narrative shamelessly, and Herbert Kalloch's intervention was gratefully received.

"I quite agree with Lady Howard in her opinion of Lady Halketh," the young Scotchman threw in cleverly, to be rewarded with a smile of appreciation by the original promoter of the topic.

"There, you see! Mr. Kalloch is the first person I have been able to draw an honest expression from. But that's because he's a man, I suppose—and it does take a man to really give a woman her due, when it comes to her charms. Now, not one of you girls has said a good word for her yet. If I do say it myself, I can always see another woman's attractions, and give her full credit for them, too!"

"That is because you can afford it so well." Kalloch again slid gracefully into the conversation, encouraged by the flattering reception of his previous effort, and seeing breakers ahead.

Kalloch's diversion was both successful and opportune. Lady Annabel paused just long enough, as she smiled her thanks to the young man for his compliment, to permit a general chorus of praise to ascend at the mention of Lady Halketh, whose social success in England promised to be even more brilliant, if possible, than in India. Indeed, before Halketh had been able to stem the tide, he had found his wife swimming so far out upon the social ocean that it became more and more difficult to hold her undivided attention to the purpose he had at once entered upon toward the lifting of the curse.

With the first shock of the dreadful revelation had come but one thought, one hope—to reach the centers of medical science, there to battle for a means of salvation for his unhappy wife. Halketh was a man to act without lingering, once he decided his course. Caring little for the astonishment of those around him, and still less for that of the Home Office, to which he immediately cabled his resignation with the request that it be acted on at once, he forced through the preparations for their departure.

During these first terrible days the miserable pair lived through their routine in a kind of stupor of wretchedness, so numbed by their agony that nothing seemed real, not even the flight of time. Mildred, in the first horror of it, had been bowed to the earth with grief and shame. For the time being her deepest self was awake and active and overriding the blighting thing which possessed her. Her agony of spirit knew no bounds in those first days when Halketh seemed a broken man, so fiercely had the ravages of the shock bitten into his soul.

Her love for her husband was perhaps the strongest thing in her—save one, that dark side temporarily pushed into the shadow. To see him suffer as she saw him now, sleepless, with haggard face so drawn that he looked years older; this, to his wife, was torture unbearable. She could have torn her own flesh, burned it in the flame, even, rather than be forced to look on, speechless, while he endured his agony.

At first, in her wild despair, she tried to find expression in which to clothe the storm of feeling sweeping her away from all human moorings. For the first time in their life together her husband was as stone to her. To do Mildred justice, her sufferings were more for him than for herself. For him was the terrible passion of pity and remorse which all but wrecked her reason, and the more, as she saw almost at once, that he was where no effort of hers could bring him the faintest consolation.

It seemed to Mildred that she could not endure to meet the pitying looks of those about them. Although none could fathom the cause of the catastrophe which had changed Halketh in a few hours to the ghost of his former self, all realized that some calamity far beyond ordinary trouble had befallen him. The pall surrounding the Halketh and all they did was too sinister for even the closest friend to touch.

Halketh moved as one in a dream. And Mildred, shaken to the very soul, felt at last that she must go mad before the day would come for their departure from the scene of her self-abandonment to an unnatural guilt. To atone! To atone! Her one longing now centered in the

weary cry, constantly rising from the depths of her sick heart—atonement! Atonement to Ernest! The restoration of his happiness, even if he could never again love her as before!

Yet as the day of departure came, she found a certain curious feeling suddenly overcoming the hitherto intense desire to quit this place of sorrow. For a little the dark curtain of remorse covering her soul since that awful night lifted a trifle. Enough for Mildred to know that although she might leave India, India would always be with her; that, go where she would, do what she would, the longing, the sick, intense craving for India and what she left behind her there would be with her always.

By night Halketh had first arrived at the place which had held for him the deepest, sweetest things in life—and the most terrible. By night he left it, and with none to say him farewell. He had not given out the time of their going, for he felt it an utter impossibility to go through empty forms of leavetaking.

Only one, unknown to Lord and Lady Halketh, rode silently with them, at such a distance that no sound betrayed his presence. Ronald had carried his burden of sorrow and sympathy ever since that night of horror and mystery. But he had endured in silence and unnoticed. His love for Mildred was one of those intense and primeval elements of the Self, and could no more be overcome than any other part of the makeup of the actual man.

So deep was it that it did not even occur to him to try to shake off a sentiment he would otherwise have felt dishonorable—a love for another man's wife. He would have died rather than let it come to light—especially than to have Lady Halketh herself suspect his love for her. He guarded himself so sternly that the idea of his loving her had never crossed her mind. The only indulgence he had permitted himself was to watch her from a distance.

Ronald's intuitions about Mildred were very keen. Perhaps a real love sometimes brings this with it, to one whose inner life is sufficiently awake to respond to them. Like an æolian harp, which answers to every passing breeze, Ronald's psychic senses vibrated to every fluttering breath which affected her. Thus he had always an uneasy feeling of something different, vaguely unusual, disquieting, which underlay her varying moods.

None of these escaped his keen eyes. He knew of her solitary walks, and that they had invariably taken place in the absence of her husband. Whenever his duties made it possible for him to slip away without attracting notice, Ronald would follow Lady Halketh as far as he dared, without her knowledge. His only idea was to be near in case she might stand in need of protection. He thought it unsafe for a woman to wander alone in the jungle, and he was always uneasy until she had returned.

After the extraordinary denouement of the duel, and the dreadful effects afterward evident on both Lord and Lady Halketh, Ronald felt that some deeper tragedy had taken place. He felt, too, that all suspicion or animosity toward himself had suddenly left Halketh. He longed to offer to serve them or help in any way in the mysterious calamity crushing them. Yet he knew, with inner certainty, that it could not be; knew that no help could relieve, no solace bring comfort. He could only look on, as he had always done, passive and helpless.

Well, he would see it through! Watchfully he stood by. His reward was that several little opportunities came to him for giving services slight yet valuable in protecting Halketh from the annoyance of having to force his troubled mind to tiresome detail of which he was then almost incapable. Halketh realized and appreciated Ronald's quiet and efficient help, and the two men exchanged a long glance that told more than any words. The one read the other's true and loyal sympathy. The other read the horror of a secret impossible to share. Impulsively Halketh grasped Ronald's hand. No more passed between them for many months, but a friendship arose in that moment which endured.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

SOCIAL INTERLUDES

THEIR homeward journey! Could it be possible that this was that voyage so often talked of in those happy days of that other life now so far back in the past?—when he had whispered:

"Darling, the proudest moment of my life is yet to come—when I take you home to England to show them my wonderful wife!"

He could have shrieked a wild prayer that this cup be let to pass from him.

They were home at last, where surely no woman was ever more warmly welcomed than Mildred Halketh, just as her husband had expected, long ago. Nothing now but the memory of what had been, to give him strength to carry out that for which the journey had been made.

Halketh threw himself into the work of locating the most celebrated specialists in poisons. Then, in new consternation, he found himself confronted by an absurd obstacle to his plans. It was grimly ludicrous that after the agony he had endured, and the pain and difficulties fought through to reach this point, Halketh should find himself brought up against a situation which threatened to baffle him seriously.

Halketh found himself facing his master in the flood of social attentions pouring down upon them like the resistless Zambesi Falls. At first he took little thought of it. It was natural that some invitations should be given them, and when he thought of it at all it was merely to brush it aside as a temporarily annoying matter of no moment in comparison with the tremendous thing always in his mind.

Almost without knowing it was happening, Halketh suddenly found that they were so involved in the social net that it seemed next to impossible to extricate his wife from it. How was it possible? he asked himself. Surely Mildred could not have realized what she was about in making so many engagements! Or perhaps she was without the necessary energy to decline? Each day he tried to secure her co-operation in his efforts.

"Mildred," he said firmly one day. "You really must give up this constant run of social affairs. Do you realize that we have not even dined together at home once this week?"

"I know, Ernest, and I'm so sorry, too. But it seems almost impossible to put people off—"

"Put them off! What can you be thinking of? Did we come here to dine out with every one who asks us? Simply decline! Let us drop out for the present. That is all that is necessary."

Halketh spoke with some sharpness, for his nerves were far from steady. The constant delay, owing to the shoal of invitations which Mildred seemed incapable of declining, put him out of all patience. She glanced at him uneasily. He was very different from the adoring lover of the past.

"I do try, dear. But everyone is so nice to me—"

"Later, Mildred," he interrupted. "Later on there will be time for all that. But just now—I need you, dear—you must help me, for I cannot do it without you."

His face clouded as he turned aside. Any reference to their object was almost more than he could bear. Yet it must be discussed and seriously, for time was

passing faster than he could have thought possible, and with nothing done so far to show for it.

But so it went on. From day to day no improvement presented in the social situation, and Halketh chafed bitterly. Mildred, on her side, although she professed to be earnest in her desire to be cured, allowed the fascination of her new circle to enthrall her to such a degree that it almost seemed as if the serious purpose they came upon had been temporarily thrust into the background.

It was difficult for Halketh to realize this at first, so intent was he on the battle before him. He only knew that a thousand and one petty hindrances rose in his way as fast as he cleared the last away. Now that the moment was at hand to begin definite action, he found himself hampered in various ways. Furthermore, a suspicion began to grow upon him that Mildred herself was at the bottom of it all, for her co-operation was far less energetic than he had expected.

When, in India, the awful revelation had taken place, and Mildred in her agony of remorse and shame sobbed out her grief and longing to atone, Halketh believed her as intent as himself in the quest for a cure. But as time passed Mildred gradually lapsed into a more indifferent mental and emotional state. Her system, abnormally stimulated for so long, seemed unable to sustain higher aspirations for any length of time. As the physical again asserted itself, demanding its accustomed needs, remorse was lulled little by little until life seemed good once more. Then, too, the old necessity for secrecy was now removed. Her husband knew. He had even permitted her to have the serpents! Thus, once again her radiant self, Mildred keenly enjoyed the empty adulation of society. Her beauty and brilliancy found a larger and more stimulating field in London than ever before.

Halketh had failed to foresee this contingency. Another difficulty also extended the delay in beginning the real work he had thought to have had well under way long before. It was proving not so easy as it seemed from a distance to strike at once into the right line where treatment for such a thing could be found. The case was so peculiar and unique. Halketh had learned so far of only one man, among the many names at first obtained, from whom there seemed a chance of finding what was needed. Then again, even to a scientist, under the seal of professional secrecy, he shrank from exposing the awful truth. But he forced himself sharply to the mark.

He had been waiting some days, as the physician was temporarily absent from London, and by the time the expected message arrived from Doctor Wildnorth, Halketh's nervous impatience had reached such a point that he felt he could not have endured another day of delay. Yet there came still another delay. The illness of the doctor, which had been the real reason for his leaving London for a brief rest, had not been improved by his vacation. He felt unable to resume professional work at present, but would take pleasure in notifying Lord Halketh as soon as he found himself again in London.

At this new link in the already long chain of obstacles, Halketh very nearly lost heart. But his depression soon gave way to acute anxiety as each day passed —the fear of Mildred's chances being lessened with every hour of delay. This goaded him to look for other physicians, as Wildnorth was unattainable—for the present at least. He dared not wait. Already the danger signals were flying in the return to the old alternations of moods growing more and more frequent.

To whom?—where now to apply? How find another such specialist who might be capable of dealing with this particular thing—unique in the annals of medical history?

It seemed to him that he scarcely saw his wife of late. There was no doubt that she simply left the responsibility of their quest to him. She never even asked what progress he was making, and showed no further outward interest in it. Her first wild remorse seemed entirely swallowed up in her engrossing social triumphs, which grew, so far as her husband could see, with each new function at which the beautiful Lady Halketh invariably proved the leading figure.

Then one day Halketh was referred to another great authority on poisons—Doctor Lynch-Pope, recently professor of medical jurisprudence and toxicology at a Scottish University, and now just come to London to give a series of eight lectures to the senior class at the Royal College of Physicians. Halketh consulted him the same morning, and made an appointment for Mildred at four that afternoon.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE UNFORESEEN.

BUT on this momentous day Halketh had difficulty in finding his wife. Only by waiting for her in her own room was he at last able to catch her as she flitted in between two special affairs, both given for her on this same afternoon, as it chanced.

"Mildred!" Halketh rose from a deep armchair as his exquisite wife entered hastily, her steps turning to the bell.

She started, then smiled a fleeting welcome as she reached for the cord.

"You here, dear?—"

He stood firm, obstructing with his hand on the bell. His face was stern, and he spoke in the resolved tone of one who has an unpleasantness to face, and intends that nothing shall turn him from his purpose.

"I have been waiting for you, Mildred," he said coldly. "We cannot waste any more time—"

"My dear," she cut in, "I'm so sorry. I'm late now for Lady Scarrett's, only I had to stop for my fur. Won't you ring for me, dear?"

Her flushed cheeks—her bright eyes! A dark cloud came over Halketh's face as he looked at the lovely face smiling up at him. How beautiful she was!—how fresh and radiant! Too well he knew those signs! He understood to what she owed the buoyant health and bloom she sparkled with, the happy eager spirits shining out as she waited, impatient but still smiling. He loathed it now—this hectic bloom. Far rather would he see her fading away, drooping, anything than with this devil's glow in eye and cheek.

"No, Mildred! I shall not ring—and you cannot go to Lady Scarrett's, or whoever it is—"

"My dear Ernest! Surely you cannot have understood me! I said, Lady Scarrett is expecting me. She is receiving for me this afternoon. Really, dear, you must let me go—"

He brushed aside her words with a wave of his hand.

"Mildred, you have allowed yourself to be carried away. You let these foolish social engagements take up your time, until our great, vital purpose actually slips into the back of your mind. You do not seem to realize this. I must talk plainly. I must warn you that you dare not wait. You dare not lose a moment more, now, than necessity compels us to. Come!"

Many changes played across the lovely, expressive face, as she listened to her husband's serious voice. At first some annoyance was there, to be followed by a look of dread, as she perceived that he was in deadly earnest.

"Dearest," she replied, "you are so good, so patient. You have done so

much, and I know I have not helped as much as I should because I have had so little time lately. But whatever you want me to do, I will do. What is it you wish, Ernest?"

She came to him caressingly, as in the old, happy time—before he knew! It had become difficult for him to endure demonstrations of love. At each touch he felt that he must push her from him. Yet he would not yield to the almost sickening repugnance.

"Mildred," he said in a businesslike tone, as he drew from his pocket a list of names of specialists he had seen, "among all of these none seems to me the right man for the case. But only this morning, and quite by chance, I was told of a new one; one, that is, whose name I had not yet heard of. I talked with him over the telephone, and then went to see him. I was more favorably impressed by him than with anyone I have seen so far. He will see you this afternoon. I am here to take you at once."

She looked at him in startled surprise, and, it almost seemed to him, with reluctance.

"You want me to go—*now*—the first visit?"

"Yes."

"But how could I?—this afternoon, you know. It cannot be absolutely necessary that I go today. I really couldn't disappoint—"

"Perhaps not *absolutely* necessary *today*," Halketh interrupted sharply. "But the appointment is made. It is time, Mildred, that you realize once more what lies before you, and that you *dare* not shirk it longer. The time for action has come, and we must both devote all our energies to this, and this alone!"

She took his hand, but he withdrew it—to arrange his papers.

"Ernest, dear," she said coaxingly, "I'm so sorry, but my afternoon is simply running over. I have Lady Wilton's reception tonight, too—and I must look in at the Duchess's tea after Lady Scarrett's. That will hardly give me time to rest a bit before dinner at the Italian Embassy—and I did want a minute for my gown for the drawing room, but I'm afraid that's impossible today. Anyway—"

"For God's sake, Mildred!" Halketh started from his seat. "Have you no feeling, no comprehension of your condition, that you put such nonsense before this—this—" He looked hopelessly at his wife, trying to think of some way to rouse her to her danger.

"Of course I have, dear! Don't you see, it's only because I have so much on my hands this week, that I have to put it off? But I'll try any time next week, if you'll let me know early enough. Now, dear, I *must* run away—"

Halketh stayed where he was, directly in the way of the door, and gave no sign of moving aside. He wondered if Mildred's almost total lack of feeling was one of the effects of the curse she was under. Perhaps it was a merciful dispensation of Nature that she seemed to have forgotten the seriousness of her condition. With these thoughts in mind he replied to her as gently as he could.

"Dear Mildred, all this brings me to what I have been intending to say to you for some time past."

She started, and looked at him apprehensively.

"I want you to give up all this social business for the present. I want you to devote yourself, heart and soul to—our purpose. Will you do it, Mildred?"

"Why, Ernest!" Her voice took on a sweetly reproachful tone. "I would so love to do all that you ask, but how can I, dear? I am simply buried in engagements even past the end of the season—and of course I know you wouldn't want me to break them, would you, dear?"

In despair he flung out his clasped hands.

"Mildred! Mildred! You drive me to madness! What do you mean by your indifference — your callousness—your—Oh, cannot you understand where you are going, my poor child?"

She would have hung about his neck, but this time he put her back.

"No, Mildred! We are at no point for cajoling now. Things cannot—*shall not*—drift much longer. You must help me as you swore you would when we left India. Finish your week, if you think you must, but cancel all your coming season. This I insist upon! Do you understand?"

He left the room without another word. Disheartened, he called alone on the great Dr. Lynch-Pope that afternoon. Frankly he told him of the discouraging scene with his wife. The physician listened closely, but made no comment. As he granted an appointment for the following week he asked quietly:

"What will you do if she refuses to come?"

"She will come!" said Halketh, his jaw setting grimly.

When Halketh reached home, after his interview with Lynch-Pope, he felt unaccountably tired. He almost fell into the first chair he came to.

"If this agony of delay goes on much longer," he muttered, "I believe I shall have to have some treatment myself. Stanton!" — to the footman — "Send Rufus to me with a brandy and soda—to my room!"

Halketh got to his feet, unsteadily. Stanton noticed the way his master walked as he went toward the stairway, and paused on his way for the brandy. As Halketh took the first step he reeled, and Stanton was just in time to prevent him from falling.

"Your Lordship is ill—"

Halketh gazed dully at the man, as if he did not comprehend. After a few seconds, in which he seemed to rouse himself somewhat, Stanton began to lead him toward a chair.

"If you would rest a bit, Sir—"

But Halketh had himself in hand again. He turned to the stairs once more, shakily. Stanton still supported him as he mounted the stairs, until he reassured him.

"No, no, Stanton, I'm all right. I was a bit shaky for a minute, but it's nothing. Let Rufus bring the brandy."

Stanton hurried on his errand. Rufus was told not to call his master to dinner. He would ring when he wanted anything. So he was left alone, although Rufus waited, anxiously, hoping to be called.

All the Halketh servants had been long in the service of the family and were devoted to their young master. But, like all other servants, they talked among themselves about the curious situation between the master and mistress, which all who knew them sensed but could not understand. Also, that the Lady's entire time was taken up with teas, dinners and receptions, which her husband hardly ever shared.

"The master looks terribly ill," said Stanton, shaking his head sadly as he held forth that night in the servants' dining room. "I'm thinking he's worrying himself into a sick spell over something he's got on his mind. I wish he'd let me call the doctor for him, before we've to send for him in a hurry—but I wouldn't dare suggest it to his lordship myself."

"I wonder he ain't lonesome, poor dear!" sighed the second cook.

"You've said it, Dykes!" remarked Stanton portentously. "It's looking after he needs—and that before it's too late!"

Rufus thought it all over as he sat waiting, hoping to hear the bell. Eleven rang.

"It don't seem natural that the master hasn't rung," mumbled Rufus. "I don't like it! Someone ought to go in. Her ladyship ought to be here—"

He shook his head doubtfully and took a turn about the room.

"A bad business—a bad business, that!"

He went to the window and drew the curtain aside and looked out into the darkness and the street lights.

"No! It ain't right for him to be alone there all this time. I'm going in!"

He closed the curtains with decision, then ran up to his master's room. Softly he entered, and softly he approached the bed. Halketh was lying on his back, his eyes wide open, yet seeing nothing. Rufus, in a shock of fear, bent down to look at him and heard a muffled groan. The master was ill—terribly ill, and unconscious!

Rufus rushed out to call help, to telephone for the doctor, and to send messages flying here and there for Lady Halketh. The doctor came quickly, but not Lady Halketh. None of the messages reached her, and she did not return until a very late hour.

The first doctor sent for two others. After consultation they agreed that Halketh was suffering from the effects of some long-continued mental strain, and that he was now threatened with a serious attack of brain inflammation. He must remain in perfect quiet and under the best of nursing for some weeks to come.

Mildred became entirely her own best self under the shock of this sudden misfortune. All that was good in her rose to the surface. Her love for her husband had been her greatest inspiration, and now, for the time being, dominated the unnatural obsession. All that love could dictate came to Mildred in the care she gave to her husband as she nursed him to recovery.

Once again all was as it used to be. Too weak still to think of troublous things, Halketh enjoyed, without a question, his wife's presence and devotion, thankfully forgetting, or at least deferring the memories of the torture of the recent past. His recovery was slow, and the autumn was well advanced before he felt something like his old self and ready for serious work.

As Halketh came back to strength, Mildred, on the other hand, drooped noticeably. She seemed to be entering one of her old phases of lassitude—an extended one this time. Halketh grew anxious again, and feared the strain of caring for himself might be telling on her now. And this anxiety delayed his own recovery. He felt that her danger grew with each day the treatment was postponed.

When Halketh was definitely out of danger, and with no further need for her nursing, his wife dropped back again into the butterfly existence she appeared to love so well, and he found himself just where he was before his illness so far as Mildred was concerned. And yet something had been gained. The closeness of each to each was almost restored. The old tender happiness was theirs again, as it had been before Halketh faced the curse. The great love he bore her awoke again in its strength. His heart cried out for her, and he clung desperately to the present blissful interlude. He felt now that he had been too severe in his first grief and horror and in the past months of misery.

Mildred's apathetic condition soon changed into restlessness, then into a highly restless state demanding constant excitement. She seized hungrily on every new opening that promised a new sensation. She went everywhere and sought constant distraction, while Halketh looked on in growing sadness and dread.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE BLOW FALLS

As soon as Halketh had regained sufficient strength he again sought Dr. Lynch-Pope. The doctor's associate received him with the information that Dr. Pope was expected daily from Zurich, where he had been called for a consultation a short time since. Dr. Thursby undertook to reserve the first appointment for Lady Halketh.

Thank God!—thought Halketh, as he motored home after his talk with Dr. Thursby. At last it began to look as if the first real step was to be taken—barring the slight delay of waiting for Dr. Pope's return.

At this time Mildred was entirely engrossed in a series of dazzling social affairs occasioned by the presence in London of the Viceroy of India, who was spending a few weeks in England, his wife and suite with him. The popular Lady Halketh was an indispensable figure at all these events, and Lady Jane, the wife of the Viceroy, had conceived a great attachment for her already. She had issued invitations for a great reception in Mildred's honor. The occasion was to be a brilliant diplomatic affair as well, and all social London stood on tiptoe with interest and excited curiosity.

Mildred seemed animated by a frenzy for movement, for life, which grew hourly, her husband thought despairingly. To his deep concern and against his strongly expressed wishes, she had in these late days plunged into such a mad whirl of gaiety that he could not snatch one moment of her time, even if he had felt the energy to try.

He resigned himself to his wife's course, while holding on to the firm intention of taking charge of her, forcibly if necessary, as soon as the summons came from Dr. Lynch-Pope. So now he desisted from all conflict on minor issues, and Mildred went her mad way undisturbed by remonstrances. Their house was often filled with guests, though the master refused to trouble himself to play the host.

As the days dragged along while waiting for the return of Dr. Lynch-Pope, Halketh grew more and more anxious about his wife. Her present condition seemed to him different from any former state. He feared that some ominous change was taking place in her, and watched her as closely as he could.

On the morning of the day of Lady Jeune's reception, a message came to Halketh that Dr. Lynch-Pope was expected to return that night, and would probably see Lady Halketh at eleven the following morning. Mildred had insisted that her husband should accompany her to the reception. He was quite well enough now, she said, and it was nonsense to make that excuse any longer. Anyway, he needed distraction.

Halketh wearily consented. Nothing could have been more distasteful to him in his anxious and perturbed state. But Mildred was in such a highly nervous condition that he did not dare to cross her in this fancy. On this particular day she was almost impossible. Nothing could please her, nothing be done to her satisfaction. So changed was she that Halketh, on looking back on their former life, could hardly recognize her as the same Mildred.

It was quite late when they left the house, much past the hour when they should have arrived. Mildred had been so exacting that her despairing maid almost gave up hope of dressing her at all. Three times she changed; three different costumes were tried and thrown aside, until her fancy for a fourth lasted long enough to get her on her way.

The distinguished company was quite assembled by the time Lord and Lady Halketh arrived. No gathering of the season had included so many notables, diplomatic or otherwise. Lady Halketh could scarcely respond to the chorus of greetings overwhelming her before she could look about her. Her husband was drawn into a gathering of men whose talk at any other time would have been of keen interest to him.

But just now he was preoccupied with increasing uneasiness about his wife. He regretted that he had con-

sented to her coming out in so alarmingly nervous a condition.

Unaware that the Secretary of Foreign Affairs was asking him an involved question upon the Indian situation. Halketh was craning his neck for a glimpse of his wife, and totally failed to give the gentleman his attention. He was recalled sharply to his present duty by the Secretary's pull at his arm.

"I say, Halketh, I don't believe you have heard a word I've been saying to you!"

The Secretary looked severely at him over his glasses, while Halketh turned a painfully vacant glance upon him.

"I beg your pardon, Sir—"

Halketh's abstraction was obvious, and the Secretary was known to be a bit testy of temper. Then Captain Fitzgerald, an old friend, laughingly came to the rescue of his former schoolmate.

"I say, old chap, your wits are woolgathering, as usual, I see. The Secretary has been trying to get a sensible remark from you for some time past, and you paying no attention to anything except those handsome girls over there. Let's take a turn to the smoking room for a bit."

Fitzgerald linked his arm in Halketh's, the mollified Secretary at his side. Everybody liked Fitzgerald. He had a jolly way with him that no one thought of resisting. Halketh felt at the moment that it would be a relief from the laughter and chatter now running so high, and the three men began to make their way through the crowded room.

It was rather slow going. As they worked along, Halketh caught the clear ripple of his wife's high, nervous laugh, and in the sound was something he felt should not be there.

"I'll finish this talk with the fellows, then take her home—if it's possible," he said to himself anxiously, as the three slipped into a quiet nook just at the side of the great arched portal which gave from the drawingroom into the wide hall, equally thronged with guests.

"Terrible jam, isn't it, Halketh?" said the Secretary. "Shows how popular your charming wife is. But I'm most anxious for your answer to the question I asked you before. Your long experience on Indian soil makes your opinion of great value. You must give me your exact views."

Halketh, in self-defense, concentrated his mind on answering satisfactorily, seeing no other chance for escape.

Meantime, the great event of the occasion was about to occur. An excited whisper ran through the room and grew into a buzz of intense expectation. Royalty was at the door! Everyone was on his or her feet, not to say his neighbor's.

Lady Jeune pushed her way to Mildred on what would have been a run, had the crowd permitted anything more rapid than a form of undignified wriggle. The flurried hostess projected herself as best she could toward the guest of honor, who should have been in her place at her ladyship's side, ready to receive the impending honor.

"Thank Heaven, I've found you at last!" she panted as she seized Mildred's arm. She had a strong desire to shake her soundly. Really, Mildred had been too provoking all that afternoon! So scandalously late in arriving; so thoroughly negligent since; and then to slip away from her side just when she must have known that the Great Arrival was due any moment!

"Mildred! Come with me at once—at once! Do you hear? Her Royal Highness is arriving!"

She drew Mildred through the crowd, passing down the great drawingroom toward the door through which the Royal Lady was just appearing.

Suddenly Mildred stopped short, as if petrified. She stood, gazing at the opposite wall, while her body began to tremble violently. She lifted one arm slowly, pointing forward. A strange hush commenced to fall. Those nearby followed her gaze, and those further on moved to see what it meant.

A picture hung where Mildred's gaze had fixed itself—a picture of a beautiful, white-robed girl, over whom a monstrous serpent poised its coils, the head raised to strike.

Slowly Mildred moved toward it, while the guests fell back to give her space. Slowly at first she moved, then faster, faster—until she dashed herself upon the canvas, wild screams bursting from her lips. Madly her hands beat upon it—clutching, striking, tearing, until the canvas was rent like a rag, her wild shrieks and wilder laughter echoing through the great rooms.

Before anyone in the dazed and horrified company thought of going to her, she fell to the floor, writhing there as the screams died away in choking, dreadful gasps.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

THE COBRA'S CURSE.

AT the first strange hush, Halketh felt the old, warning shadow fall upon him. It was that same, sinister, chilling warning he had known before, and never in vain; so that now his heart beat faster with vague fear as he looked about for his wife.

When he heard her first scream—he understood! With a bound he left his two companions while the Secretary was delivering himself of a weighty expression of opinion on Indian affairs. Forcing his way desperately through the dense and horrified throng until he reached Mildred, he lifted her as she lay still writhing convulsively on the floor, just as the poor, distorted consciousness faded, and left her inert in his arms. The prayer filled his heart that this was the end—for death at this moment seemed more merciful than the life he saw before her.

Then he gathered her up as if she were a child, and rose to his feet. The shocked hostess and pitying guests, forgetting even Royalty in the presence of such a tragedy, tried to be of help. But Halketh pushed them all aside.

"Home, home!—I must get her home! Will someone please call my car?" was all the answer he would make, as, with set and stern face, he carried his unconscious wife toward the main entrance.

"Home!—Full speed!" he said, as he got into the motor.

He took her to her room and laid her gently on the bed. Then he locked the door and sat down to wait—making no effort to revive her.

At last she stirred. Her eyes opened, and turned upon his stony face.

"Where am I? Ernest—what—what has happened?"

He spoke no word.

"Ernest!—Ah!—" A scream, muffled and choking, rose to her lips. "I know now—I remember!—Oh, Ernest!—I shall die!"

She broke into such a terrible fit of weeping, such bitter, rending sobs, that Halketh, unable to endure it, caught her in his arms and wept with her. Gradually the agony spent itself. Mildred lay exhausted, unable to speak until some time had passed. Then:

"Ernest—I have not wished to tell you—but—but—*they* have all died! Oh, my God! My God!"

She hushed the wail, as he started back, shuddering.

"Yes!" she went on. "This morning—the last one died. And when I saw—that picture!—Oh, Ernest!—you don't know what I suffer—*how* I suffer!"

She groped for his hand, snatching at it convulsively. Gasping, she continued:

"All summer it was wonderful. And then—then—they did not like the cool weather. They did not feel like stinging!— Oh, Ernest!—have mercy on

me!— But still, every now and then, I could make them—only it was no longer strong enough—no more the same—while you were sick, you know. But I went on, until they began to die—one by one!— And now—the last one! Ernest! You must save me!— I *must* have them! You must—you must—*must!*"

Again her voice rose to a scream. She groveled in the bed, gnawing at his hand in her frenzy.

Halketh seized her. He laid her gently on the pillow, holding her down quietly.

"Mildred, look at me!"

She did not raise her eyes.

"Look at me, I say!"

Slowly her eyes went to his. With a supreme effort he began to speak.

"Mildred, I can be brave for both of us. Tell me—will you not die, rather than live like this?"

She started violently, then stared at him wildly.

"I would do it so gently, darling—because I love you—"

"You—you—what do you mean? What do you ask of me?— Ah, I know! I know what you want!—But I will not—I will not! No! No!"

He waited until she was quiet.

"Not if you will not consent, dear. But would you not wish it? We would both go together, you know! And you should not feel it— I promise you that!"

His unnatural, stony calm; the awful, cold-blooded proposition; these, for the moment, terrified Mildred back to something like reason. She sobbed, but gently enough now, as she said:

"My darling! May God forgive me the sorrow I have brought you! But oh, do not ask me this!—I cannot! And it shall not be necessary, Ernest. You will not need to do it—for I cannot live this way without the poison. It will not be long now!"

"Do not fear, Mildred," he said, in the same calm, gentle voice. "It is for you to say. But—if I may not send you to sleep quickly and easily—I shall not allow you to bear a long agony—"

She shuddered again, wondering and fearful.

"You shall have relief, my darling—I swear it! If cure there is, it shall be found! If not—"

His voice had become natural again and shook with emotion. He paused, thinking.

"It can be a secret no longer, in any case. The scientists must come. All medicine shall be roused—to take this evil from you!"

As he turned to leave, Mildred clutched his sleeve. Her voice had a new, trembling note of pleading eagerness.

"Ernest!"

He bent over the pillow, waiting for her words.

"Yes, dear—tell me?—"

She hesitated another panting moment, then:

"If—if relief does not come soon—Oh, my husband!—Take me back—to India!"

His hand shook as he smoothed back the dark hair.

"Let us not—speak of that—not yet!"

She sank back again, turning her face to the wall.

Halketh passed from the room and hurried to the telephone, and, in the least possible time to accomplish it, the great doctor and toxicologist was in the house. With him came his associate, Dr. Thursby, and two other men whom the great man had summoned, after his preliminary short talk with Halketh over the telephone. The four specialists were shown into the library instead of being taken at once to the sick room. Lynch-Pope was slightly surprised at this, in view of the urgency of the case, although he was prepared to expect something unusual.

Halketh passed almost the last step of the Calvary his weird fate called him to tread, when, the assembled physicians close about him, he told the ghastly story of that evening, in simple, heart-reaching words.

The men of science were dumfounded. No similar case had come before them. Imagination could have conjured nothing to approach the reality, whatever it might have pictured. For the moment they did not see their way. Experiment and study, time and observation, would be necessary before a definite treatment might be decided upon.

Meantime, however, the patient's condition was found to be grave. She stood in immediate need of stimulation. The loss of another hour, even, could not be risked. Trained nurses were sent for, and doctors remained with her day and night, though they themselves were nonplussed.

As every known resource of science was brought into action, as the greatest brains in medicine studied over the unhappy girl, she lay helpless in the midst of all that wealth could procure for her salvation. Telephone and telegraph were flashing messages here and there, in search of the rare and little known drugs that Pope and his colleagues, even against hope, felt must be called to their aid.

During this sad time of bitter suspense and bitter agony for Halketh, scandalized society wagged its forked tongue, wondering and conjecturing. The papers gave weird accounts of the mysterious attack, with imaginary details most effective for spreading the latest sensation of the day—Lady Halketh's sudden collapse into insanity.

The Halketh home was hushed, closed to all callers. All that was known was that the lady was seriously ill. She was surrounded by all the men of note who could be summoned. But her condition at the present time was too grave, too uncertain, to permit of any definite statement being given to the public. Halketh remained entirely secluded and saw no one but the physicians.

They waged a noble battle, those men of science. Yet as day succeeded day, they knew it was no victorious struggle they were fighting so desperately. In spite of unceasing and devoted effort to hold up her vitality, Mildred grew steadily weaker. She fell at last into a coma which no available stimulant seemed able to reach.

Dr. Lynch-Pope had at no time been able to give Halketh a definite opinion as to the true condition of his wife. Her case was one quite apart from anything in his previous experience and that of his confreres. Thus, having no data from former patients, they were all of them at sea now. They studied Mildred's varying symptoms and reactions day by day, but had not yet worked out a line of treatment that held any promise. Nothing had thus far appeared to affect the condition for better or worse. The root of the trouble seemed to be beyond the reach of medical treatment. Vitality was gradually slipping away. It had been stricken at its source, and could not be stimulated nor resupplied.

As time passed, the physicians saw clearly this one great fact, and saw also that if they could not soon hit upon a remedy, the sufferer would glide out into the Beyond, as a wreath of mist passes into the atmosphere. It was time to make Halketh aware of the threatening danger, and to obtain his consent to a step which seemed the only recourse, as matters stood.

Accordingly, Lynch-Pope held a long, frank conference with him, in which he tried to place all the possibilities, so far as he could then see them, clearly and definitely.

"Remember, Sir," he said, "I do not feel that we are defeated, even though for the present we feel compelled to go

back a bit, as one might say—over our own steps."

Halketh listened with his head bowed in his hands. The strain was telling terribly on him. He had seen only too clearly that his wife's life was fast slipping away from human power to help. His agony grew more intense with each hour. He saw her passing away from him, and the old infinite love came back to him so strongly that he could not stand the torture. When the doctor finished speaking, Halketh looked up at him with both hope and dread in his worn face.

"Save her! Save her!"

The cry burst from him, and the desperate pain in his quivering voice went to the sympathetic heart which all the years of science and its stoic training had not made callous to human woe. He pressed Halketh's hand hard, as he said:

"That is why I am going to propose something which I have led up to with the explanations I made to you just now—regarding the necessity of finding a treatment to which she can react without delay or uncertainty."

"Anything—anything! Only save her—save her!" Halketh implored the great medical man, who was plainly at the end of his resources—save for that which he seemed to hesitate to propose, even in this grave moment.

Lynch-Pope looked pityingly at Halketh as he leaned tensely forward, awaiting the word of hope.

"My lord," he began, "I trust will forgive what I am going to say, for I solemnly believe it the only means of saving her. Tell me this: Would you wish Lady Halketh to live, even at the price of a possible continuance of the—the—habit?"

Halketh started violently, nor could he repress the shudder running over him. But—Mildred! Her life must be saved! He tried to speak, then choked before the words would come. He swallowed, made a struggling effort again, and spoke:

"Do not ask me of the future, Doctor—but in the name of God, save her now!" His last words came wildly.

Dr. Lynch-Pope drew a deep breath as of relief, and said with quiet emphasis:

"I think you have decided wisely, Sir. Now that I have your consent, I will say that she must be inoculated with her former stimulant *at once!*"

Halketh leaped up from his chair.

"You mean—you don't mean?—" He could not go on.

"I do!" The doctor answered gravely. "I cannot answer for Lady Halketh's life if she remains much longer without it."

Halketh paced the floor like one insane. Either alternative was too terrible. Besides—could it be obtained? He turned a ghastly face on Lynch-Pope, who said encouragingly:

"Anything to keep her strength up just now, you know. Later on we may be able to effect a permanent cure. But for now there is only one thing to do, and that quickly. We must gain time!"

"At any price, save her!" cried Halketh, in his despair. "But how—where—I fear—do you believe they could be obtained here?"

"Easily. In fact, anticipating your decision, I have already sent for them from the Zoological Institute. I learned that there are three alive at present in London, and I believe they are now on the way here."

Halketh's agitation was so great that the doctor began to fear he might give way under the strain. He felt profound sympathy for the unfortunate husband, and wished that some relative or dear friend might be with him during the time of greater suffering that he foresaw.

"I beg you to leave everything to me, my dear Lord Halketh," he said very kindly. "It is unnecessary for you to distress yourself."

But Halketh had forbade the admission of anyone. He chose to endure his torture alone while waiting through the hours which must pass before suspense should lift—either for better or for worse.

After some minutes of unbroken silence Halketh turned with a start, to find that the doctor was no longer in the room.

"'The serpent—the serpent!" muttered Lynch-Pope, as he walked quickly to the sick room. "'As it was in the Beginning.' The serpent!"

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

ATONEMENT

THEY awaited the arrival of the grim remedy. After a time Halketh sent a message to the sick room, begging Dr. Lynch-Pope to come to him as soon as possible. When the doctor came, a few minutes later, Halketh said:

"If she were taken back to India—do you think it might be more hopeful than to wait here for the—the—effect of what—we are expecting tonight? These—could of course go with us, to sustain her meanwhile?"

The pleading in his words was terrible to hear. Lynch-Pope answered guardedly. It was still too early to forbid hope.

"At present it is impossible to say. We must first see what results we shall have, as we now stand. In any case, until we can recruit her strength, it would be unsafe to attempt moving Lady Halketh. I hope for much, however, as soon as we can use the stimulant."

Halketh dropped his head on his arms across a table. He was almost in despair now, for the doctor's manner, rather than his words, had told him that hope was nearly gone.

As Dr. Pope stepped into the hall, Stanton came to him.

"If you please, Sir, there's a gentleman at the door who begs so hard to see his lordship that I could not refuse to ask further instructions. Would your honor speak to him—begging your pardon for the liberty I'm taking?"

"Who is he, Stanton?" Dr. Pope decided to take matters into his own hands, if the answer justified it.

"It's Lieutenant Ronald, Sir—an old friend of my lord and lady both—that much I know. He's just arrived from India."

Stanton paused a moment, dropping his voice still lower, although both men were already speaking in whispers.

"If I might make so bold, Sir, his lordship's just killing himself, sir—with grief for her ladyship. He'll go mad, sitting there day by day, alone. And Mr. Ronald is such a fine, cheery young gentleman as would do my lord a world of good—and such a devoted friend—"

Dr. Pope had decided.

"Bring him up, Stanton! I will be responsible."

"Oh, sir, I thank you!—" Stanton's relief showed in his face. "And if I may ask, sir—how—how—does her ladyship?—"

He could not go on, and his voice broke with the last word.

Mildred had always been much beloved by all in her service, do as she might. Although her lapse from wifely devotion in the last months had been severely censured, they loved her none the less. And then the zeal with which she had nursed her husband in his recent sickness had almost restored her to grace in the servants' hall. In their desire to defend her they ascribed her present sickness to the strain she had then put upon herself. Nevertheless, that mysterious thing which conveys to those around the sense of something undivulged, secret and sinister, was abroad throughout the household.

As Stanton hastened to the waiting visitor, the doctor re-entered the room where he had left Halketh, and ran a quick eye over him as he sat there, apparently sunk in a gloomy revery.

Without addressing him, the doctor left again as quietly as he had come in, to meet Stanton coming up with Lieutenant Ronald. At his first glance, the doctor's trained eye recognized the true friend in the ex-soldier's face.

"Pope is my name, and I am attending Lady Halketh," he said in low tones. "I am very glad to have a friend of theirs here, to remain with Halketh just now."

The sudden pallor which blanched Ronald's face told its own story to the man of science, skilled alike in reading the signs of emotional and spiritual afflictions and physical ones.

"You mean—you think there is—danger?—"

Ronald could scarcely utter the words.

"Do not take me to mean that there is no more hope for Lady Halketh, Mr. Ronald. We are about to try a remedy from which we expect promising results. It was of her husband I spoke when I said that it is most necessary that a friend be at hand, for he has been under a terrible strain so long that I am really anxious about him also."

The doctor drew nearer the door, indicating to Stanton that he himself would introduce the visitor.

"I must warn you," he whispered, "to go in quite casually. Talk to him as a matter of course. Try to keep him from sinking further into the apathy you will find him in now. I hope much from your presence and support, my dear sir."

Dr. Pope opened the door to admit Ronald, and closed it after him silently.

Ronald had heard conflicting accounts of Mildred's mysterious attack on the first day of his arrival, and he had hastened to the Halketh home within an hour afterward. Deadly fear for her had seized him and drove him there, that he might learn the truth.

Since the departure of Mildred and her husband from India, Ronald had tried heroically to live down the suffering of her loss. Not that he had ever expected their acquaintance to mean anything more than it had always been—simply the reflection of a joy that might have been; in some other world, some other life. At last, however, he looked it in the face—to find that unless he might know himself near enough to see her now and then, even if only to glance through the window of the house that sheltered her—life would not be worth living any longer. So the Home Office received another resignation. And now, Ronald, with fear and anguish in his heart, stood in Mildred's home, to learn his supreme lesson of pain.

Halketh sat at a table, his head resting in his hands. He did not move as Ronald crossed the room quietly and paused near the table. He did not seem to realize that anyone was in the room. At last Ronald spoke to him, as simply and naturally as if both were back again in the old happy days in India.

"I've just come in, Halketh. Let me hear how you are?"

Halketh looked up at him with a strange, ghostly look of a far-back remembrance.

"You love her, too! I'm glad you're here—"

That was all he said. But Ronald knew he had succeeded in reaching him and that he could help him as the doctor had hoped.

THEY came by night—those terrible messengers of the ghastly hope on which Mildred's life now hung. Nor was the time long in which even these might be of use, it seemed, so quickly had her vitality ebbed since the setting of that day's sun.

As the light faded, the anxious medical men found it imperative to use every possible means to stimulate heart action as they fought to gain time until the living things they looked for should arrive to give their awful aid.

Meantime, a slight response in strength induced Dr. Lynch-Pope to send a word of encouragement to Halketh.

Almost in the same moment came the arrival of the sinister-looking cage containing the needed elixir, and preparations were rushed for testing the effect of the dreadful expedient that everything now depended upon.

The black hours of waiting Halketh had passed in silence, still sitting as he was when Ronald found him. The two men shared the vigil, with scarcely a sound breaking the quiet, until Pope's hastily scribbled note of hope was brought. Then Halketh spoke—three words only, as he laid the note just read on the table beside him:

"Stay with me!"

And Ronald's answer was little more:

"I'll see you through—always!"

And they went back to their world of silence, not knowing if hope were with them, or fear alone, to be their final comrade. So they waited. At every faint sound in that stilled house the two started and their eyes turned to the door. Yet still the time crept by, and message there was none.

At last it seemed impossible that so great a length of time could be in one night only. It must be more! And still no word! Halketh could stand it no longer. He *must* know something, if only that they were at work.

"Wait for me!"—

He rose from his chair, pressing his hand heavily on Ronald's shoulder, as he half-whispered the words. For another moment he stood so, leaning on the strong support he seemed unable to stand without, then braced himself for the effort of walking. Ronald steadied him and walked to the door with him. There Halketh paused, standing for a time with the doorknob in his hand, and staring in Ronald's eyes.

"Wait for me!—" He turned, opened the door, and went out.

Even as he neared that other room, Dr. Pope came out. The look in his face sent the blood from Halketh's heart.

"My lord, I was coming for you—"

Halketh clutched his sleeve.

"What—what—"

He could gasp no other word. The doctor led him gently into the room.

"We must still hope," he said. "But—I beg you not to despair, Sir—but the serpents will not bite!"

Halketh groaned and covered his face.

"No—no!—it is not so bad as that—not yet!" whispered Pope. "But there seems no way of rousing their activity. The cold—this climate—they are torpid."

"Then—she—she?—"

"We hope to provide Lady Halketh with the stimulant, nevertheless. We have killed them to extract their poison. Hypodermically injected, it may avail—"

At that moment Dr. Thursby appeared from the inner room, where Mildred lay.

"We are ready—there is no time to lose!" he said, holding up a hypodermic syringe.

Pope sprang forward. "Come, Lord Halketh," he said quickly, and the three men entered the bedroom.

Two doctors were bending over Mildred. Pope prepared to use the needle.

As he lifted the white arm, he paused, looked sharply in the quiet face—then laid the arm gently back again on the coverlet, turning to Halketh as he did so.

He understood! No cry passed his lips. But even the little group of physicians, men well accustomed to such scenes, bowed their heads with wet eyes, as Mildred Halketh passed away upon her husband's breast.

They left them there alone—together.

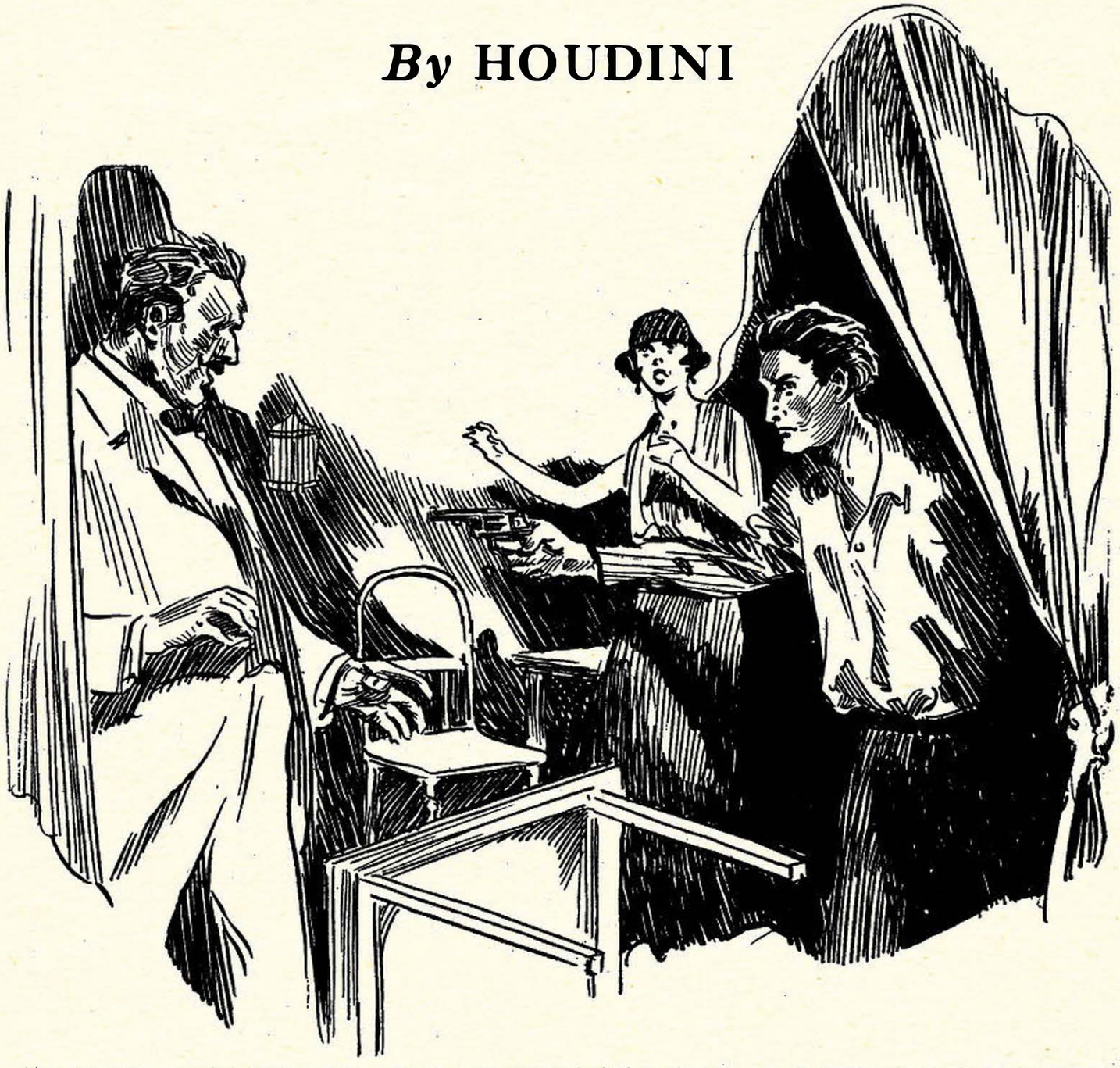
The cobra's curse had passed.

THE END

The Concluding Installment of Houdini's Spiritualistic Expose—

THE SPIRIT FAKERS OF HERMANNSTADT

By HOUDINI



After finishing a theatrical engagement at Roanochers establishment at Vienna, Houdini, Master of Escape, takes a jaunt through the Maros valley. He is approached by the Countess D—, who has fallen in the hands of some unprincipled blackmailers headed by the notorious Popkens, a self-styled spiritualistic medium. Popkens has been endeavoring to secure from the Countess D— and her sister, Rosicka, a written confession of their dead father's misdeeds, intending to later use this confession against them. Houdini is persuaded to accompany the Countess D— to the castle where he temporarily falls into the hands of Popkens and his comrades. He is shackled and thrown into a secret dungeon of the castle where he escapes by methods known only to himself. At which point you take up the narrative—

DESCENDING the side of Castle D— with my hands manacled in front of me was rather a ticklish business, but owing to the shape of the stones there were many crevices into which I could dig my fingers, and the wall was rough enough to provide sup-

port for my bare feet. I would have made my escape without great diffieulty, except for my hasty oversight in not locking the door to the dungeon when I left it after having thrown my assailant into the oubliette.

The man managed to make his way out, and he recovered his revolver, which had either been precipitated into the oubliette with him, or else was lying on the floor of the dungeon in which I bad fought him. I went slowly down the wall of the Castle D— to within twenty feet of the river, when he made his appearance at the window of the tower above me, revolver in hand.

He fired two shots at me, but fortunately he was too excited to aim accurately. I half dived, half fell, into the Maros River. The water could not have been more than six or seven feet deep where I dived, for my head came in contact with the bed of the river and I came near being stuck in the soft mud. I struck out under water for the opposite shore, for my only hope lay in getting away from accurate range of the man's weapon.

Swimming with the hands manacled is not as difficult as might be imagined. Those who have seen my motion picture, "Terror Island," in which I have to enter a ship through a door in the bottom, will realize that I am a strong swimmer, and my skill stood me in good stead now. A lump of warm lead, deflected by the river, touched me gently on the shoulder and sank heavily past me. I realized that the scoundrel in the castle window was still shooting at me, and I wondered whether he could see me from his position above the river, as I swam under water as close to the river bottom as I could.

Forced at last to come up for air, I found that I was well past the middle of the river, and that the water was shallow enough to stand. I showed hardly more than my nose above the surface, however, for I did not care to reveal myself as a target for flying bullets, even though the dusk was deepening every minute. I took a deep breath, and continued my progress along the bottom.

I finally pulled myself out in the shadow of some bushes that grew on the bank. Peering through these, I saw two faces at the window through which I had escaped a few minutes before. My assailsnt had been joined by another of the gang, who doubtless had hurried to his aid after hearing the shots. Another report rang out, and a bullet hit the water under the castle, close where I had dived. My foes had not seen me, then, as I swam across the river, for they believed I was where I had fallen in.

This conjecture was confirmed a minute or so later when another of the gang came to the water's edge. He peered along the buttress to see if he could discover my body lying on the bottom. He also fired one shot into the water near where I had gone into the stream. Cupping his lips, he shouted up to the two scoundrels in the window, and then began peering very carefully into the river, walking downstream for a hundred yards, in an attempt to locate my body. Coming back to the buttress, he again searched the water carefully, looking upstream toward the spot where I had fallen in. He again cupped his lips and shouted back to his fellow conspirators. They shouted back to him to remain on guard and keep up the search. Then they left the window.

The darkness grew thicker, and I worked to free myself from the handcuffs. I had picked out the wooden plugging from one of the locks before I left the oubliette, but the other was more difficult, for the plugging had swollen as a result of its bath in the river. However, I soon had both hands free, and I chafed my wrists to restore the circulation, for they had been cruelly lacerated by the close bite of the steel.

How I unlocked the handcuffs is, of course, my own secret. Even though the locks were mashed, I found them less difficult to remove than the German police handcuffs at Cologne, during the trial of my suit against the police official who had slandered me by publicly proclaiming me a charlatan. At Cologne, I was stripped and fastened by a pair of expertly made links, which, on the testimony of the locksmith who made them, *could not be opened even by the key that locked them.* The handcuffs that Popkens had clamped so tightly on my wrists, however, were ordinary police manacles, and I was thoroughly familiar with their construction, for I have made locks my special study for many years. (This particular cuff was made in Sheffield, England and was one in general use throughout the continent. It is a clumsy cuff and can be jarred open by a quick glancing blow on the open side of the manacle. This causes the spring to snap back, which in turn pulls back the small bolt.) But my wrists were bleeding, and my whole body ached from the brutal treatment I had endured at the hands of the gang from Hermannstadt.

My first thought was to summon help. With this in mind I clambered through the bushes and struck out haphazard in the general direction of the village I had left. Then I though of Rosicka and the Countess D—, and the devils in human form in whose power they were held at that moment, and I resolved upon the dangerous plan of returning to Castle D— to their aid.

If I had coolly weighed the chances against me, I probably never would have considered such a foolhardy line of conduct as returning to the castle. The men there were my foes. They were well armed, and desperate. I was unarmed, and naked. Yet, after all, I had the advantage which attaches to surprise. The five men from Hermannstadt believed me dead. The obviously sensible thing to do was to find a peasant and summon aid at once, but at the moment this seemed like a tremendous waste of time, for the blackmailers had Rosicka and the countess in their power, and were perhaps even now torturing them into revealing the dead secrets babbled by their father in his dying delirium. So I determined to take advantage of the darkness and return.

I could no longer see the sentinel on the opposite bank, but I did not doubt that he was there. Taking the handcuffs with me, I warily slipped into the Maros River, and swam noiselessly to the opposite bank. I crawled out cautiously, and retreated into the shadows. Pretty soon I heard the sentinel coming slowly toward me. Straining my eyes to see him as well as possible, I crouched to spring. He must have seen my white body move in the darkness, for he uttered an exclamation, and his hand was on the trigger of his revolver as I knocked it from his grasp.

He was completely taken by surprise, and offered amazingly little resistance. I took his outer garments from him and handcuffed him with the steel bracelets that Popkens had used on me. He made no outcry, and I gagged him to prevent his giving an alarm. With strips torn from his own undergarments, I then tied him to a stout shrub, and proceeded to clothe myself in his trousers and blouse. I even tried on his shoes, but they were much too big for me. I reflected that it would be easier to climb the castle with bare feet than with shoes on, in any event, so I contented myself with the man's outer garments, and turned my attention to entering the castle.

I suppose I could have entered boldly through one of the doors without being detected, but the risk of meeting someone seemed too great. I had found, on my descent, that the rough wall of the castle was very easy to climb, so I decided to enter by the human fly method. I scaled the wall, and made my entrance through one of the windows in the second story. I stood noiselessly in the darkness for a minute, and then

began to feel my way toward that part of the building in which the spirit fakers from Hermannstadt had confined Rosicka and the Countess D—.

The door into the corridor was locked, for I had come into one of the rooms that was no longer used, but I unlocked it with much greater ease than many American jail locks, for it was old, very simply constructed, and yielded readily to my knowledge.

As I passed noiselessly down the corridor, I heard a low moaning from one of the rooms. The door was closed, but not locked, and I stealthily entered. It was the room into which the old servants, the man and his wife who looked after the upkeep of the castle and cooked the meals, had been thrown by Popkens and his co-conspirators. The ruffians had not even gagged them, for there was nobody within hearing distance besides themselves and the deaf caretaker of the grounds, when they were thrown into the room. It was the woman who was moaning. She was lying face down on the floor, tied to a bedpost, and her position was painfully uncomfortable. In addition, she was badly frightened, for she expected no mercy from men so brutal that they would strike a girl like Rosicka and offer such indignities to the Countess.

I released them both, and sent the man posthaste in search of help. I was afraid to let the old woman go with him, for fear he would not return, once they had left the dreaded castle behind them. So I told her to remain in the room. I cautioned her husband to make no noise as he went out, and together we stole like two cats through the dark corridors and out into the night. I grasped his hand, whispered in Magyar a command to return with all possible speed as soon as he got a sufficient number of men together to effect a rescue, and then I returned to the castle.

I heard a weird voice, sounding like a woman's voice, coming from the large room where Rosicka and the Countess had been tied up. I listened at the door for several minutes, but I could make nothing of the sound. No light came from beneath the door, and I judged that the room was in darkness. Still that uncanny voice droned on, in Magyar. I could not distinguish many words, for the voice came to me very faintly through the door. My curiosity and my anxiety at length got the better of my fears, and I noiselessly, stealthily, opened the door.

A luminous ring was moving in weird spirals high in the air. The voice had ceased momentarily, but soon the luminous ring ceased its spiraling and remained stationary, and the voice spoke again, softly, with a peculiar wailing intonation. I was puzzled to know what was happening. Then the truth flashed upon me, and I was amazed at the utter audacity of Popkens. Having failed in his attempt to extort from Rosicka the secrets of her dead father, he had the effrontery to resort once more to a spiritualistic seance in an effort to break down her resistance, before attempting to apply torture.

No other sound was heard except the breathing of the four men, and a smothered exclamation from time to time from one or the other of the two women, who had been placed at one end of the table, as I found out afterward, and bound into their chairs. The voice droned on, and I soon realized that Popkens was trying to make Rosicka think that it was her mother's voice commanding her to reveal the secrets.

The seance, after all that had happened, could hardly be expected to convince anyone, especially Rosicka, for she knew now that the men were unscrupulous charlatans. The plan was unworthy of so clever a man as Popkens, for, now that Rosicka had seen that the men from Hermannstadt were in reality his accomplices, and other happenings had dashed her faith in him, she could hardly believe in the reality of any spirit voices that he might produce. But Popkens, the charlatan, confident of his own powers to deceive, and knowing full well that he could imitate to perfection the voices of the girl's parents, still thought he could work on Rosicka's credulity through a seance, despite all that had occurred to undeceive her.

I listened for a while to the voice. The language was, of course, Magyar, but, as the voice spoke very slowly, I had very little difficulty in understanding it. Despite the weird, sepulchral quality of the tone, which the medium obtained by holding rolled-up paper in his mouth while he was speaking, the voice must have borne a distinct resemblance to the living voice of Rosicka's mother, for presently the girl started weeping, and little choking sobs joined the sepulchral voice in a weird duet.

The voice told Rosicka that her father was undergoing terrible torments, because of the sins he had committed while in the body. In any case, it said, the torments would continue for many long years, for the man had sinned grievously, but, since no one was utterly beyond redemption, Rosicka had the chance to assist her father to a possible future atonement and end to his sufferings. She was to write out the terrible confessions of her father, made in his delirium, and sign it in the presence of the men who had come from Hermannstadt, so that they could witness the signature. It would not be necessary to read it to them, but she must show the confession to Popkens. Then she should take the paper, alone, into the black dungeon, and conceal it behind a certain stone in the wall, which the voice described in detail. This stone was loose, and could easily be pried out with a knife. She should replace the stone, and say nothing to anyone about what she had done. Popkens, said the voice, was very evil, and she was loath to let him know the confession, but there was no other way in which the evil Count D— could be offered the chance to expiate his crimes; and furthermore a spell had been put upon Popkens that would make him powerless to make known to anyone the contents of the document. She had been obliged to use Popkens as a medium, because the spirit of Count D— could not get into rapport with a medium of more refined psychic fiber, but the spirit of the Countess would lend Rosicka her aid. The document could not be used by Popkens in any case, the voice explained, because it would be hidden in the black dungeon, and his mere knowledge of its contents could not harm Rosicka or her sister unless Popkens could prove his statements. The other four from Hermannstadt would witness merely the signature, and would not read the contents of the document. Then, perhaps centuries later, someone would discover the paper, and with this earthly revelation of the old Count's crimes a chance would be given his spirit to make expiation.

I was more and more amazed as the seance proceeded. Popkens evidently thought he could convince Rosicka that the spirit voice was genuine by branding himself as evil, for Rosicka now knew that he was evil, and might take the frank admission of this fact as a sign of the truth of the seance. Truly, Popkens had found the girl so easy to dupe in earlier seances that he overestimated her gullibility.

I stole cautiously around the group, a shadow among the shadows of that great room. I stopped directly behind the false medium. As long as the men were not actually torturing the women, I thought it best to allow the seance to continue, and thus allow time for the reinforcements to arrive. But now the voice trailed off indistinctly and died away in a soft whisper. The luminous ring, which was nothing more nor less that a phosphorescent ring painted on the wide mouth of a long speaking trumpet, again began describing its weird spirals in the air over the heads

of the sitters. Popkens stirred uneasily, although he was *supposed* to be in a trance. He was manipulating the speaking trumpet, which is part of the stock in trade of every medium, when I suddenly seized the hand that held it, and closed my left hand over his windpipe.

I knew the signs. I knew that the seance was about over. A lamp would be lighted, I would be discovered in the room, the two women would be tortured (since the seance had failed to convince them), and the men would either kidnap them or extort the document from them before help could arrive. Help might already be close at hand, or it might not come for hours. My own position would become precarious in any case, for the men would undoubtedly murder me out of hand. There was nothing for it except to prolong the seance. Since the medium was about to come out of his supposed trance and bring the sitting to an end, I resolved to take his place and continue the seance.

My grip was like steel at his throat. He could not cry out, nor could he release his right hand from the powerful hold I had obtained on it. He clawed frantically at the hand that was shutting off his wind, and a strange bubbling gurgle came from his throat. This alarmed me, but needlessly.

"He is coming out of his trance," whispered one of the men to Rosicka, for so he interpreted the sound that he had heard.

Popkens slumped into an unconscious heap. I stuffed his own handkerchief into his mouth as a gag, and slit his blouse with his own knife, silently, to obtain strips wherewith to bind him. This I did, silently, while the sitters were waiting for him to utter the groan that should show the spirit control had left him and he had recovered consciousness. I had attended many seances. I knew the procedure well.

I trussed up his legs so that he could not kick or make any other noise with his feet when he came to, and took the medium's place at the head of the table. Straightway the luminous circle again began to weave its loops and spirals over the heads of the sitters, but it was I who manipulated the trumpet, and not Popkens. He lay behind me in a trance that was much more real than any he had ever undergone during his seances.

I had withdrawn from his pocket, while searching for his knife, several wads of paper, already rolled, and I stuck some of this in my mouth to give my voice a sepulchral sound. In my case this procedure was really necessary, for if I had spoken in a natural voice, the American accent with which I spoke Magyar would have betrayed me. But, with paper in my mouth, and my voice further disguised by the speaking trumpet, I began to talk, very slowly, in broken words, as if I were the spirit of old Count D—, torn with contrition, and begging, pleading for a chance to expiate.

I continued in this vein for twenty minutes or more, when I realized that the other conspirators were getting restless. I don't think they suspected I was not Popkens, no matter how poor my Magyar accent may have been, for they could hardly dream of anything so strange as Houdini, whom they had seen drowned in the Maros River, returning to overpower the medium and take his place. But they had not expected so long a seance, and were impatient to have it over with.

I sensed this impatience, and prepared to meet the inevitable discovery of my presence. Of the five men, one was bound and lying by the river's bank. Popkens was trussed up, gagged and unconscious on the floor behind me. Three were left to oppose me. The seance had continued for the greater part of an hour before I took Popkens's place. Help might come at any minute. But I could not count upon this, for I did not know how far the old servant had to go to summon aid.

The sepulchral voice in which I was speaking trailed off into silence as Popkens's voice had done. Rosicka had long since ceased sobbing, for she no longer heard her mother's voice. I arose silently and stole like a shadow to the two women. I cut their bonds with the knife I had taken from Popkens, and then pondered what else I could do to protect myself and the two girls. The thought came to me that I could overcome each of my remaining three assailants in the same way I had overcome Popkens, and I proceeded forthwith to grapple with one of them. But I missed my first hold in the darkness and he uttered a frightened oath as I grabbed him. He half arose and his chair crashed to the floor. We fell together, I on top, and I quickly had my knee at his throat. Then one of the other two men lit the lamp.

I drew the revolver of the man under me and sprang to my feet. I was not quick enough, for I found myself looking into the muzzle of another revolver.

"Drop that weapon!" my opponent shouted.

I suddenly dropped to the floor, at the same time raising my right leg in a tremendous kick at the man's hand. He fired as I dropped, and the revolver flew out of his hand. My bare foot had landed, painfully for me, on the weapon, but the kick had disarmed the man. I at once covered the other man, who had lighted the lamp, and asked Rosicka to take his weapon from him. The Countess picked up the other revolver. The man I tried to throttle arose and rushed at me, snarling like a wild beast. I was forced to shoot, and I sent a bullet into his knee. He sank to the floor, with a look of pain, and reached for his revolver. He was out of his head from rage and pain. Fortunately for me, his weapon was in my hand instead of his.

"You see," I exclaimed in Magyar, "resistance is useless. The old servant went for help a long time ago, while I stayed here and heard your leader trying to delude the ladies into thinking it was their mother's voice they were hearing. There is your leader on the floor."

I pointed to Popkens.

"He is unconscious—no, he is coming to. See, he is blinking his eyes. I have been Popkens for twenty minutes, while Popkens has been lying there in a trance. It is well for you that you did not shoot me. It would mean the rope for all of you."

The men glowered at me. The man on the floor sat nursing his knee and cursing very loudly.

"The police have been notified," I said, "and soon there will be many strong men here to take you into custody. Now, if you please, you will let the ladies pass out of the room. It is not pleasant for them to listen to such cursing as our friend in the corner is indulging in."

I waved my hand toward the man with the wounded knee.

"No, by God!" howled the shorter of the two men, barring Rosicka's way to the door. "They will stay here, and we will do the going out ourselves. Stand out of the way, while I release Popkens."

Popkens by this time had spit out the handkerchief that I had stuffed into his mouth, and launched out into a stream of as disgusting and filthy profanity as ever I have heard. I did not understand nearly all of it, but Rosicka looked sick, and the eyes of the Countess opened wide in horror. I would not let the men untie him, and they would not let the two women pass through the door. We had reached an impasse, as they would not obey my commands, despite the weapon in my hand.

Then suddenly one of the men kicked the lamp over, and as it crashed to the floor the room was plunged into darkness. Rosicka uttered a shriek as one of the scoundrels wrenched the revolver from her. Several flashes of fire spit into the gloom as the man shot at me in

the darkness. But the sound of many feet caused them to burst out into the hallway.

They were too late, for they ran plump into the arms of a dozen peasants, who were armed with heavy clubs, pitchforks, and axes. The peasants had been summoned by the old servant, who accompanied them back to the castle. They quickly disarmed the man who had the revolver, and trussed up all three captives in the room where Popkens lay straining at his bonds. Three of the peasants went out to the river bank and brought in the man I had tied up.

The situation was hopeless for the men from Hermannstadt, but Popkens had not yet played the last card in his game of brazen effrontery. Beaten in his efforts to obtain the document, he now sought to effect his own release and the release of his companions from the trap into which they had fallen.

"I think, Countess," said Popkens, who had just been swearing so frightfully before her. "I think you had better instruct your people to unbind me and my comrades and let us go back to Hermannstadt. There are certain secrets about your father that you might not care to have made public, and if these people knew them, they would probably chase you out of the country."

Rosicka turned white. I thought then, by the strange set of her lips, and I still think now, that it was righteous and fierce anger rather than fear that made her blanch. I felt keenly for the poor girl in that moment, but the Countess won my heartiest admiration. She turned her dark eyes on Popkens with all the dignity of a queen.

"I haven't the remotest idea what you are talking about," she said. "These people all knew my father, the Count D—, and if I were you I would not slander the memory of that great and good nobleman. I think, after all that has happened, you will not find anyone who will believe you."

This was a master stroke. Popkens realized how precarious his situation was, and what actual physical danger he was in. Besides, he had no proofs.

I saw the Countess in Hermannstadt later, after the hearing on the cases of the five spirit fakers. From her I learned that Popkens had formerly been an agent of the Count, her father, and it was as such that she had seen him at Castle D—. Popkens was so close to the Count that he had been associated with him in his dark crimes, and he did not dare reveal them to the authorities because of his own criminal connection with them.

Under duress, however, he told this story, which was as near a confession as he made: he had acted as agent for the Count in a large number of promotional schemes backed by the Count's money, but in which the Count's name did not appear. The Count had cheated him out of all his share of the earnings, and threatened to expose him as the active agent in a number of mysterious robberies, in which the Count, to protect himself, had manufactured evidence pointing toward Popkens as the perpetrator. Popkens, had known of the oubliette and the black dungeon during his association in the dark deeds of the Count, and he knew the mysteries of the castle as well as the Count himself. He had returned to Castle D— to demand a final accounting from the Count by threats of exposing his infamies, and made his way to the Count's room only to find him dying. The two girls were in the bedroom, and Popkens listened outside the door to the remorseful man's delirium. That was how he knew that the two girls were in possession of the Count's secrets. He had become a spiritualist charlatan thereafter, having dabbled in black magic and deceptive tricks, and one day, when the Count's daughter Rosicka attended one of his seances in Hermannstadt, he conceived the bold plan of getting her, by trickery, to write down the confessions made by the Count in his dying delirium. He knew the black dungeon, and he planned to steal the document after Rosicka had placed it behind the stone, and then he could blackmail them out of all they possessed in return for restoring the document to them. Thus he would revenge himself upon the Count's descendants, and become master of their estates.

Popkens was convicted of conspiracy, attempted murder, and kidnaping, and he and his companions were given long prison terms. Among his disciples in Hermannstadt was a Russian named Ileanadorff, who left Hermannstadt and made his way back to Russia before the authorities could apprehend him. I have reason to believe that Ileanadorff was in reality the false monk Ileador, known as Rasputin, who became the most sinister figure in Russian history. It will be recalled that Ileador, or Rasputin, witnessing the feats of black magic performed in the Czar's court by Irving Bishop, told the Czarina that he could do much more marvelous things, and from that time he gradually gained an ascendancy over the Czarina, and later the Czar, that made him the real ruler of Russia. Never was any other ruler so profligate and wicked as Rasputin, the evil force behind the throne of Czar Nicholas II.

Countess D— thanked me for all I had done for her, and told me she had but one regret in the whole matter.

"What was that?" I asked.

"Do you remember," she replied, "that when Popkens tried to threaten me before my peasants, I told him my father was a great and good nobleman whom I would not allow him to slander? It is the memory of that lie that hurts. If it were to be done over again, I do not think I could say a good word for my father, even if life itself were at stake. I ask only that he be forgotten. Mr. Houdini, you and I and Rosicka and that devil Popkens are the only persons in the world who really know what my father was. You can sympathize with my feelings."

THE END

Caution of a Brother's Spirit

TWO wealthy merchants, traveling through the Taurine hills into France, upon the way they met with a man of more than human stature who thus said to them: "Salute my brother Lewis Sforza, and deliver him this letter from me." They were amazed, and asked who he was? He told them, that he was Galeacius Sforza, and immediately vanished out of sight. They made haste to Milan, and delivered the duke's letter, wherein was thus written: "Oh Lewis! take heed to thyself, for the Venetians and French will unite to thy ruin, and deprive thy posterity of their estate. But if thou wilt deliver me three thousand guilders, I will endeavour that the spirits being reconciled, the unhappy fate may be averted; and this I hope to perform, if thou shalt not refuse what I have requested: farewell." The subscription was: "The soul of Galeacius thy brother." This was laughed at by most as a fiction: but not long after, the duke was dispossessed of his government, and taken prisoner by Louis XII, King of France. Thus far Bernard Arulnus, in the first section of the history of Milan, who also was an eyewitness of what had passed.

Further Adventures on the Planet Venus Are Graphically Described in the Following Chapters of

DRACONDA

By JOHN MARTIN LEAHY

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

ST. CLOUD AWAKES

WE ENTERED a richly-furnished room and took seat, Henry and I beside Draconda on a divan, the princess and Mynine on another and the old man in a big chair, which, though there were several servants in the room (soon dismissed by the queen), had been pushed forward by Nytes.

It was a pretty sight to see the princess perform this little act of kindness for the old man. She was on the threshold of life, in the first flush of womanly beauty, while he was white-haired and wrinkled, had one foot on the brink of the grave, as it were. He thanked her with a smile, then looked at us with wondering eyes.

The room was rich in furnishings, but everything bore the stamp, sumptuous though all things were, of a beautiful simplicity—a simplicity akin to the dress of Draconda. The room was lighted by little hanging lamps of silver, and the plain, somber beauty of the place seemed to soothe the eyes and the mind.

"Now we are alone," said Draconda, "and can talk. I thought we should be favored with the company of the high priest, whose name, by the way, is Sallysherib, and that of Ta Antom, which means The Wolf; but Ta Antom—there is no need to speak of Sallysherib—wished to be excused. He is not pleased with what—with the mystery of that which has occurred. It is just as well that they did not come—no, better. I am more at ease."

She was silent for a moment, as though in troubled, painful thought.

"Oh!" she cried, with a sudden movement, a curious look flashing over her face.

Then her low, musical laughter filled the room.

"How silly!" she exclaimed. "Pardon me, my Quainfan, my Farnermain, but I was thinking of something that—How happy it were if sometimes we could only raise a barrier against thought! But enough of this!

"I was going to tell you—"

She looked at me, a smile touching the corners of her mouth.

"Not yet, my Farnermain!" she laughed.

"But I was going to tell you—this is my old friend Mayto. He is a philosopher—the wisest man in all the land. But he does not give his wisdom to the world, because of the priests, of whom more anon."

"It seems," I observed, "that they wield a power truly dreadful."

"Dreadful? Alas, my Farnermain, you have caught a glimpse of it. But hear now the story of Mayto.

"Many years ago, he was seized and condemned to death by burning for the blasphemous teaching that Venus is a sphere and goes round the sun. That this world is a globe he proved by the rising of Alpha Lyrae as one goes northward, the sinking as one goes to the south. This phenomenon, too, enabled him to deduce a planetary circumference—which was remarkably near the true one. That Venus goes round the sun was not so easily proved, but he did it. Alas, though, Truth finds foes where she makes none.

"For the people thought him a madman, acclaimed the horrible condemnation of the sacerdotal supreme council as only ignorance can acclaim. Mayto received the horrible pronouncement with composure, flinched not at all.

"I had closely followed the trial—if trial it may be called, for Mayto was condemned to death or ever he was apprehended, and he knew it—and greatly wished to see this philosopher whose love for Truth raised him above the qualms of the flesh and the pain and destruction thereof.

"Therefore, the day before he was to be burned—for the matter was moving with despatch—he was brought before me, who then was very young: it was ten years since, terrestrial years, that is. Into this very room he was brought and stood there where you see him now. There he stood brave and defiant, asking no mercy from any one. He was a giant among Yahoos, a Newton among Pithecanthropi, and my heart went out toward him. There he stood naked to the waist, bare of foot, his hands tied behind him and his body, wasted by dungeon starvation, encircled by lash welts; and upon his head, a crown of great thorns had been pressed down tight, the blood from the thorn wounds trickling down his white hair and wasted cheeks.

"The sight cut me to the heart, and I resolved to save him—if the thing were possible. Of course, it was, or he would not be here now. Another time I shall tell you the whole of the story. Let it suffice now to say that the expedient I seized upon, and which might have cost me my own, saved Mayto's life. The revocation of the death sentence, however, had this proviso, to which I at first feared Mayto was not going to assent: he must maintain an absolute silence as to his blasphemous belief that Venus is round and goes round the sun, even as the moon goes round the earth. A fool had but to look to see that the sun moves, and, as for the earth and the moon, they are lamps, not worlds. Any but a fool could see that, too.

"And thus it was that I, who then had seen but three lustrums, incurred the enmity of Sallysherib, and there has been war between us to this day. There was a mystery about me that he could not fathom, and that mystery drew the people to me, even though he tried to make it appear that I was an emissary of Satan. Ever has he watched for something that would enable him to destroy me, but that something never came. As perhaps you have seen, the war between us is not likely soon to end. The end will come only when one or the other goes down."

There was a slight pause.

"A strange story, is it not? And, if nothing else, it proves that humanity is humanity no matter where you find it—on earth or Venus, on Mars perhaps, or worlds that encircle about Aldebaran or Vega."

She looked at me whimsically.

"Something seems not clear in your mind, my Farnermain."

"It is this, O Draconda: couldn't you have conquered by revealing—?"

Query that comprehended was in her eyes.

"The truth?"

"Just so."

She smiled bitterly.

"Have you not learned, my Farnermain, that, as Innocence herself sometimes has to wear a mask, so Truth must at times stay hidden or silent? Alas, in the world of consciousness, man's intellect is as a bat—a hideous, poisonous thing, hiding in caves and fearsome places, moving only in the twilight zone and the kingdom of darkness."

"Yes," said Henry Quainfan. "And he who carries a torch for others must himself walk in shadow."

"By the way," I asked, "does Mayto know how you learned English?"

Draconda laughed.

"No, my Farnermain; he doesn't even know what English is."

"He is a great man," Henry said. "Tell him, O Draconda, that I am honored to meet one so learned and brave."

The queen translated, when the old man arose and bowed to us, Henry and I stood and bowed with deep respect in turn.

"And now tell me things!" said Draconda. "Tell me about your discovery and the journey, O Quainfan—no, first the year. Judging from your dress and weapons, I should say that it is not, after all, far from the year nineteen hundred."

"How in the world," said I, amazed, "did you lose all count of the time?"

"I didn't," she told me. "And for a good reason: I never had it to lose!"

I was dumbfounded.

"Mystery follows mystery," said Henry Quainfan.

Draconda laughed a little.

"But what is the year?" she asked.

Henry told her.

"And the month?"

The month was given and the day of the month also.

"I could tell from your dress and your weapons that not many years had elapsed since—that the time was near the year nineteen hundred," she said; "but, before you came, I did not know whether it was the twentieth century, the fortieth—or the eightieth! And now tell me things."

"I think it is you who should tell us things, O Draconda," I said. "We are in utter darkness."

"No," she laughed; "you tell me. I am not cognizant of anything that has occurred on Terra since eighteen hundred and eighty-six. But, first, tell me of your journey and that marvelous thing in which you came, O Quainfan. It was called the *Hornet*, was it not? That was a funny name."

Henry and I looked at each other. Was it any wonder? What on earth were we to make of these things?

Draconda was twenty-five. She had just said so. She had been born on Venus, and yet her knowledge of things terrestrial did not go beyond the year eighteen hundred and eighty-six! Nonsense—gibberish—hocus-pocus!

Draconda broke the silence with a little silvery laugh, which rippled merrily round the room, and again asked Henry to tell her of our journey and the thing in which we had come. So he proceeded to give her a succinct account of the discovery, the *Hornet* and those unearthly days in space. She broke in with many exclamations and questions, and, when he had finished, told him he was the greatest man that had ever lived, whereupon he flushed like an abashed country swain.

"Now tell me of the terrestrial happenings," she said. "Of course, I mean the ones that have occurred since the year eighteen hundred and eighty-six; the others I know full well—some of them too well, perhaps."

So Henry went on to tell this mysterious woman what had happened on the earth since eighteen hundred and eighty-six.

I tried to think, but think I could not. My thoughts were all jumbled up. I found myself imagining the absurdest things. I sat bewildered, dumbfounded, thunderstruck. I often think of those first minutes with Draconda. Ever had I to assure myself in various ways that I was not dreaming it all. The strangeness of it, the unreality of that which was real—no wonder I am making a fool of myself—made my poor brain fairly spin.

Just think of it. Was it any wonder that my brain went round and round and round? Bear with me a moment. Here we had journeyed all the way from the earth, and on this planet called Venus, whose orbit is twenty-five millions of miles sunward of Terra, we had met a woman who spoke English: We were sitting beside her now. And she had said the possibility of coming from Terra to Venus never had entered her head; ergo, she had lied. That was incontestable, or else nothing ever was incontestable.

But why? Yes, why? However, there was no light forthcoming in that direction. All that was palpable was that this mysterious and wondrous being had said the thing which was not.

Also, what had happened on the earth since eighteen hundred and eighty-six was a blank to her; in other words, she was not cognizant of anything that had occurred on Terra for near thirty years. And she was only twenty-five! How in the world had she crossed those years between?

Furthermore, she had been born here on Venus, never had left Venus, and no Terrestrial ever had landed on Venus before us.

What did she think we were?

Also and furthermore, before our arrival, she had not known whether the time that separated the now from that year eighteen hundred and eighty six was fifty years, a hundred, a thousand or a million years in extent:

Ye gods! What was I to make of these things?

"So!" exclaimed Draconda when Henry had finished. "So men see through solid steel and granite now, talk without wires, soar with the eagle and the condor, sport with the dolphins and dive to the haunts of the mermaid! And you, my Quainfan—you have unlocked the terrible mystery of the atom, seen the beat, as it were, of Nature's heart!"

"No, no," he said: "unlocked but one of its mysteries. And her heart, I fear, is not there."

"Ah, well," said Draconda, "you have blazoned your name big on the marble cliffs of time, my Quainfan, high above the names of Newton and Columbus.

"And thus science advances, and theology advances with her. And yet scientist and theologian—there they sit glaring away at each other. Well, so it has always been, and so, I have no doubt, it will always be.

"Unfortunate it is that Science and Religion are so antagonistic to each other, for neither is wholly right, and where one has weakness the other has strength. One could not be without the other. Each owes to the other a debt, and each will not consider that debt—acknowledge it even.

"Science is iconoclastic; and Religion shows a weakness for which it is difficult to account, in view of her strength of ages, in believing that, because Science has, for instance, forced man to live on a ball instead of a pancake, her antagonist will one day destroy the anagogetical verity. That will never be destroyed by Science. Her domain does

not include the spiritual, and, when she ponders on spiritual things and attempts to put them into a test-tube, then she is anything but scientific.

"Just what I've said a thousand times," I remarked, for Draconda had paused.

"And, in like manner," she went on, "Religion is anything but religious when she ponders on earthly, material things, attempts to make of them a balloon in which one must ride to reach heaven, or, if blasphemous enough to doubt its Divine manufacture, go down to damnation eternal."

She glanced at Henry Quainfan.

"Just what I've said a thousand times," he told her.

Draconda laughed a little.

"I thought it," she said. "However, Religion, if unrestrained by Science, who ever forces her to let the *material* alone, would fill the beautiful Universe with devils, ghosts and the shrieks of damned souls, would plunge the minds of men and women into darkness and the fear that surges in darkness; while, on the other hand, Science, if unrestrained by Religion, who ever forces her to let the *spiritual* alone, would send the glorious Cosmos crumbling to a heap of dead atoms.

"But my, how I have been talking! Now I listen. Tell me about literature—oh, did you bring any books?"

"We had five or six dozen," Henry said; "but, when the *Hornet*—"

"Oh, you lost them all!"

"No; we have three."

"Goody, goody!" exclaimed Draconda, clapping her hands in girlish fashion. "Let me see them! Quick! What are they? Hurry, hurry!"

"That we have two of them is due to the merest chance: his Bible Rider has with him always, but Goodness only knows how I happened to have, in one of my pockets, *The Deerslayer*—"

"Dear old Leather-Stocking!" exclaimed Draconda. "And the other?"

"A little volume of Poe."

"Not *Gordon Pym*, I hope."

"No: *The Murders in the Rue Morgue, The Gold Bug, Ligeia, The Fall of the House of Usher* and a few others. The best of Poe, you see."

"Yes; but I could easily wish it had been something else. Life isn't tombs and grave-worms—nor is that death, either.

" ' 'Tis not the whole of Life to live.
Nor all of death to die.'

"Probably, though, my Quainfan, you think—or have thought—otherwise."

"How on earth, O Draconda, did you know that?"

"I didn't know it," the queen smiled; "I but thought it."

For a time she sat silent, turning the pages.

"What a contrast!" she said. "Where an antithesis more striking: Cooper and Poe! One like the sunlight streaming on forest and ocean; the other like the moon-gleams gloating o'er tombs: one clear-eyed, with the brown of the sun on his cheek; the other a companion to dragons and owls."

"Pretty hard on Poe," I thought, but all I said was:

"You love Cooper?"

"Adore him!" said Draconda.

She took up the Bible from her lap.

"Ah," she said, suddenly pausing in the turning of the leaves. "Listen:

" 'Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding.' "

Neither Henry nor I made response.

"Silent!" Draconda observed, with a whimsical smile.

"Your answer, O Queen," Henry said.

"No—even I can not say," returned Draconda. "But this I do know, my Quainfan: *we were!* Yes, and even eternities before our sun his terrible march began!"*

Henry Quainfan said:

"In a certain sense, O Draconda, that is undoubtedly sober truth: what I mean is, not that I believe in the immortality of the individual soul (though it may be immortal) but in that of—what shall I say?—in the immortality of the Spirit of Life. As Lord Kelvin puts it:

" 'I am ready to adopt, as an article of scientific faith, true through all space and through all time, that life proceeds from life, and from nothing but life.' "

"My Quainfan, my Quainfan!" said Draconda. "I don't mean *that*."

"I know it," he told her.

"You have left the highway," said she, "taken a footpath leading into shadows."

"Just so, Draconda: the shadows cast by the mountains called the Mystery of Life."

"But—" began the queen.

Came a sharp word or two from just without one of the doorways, a woman's voice in answer, then the clang of weapons on the marble floor.

A moment, and the lady had entered. She made obeisance to her queen and stood with bowed head till Draconda bade her speak.

The sick man from the stars was awake—with which intelligence Draconda acquainted us forthwith.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

THE MEETING

"HE is lying quiet," said Draconda, "though plainly surprised. Shall we go to him now? I would that I might bid him welcome, but that would not be expedient, what with the surprise it might give him to hear a Venusian speak English."

So we all arose and directed our steps toward the room in which we had left St. Cloud.

It was not until afterwards, by the way, that I thought of this curious fact, to be writ on my brain in letters of fire:

Draconda had not asked, nor had we mentioned, our companion's name.

However, we found St. Cloud apparently asleep again, his face partly covered and *in shadow*.

I have often wondered what the anagnorisis would have been had his features been in the full light and wholly uncovered. Then the queen would have discovered the terrible truth from a distance, and, if he had not awakened from the light sleep or stupor in which he lay, she might have stolen out quietly so as not to disturb him, knowing—as surely she would have known—that the sight of her, what with his weakened mind and body, would inevitably prove fatal.

Of course, she might not have done this; she might have screamed just the same, and the same horrible thing might have happened. What is the use of wondering? We can only hope that it will never be seen again. Nor, indeed, do I think that, throughout all the ages of eviternity itself, any mortal eye will behold what we saw in that room.

All was still when we entered. Could be heard only the soft rustling of the women's dresses and the faint sound of our feet as they sank into the deep nap. Once there came from without a distant and wailing cry, which I thought came from some aquatic bird on the lake. Mynine, the princess and the old philosopher came to a stop about three yards from the litter, the old man leaning on his cane; Draconda, Henry and myself advanced to Morgan's side. He had not stirred.

"It seems he had gone to sleep again," Draconda said in a whisper.

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*Whence have we come, and whither do we go? . . . Since the traditional time of Adam the sun has led his planets through the wastes of space not less than 225,000,000,000 miles, or more than 2400 times the distance that separates him from the earth . . . Where was our little planet when it emerged out of the clouds of chaos? Where was the sun when his "thunder march" began?—Garret P. Serviss: Curiosities of the Sky.

I nodded.

"Yes, it seems so," Henry whispered back.

Then Draconda took a step forward and, leaning over, looked at Morgan's face.

I was watching closely.

Suddenly I heard a sharp, painful intake of breath; over her features shot the strangest look—terrible, ghastly. She stood there, leaning over and staring for a few seconds, then of a sudden flung her body up and back as though struck at by a serpent, her face white as death, even the lips it seemed, and then there burst from her throat a scream that drove into my brain like a dagger.

"*He!*" she exclaimed, her voice a hoarse whisper.

I stepped toward her, for I feared she was going to fall.

"What is it?" I asked. "What—?"

"Why didn't I ask—oh, why didn't I ask his name?"

Then a little fiercely:

"Why didn't you—?"

Here speech was frozen on her lips; her eyes, which had never left Morgan's face for an instant, became wide and aglcam with horror.

There was a sound from the litter.

I turned my look to St. Cloud, but, before it had reached him, there burst from his lips the most frightful, terror-filled scream I have ever heard in all my life.

He had raised himself up on one elbow and was staring at Draconda with eyes that seemed about to start from his head. Never have I seen on another face that unutterable terror which was stamped on his still and livid features. The face seemed to be crushed in, the eyes bulged out, by a terror and horror that were ont of the earth.

His lips moved; no sound, though, issued from them. Again they moved; but still no sound. At the third attempt, he succeeded, and the words burst from his lips like a thunderclap:

"*Blanche! Blanche!*"

I started at that name, and a shiver ran through me.

Draconda drew herself up. This simple movement had an effect as swift as awful: St. Cloud's terror became a thing for which there is no utterance.

"Speak!" he shrieked. "Speak!"

Draconda said never a word.

She just stood there looking at him.

"Speak!" he shrieked again. "In God's name, Blanche—are you in the flesh?"

Then from Draconda's lips came these words, her voice hard and cold:

"Of course!"

Morgan shrieked horribly.

"Why—oh!" he screamed. "I saw you—with my own eyes I saw you—oh, —oh!"

His body jerked into a sitting position, the eyes flashing shut; then, uttering one short, frightful scream, which must have reached to every corner in the great palace, he fell back and was still.

For a little space, no one moved; then Henry went and leaned over Morgan.

"Dead," he said, straightening up.

He stood looking at Draconda.

She said nothing.

Silence fell—heavy, awful.

So this mysterious Draconda, whom I loved, was Blanche, the woman whom St. Cloud had in some way wronged on far-off Terra, who had stalked through his dreams, whose ghost had come and tortured him in the mountain tomb—but who was Blanche?

Henry had known St. Cloud for nearly ten years, and he knew nothing about Blanche. He had never heard of her on the earth, had never heard her name ere Morgan in slumber spoke it in that ruined city in which dwell the Ohams.

Of course, he was not conversant with St. Cloud's affairs; but, had this disastrous one with Draconda (whatever it was) occurred during that decade, he would, in all likelihood, have known of it. Henry had told me he was almost sure that Blanche had come into Morgan's life prior to their meeting. This, it is obvious, would make Blanche—or, rather, Draconda—at the most fifteen years of age when that unknown tragedy, a love tragedy perhaps, had occurred; wherefore, it seemed to me, there was something wrong here.

Not that I did much thinking. Indeed, I did not try. These things just came darting through my mind, that was all. What was the use of thinking? Mystery had succeeded mystery; and what was the use of thinking at all?

We should have to wait, wait till Draconda was minded to explain.

But who in the world was this mysterious woman, the mere sight of whom had killed in a manner so terrible our dark, handsome, mysterious Morgan St. Cloud? Who was she? How had she come from the earth to the Planet of Love? And why—oh, why—had she lied?

How long the silence lasted, I do not know. At last, however, Draconda spoke:

"It was unfortunate; it was awful. I would to Heaven I had asked your companion's name. Had I known he was Morgan St. Cloud, this awful thing would not have happened. He has changed much, yet I knew him the instant I looked closely. I shall explain later—not now. I must be alone. He is dead—slain by his own folly, his own sin."

She fell silent, and seemed to ponder deeply, once glancing quickly at the face of the dead man.

The silence was broken by Henry Quainfan, who addressed himself to the queen.

"Why will you not explain, O Draconda? What, in the name of Heaven, does this mean? How did you come here? You knew this man on the earth?"

"Yes; I did," she answered.

"Why, Draconda," he said a little wildly, "do you spin these webs of gibberish? You have given us nonsense, utter nonsense. This meeting has proved it. Why, O Draconda, do you spin these webs of words more flimsy than the spider's web?"

"Those are bold words," she said softly, looking straight into his eyes. "No Venusian would dare speak like that to me."

He made a sudden wild gesture, then said humbly:

"I beg your forgiveness, O Draconda. But surely you knew what was in my mind. This meeting threw me into a frightful tumult—which perhaps you understand, O Draconda. But I am sorry; I beg your forgiveness."

Draconda forgave him with a look. As her eyes looked into his, I saw in them a mysterious softness that brought my heart into my throat.

"Do not mention it any more," she said. "And, indeed, I can not blame you for doubting my word. But, here in the presence of this dead man, I can not explain."

She now turned and addressed a few words to the princess and old Mayto. I saw Henry's look wander from her to the face of St. Cloud, then back to the queen.

"I am sorry," she said, turning to us, "but I must go now. I want to be alone. Here you will be safe from intrusion or snares—may entertain every feeling of security. And now I must thus unseemly bid you good-night."

"Good-night," we murmured as this mysterious and, in a way, awful woman, with a swift glance at the face of the dead man, turned to go.

She and the bewildered Nytes, followed by the equally-bewildered phil-

osopher, walked slowly to the curtained doorway, where the queen stopped (whereupon the princess and old Mayto also came to a halt) and stood looking back at us.

"And yet," said Draconda in a low voice, looking at Henry Quainfan, "it hurts me sorely to know that *you* think my words false."

She paused, still looking at my companion. The curtains were held aside by two servants.

"Good-night," she concluded.

Then they went slowly through the doorway and were hid from view as the curtains fell back into their places behind them.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

ACCURSED

FOR a while, I gazed at the curtains, then turned my look to Henry, to see him staring at the face of the dead man.

A few moments, and our eyes met, questioning. He shook his head, muttering something that I could not catch.

Then suddenly he turned and signed to the Venusians to leave the room, which they did immediately, leaving us with Mynine and the thing that so short a time before had been Morgan St. Cloud.

Shortly afterwards, he explained to the girl, who had been watching him was a look steady and troubled, that we wished to be alone now. She hesitated a moment, looking at him in a strange, questioning manner, with eyes in which, it seemed to me, there were adumbrations of a terrible fear (I knew what she feared; it was that the queen might take her lover from her), and then she turned and slowly left the room, hesitating at the doorway and glancing at Henry with unchanged eyes. But he did not see, for he was again staring at the face of St. Cloud.

There was silence for a time, broken only by the beating of my heart.

Henry was the first to speak, his voice husky, curiously unnatural:

"In Heaven's name, Rider, what does this mean? Good God! what—?"

He left the sentence unfinished.

"We'll know—when Draconda is minded to explain."

He went to the litter and stood looking down on St. Cloud's face, a strange, hard expression on his own. At last he covered up those pallid, horror-stamped features, then, with a wild, and, I think, unconscious, gesture, began walking back and forth with nervous steps, at length coming to a stop beside me.

"Rider—" he began.

His eyes fixed themselves on vacancy.

"Yes?" I suggested.

There was no response.

It was patent that his mind was in a terrible turmoil. And why? Because the sight of Draconda had killed Morgan St. Cloud? I did not think so; no, I was sure there was something else.

I remembered certain words he had spoken to the queen, that peculiar softness I had seen in her eyes, the way in which she had addressed him when she was leaving, and other things. She had spoken, it seemed to me, as though there was some tacit understanding between them. And all this, of course, pointed to but one thing: That this mysterious queen was the woman of his dreams—though I could not, for the life of me, see how her picture could have been stamped on his brain.

Yet, even so, I feared that it was true—and I loved her. Strange—terribly, sweetly strange. But I loved her, and I do now.

And, of course, all this threw my own mind into a frightful turmoil. Jealousy went coursing through my veins like a molten flood. If Draconda was his "dream woman," there could be no hope for me; if she was, my life was blasted even now, for I knew that only Death could end that sweet, agonizing pain at my heart—and I knew not what Draconda was nor what she had been.

Love had come in its mysterious way, as swift and blinding as the lightning—in a manner I never had believed that love could come.

And, anyway, what hope could I have of winning this queen? Why, the thought itself was a madness.

I longed to know if Draconda was indeed his dream woman—and yet dreaded the knowing.

It was Henry who broke the silence.

"Rider!"

"Yes?"

"Maybe you'll think—it's a queer thing; but it's a fact."

"A fact—what?" I asked, with a sinking of the heart.

"It is she, Rider: Draconda is my picture woman, the woman of my dreams."

"Oh!" said I. "How wonderful!"

"Wonderful beyond words, Rider."

I said it was, or something to that effect.

And there was a silence.

So there it was! I had expected that, had steeled myself to keep back any sign of the effect it would have upon me. And I succeeded. At least, I am pretty sure that I did. I do not think Henry ever learned by word or sign that I loved his Draconda. And yet how can we be sure of these things?

Perhaps, though, Draconda herself knew.

Well, it had come, the expected had come, and my life was blasted, I was accursed. As he spoke those words, something came crashing down upon me, something that crushed with the weight of mountains, whose awful weight is crushing me still.

Often have I pondered on the exceeding strangeness of it all. A short time before—such a short time—I had never set eyes on this mysterious queen, and now I loved her, knew my life was blasted because she was Henry Quainfan's "dream woman"—the woman whose picture had been stamped on his mind, stamped in a manner which, I thought, would be forever beyond the understanding of the finite mind.

And to see her become his wife—well, I would be a man, though my heart would be broken: already it was broken. Yes, I would be a man. Though jealousy went through my veins like a flaming flood, filled my brain with spluttering and hissing lights, though I hated Henry, yes, actually hated him (and yet loved him, too), even so, I would be a man, would conquer all the weaknesses of the flesh-imprisoned spirit. Yes, I would hide all that was in my soul, that might be in the days to come, and I would fight side by side with him and her until they were happy or disaster overwhelmed us all; and, if the first came to pass, then I would go away. Yes, I decided upon this as I stood there. I would go away, so that I could not see Draconda any more—for that would be a torture unbearable.

It was I who broke the silence:

"It *is* wondrous, Henry, as wondrous as mysterious. And think of it—the chance of chances that brought you to her!"

And I reached out my hand and wrung his—yes, congratulated him there in the presence of the dead man.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

DEATH AGAIN

"BUT—" said Henry Quainfan.

"Well?"

"You think that Draconda—well, has a mind photograph of me?"

"It's possible."

"Of course, it is possible, Rider. But—has she?"

"You must ask the lady herself that question."

"From certain little things, though, Rider—"

He looked at me quizzically.

"Yes—I think so, too," I said.

"You do?" he asked quickly.

I nodded

"You noticed?"

"Yes, I noticed."

"I never believed it possible, Rider. And life has changed, changed wondrously, in an undreamed-of manner, since we entered that hall—though what the end may be, who can guess that? Everything is different now. I see why things always hurt, why I didn't know what to do—except lose myself in work. Something hurt, and in work, and work only, I forgot. It was because I hadn't found Draconda!"

"Little wonder you hadn't found her!"

"But, Rider—this meeting!"

His jaws snapped shut, his eyes went to the litter, and his handsome face grew dark and lined.

"In Heaven's name," he broke out. "what was he to Draconda? She is a mysterious woman, and this meeting—it bespeaks something awful. I had just seen immortality for the first time—I saw it in her eyes—and then came this dreadful thing to fill my mind with black, writhing thoughts. Why didn't Draconda explain? And how on earth, Rider, is she going to straighten the thing out? Born on Venus—and then she had known Morgan on the earth!"

A terrible look came into the gray eyes, which turned again to that covered and lifeless form in the litter.

"It must have been something terrible, Rider."

"But—he lied! He said so himself. Good Lord, don't you remember what he said in the tomb, to Draconda's ghost—or, rather, to the ghost of Blanche?"

"I remember," said Henry. "Of course!"

"Well, don't be a fool!" I told him. "Don't let—remember Cambyses and Nitetis, Henry. More tragedies have been caused by black thoughts, fears and blunders, than by all the he and she devils that ever have lived."

"I remember. And *that* will not bring about any tragedy here—though tragedy there may be. And Mynine, Rider! How can I explain? The girl will never believe."

"Oh, well," I said, "there's not need of a lighted lantern until it's dark."

"Yes, but you can't light the lantern until you have it. However, let's go into this other room; it will be more cheerful in there, and Morgan can sleep just as well alone."

So we went into the room in question, where Henry took seat on a chair, myself on the bed. In a few minutes, I lay down. I closed my eyes and thought—thought—thought. Minute after minute passed, the minutes became hours, and still I lay there thinking—thinking.

How I wished that I could sleep, so that, for a time, all would be forgotten.

My imagination ran riot—became a phantasmagoria that was a nightmare, a nightmare in which, ever and anon, would appear that mummy-like thing I had seen in a dream, that creature who had warned me never to set eyes on Queen Draconda.

Never once did Henry Quainfan break the silence; and, when I spoke, which was seldom, his response was monosyllabic. Whenever I looked, it was to see him sitting there staring into vacancy.

At length—it must have been in the last hours of darkness—I sank off to sleep. It was a troubled sleep, a nightmare indeed, and from it I was aroused, about two hours before midday, by a great crash, which brought me to my feet before I was even half awake. And, so overwrought were my nerves, as I sprang up I screamed and screamed yet again.

I was dreaming when that crash came, still was dreaming when I sprang up and screamed—the dream and the reality blended together, though at the time I did not know but what it all was a dream.

I would to Heaven it had been!

The sunlight was streaming in through the windows. In a strange, unearthly way, I saw a form madly struggling on the floor, in one of the far corners of the room. Even as my eyes fell upon it, it arose and instantaneously became two forms—one Henry Quainfan, the other The Wolf, locked in a struggle so savage that the men were like beasts.

I may as well, I suppose, set down here what had happened, what had brought about this terrible scene, to have so strange and terrible an end.

Of course, a woman was the cause of it, and that woman, as doubtless the reader has anticipated, was none other than the queen.

For Draconda loved Henry even as Henry loved Draconda, had a picture of him more vivid even than that one which Love had limned, with so sure a touch, on the canvas of his soul: but, like her lover from the earth, she had never believed her picture was that of a real mate, that he existed or ever had existed; and, so believing, she had (and here is the terrible thing) fallen in love, though in a troubled way, with Ta Antom.

Believing that the breaking of her betrothal to the powerful Venusian would, in all likelihood, be succeeded by something unpleasant in the extreme, even if she exercised all the diplomacy of which she was capable; the queen had planned to proceed with this unpleasant business as gently and judiciously as possible. But, when she met The Wolf this day, her plans were in some manner overthrown: she smashed the engagement then and there, whereupon The Wolf watched his chance and, sword in hand, crept into our room to make an end of the man who had taken his sweetheart from him.

But Henry, who had not fallen asleep once, heard Ta Antom stealing up behind him. Springing to his feet, he saved himself from what surely would have been a fatal thrust, though he received a wound in the left arm, near the shoulder, that rendered that limb utterly useless. He succeeded in gripping his antagonist's sword arm, and now his strength stood him in good stead indeed. He managed to throw his enemy, and the two, falling upon a chair and smashing it to pieces, crashed to the floor; and the crash of their falling aroused me.

The Venusian was a powerful man, but, in a struggle with strength as the decisive factor, Henry, I am sure, easily could have come out the victor. Ta Antom, however, had taken him by surprise, had two arms to his one—to say nothing of the weapon.

The instant I became wide awake and grasped the perilous position of my companion, I jerked out a revolver (I had, since our rescue from the tomb, worn St. Cloud's cartridge-belt, with its pendent weapon, as well as my own, and had lain down without taking them off), but, so swift were the gyrating movements of friend and foe, I hesitated to fire, for fear of hitting Henry, from whose wound was gushing a crimson stream.

I started toward them; but, at that very instant, a white-robed female figure, sword in hand, looking like a specter against the dark background of wall, came rushing into the room.

Some fluffy stuff that the woman wore had flown up over that side of her face which was toward me, completely hiding the features and enhancing not a little that terrible spectral quality of the figure.

With a little cry, she darted toward

the men, and, with another cry, short and fiercely wild, she drove her weapon into the Venusian's body—drove it clean to the hilt.

As the stricken man, with two feet or so of the blade protruding from his back, pitched to the floor on his face with a groan, that gauzy stuff slowly fell from the countenance of the being who made the fatal thrust, revealing to my astonished eyes the lovely face of the queen.

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

THE BLOW FALLS

I MADE an exclamation and stood aghast.

Draconda gave way to no feminine weakness. Though pallid of face, cadaverous even, and trembling a little, she was calm—her calmness somehow striking me with horror.

She gave the fallen man a swift look, then hurried to Henry Quainfan, who was leaning weakly against the wall. From his wound a fountain of blood was gushing forth. He was so covered with gore that I feared he had received at least a half dozen wounds.

I looked at the stricken man, writhing there in mortal agony. Draconda, too, turned her eyes to her victim—to her quondam lover, who so short a time before had held her in his arms, aflame with her velvety embrace and her kisses.

With a groan, one hand gripping the hilt of the sword, he rolled over on one side that he might see her better and curse her with his eyes; then suddenly he rolled back and in a moment had expired.

Some men and women, among whom I saw Mynine, who was pushing her way through them, had appeared in the doorway through which the queen had entered on her swift mission of death—taking in the bloody scene with wide eyes.

Draconda turned and gave a sharp command, whereupon one of the men vanished on the instant.

Without her queen's permission, Mynine came boldly into the room and hurried toward her beloved, her lovely eyes swimming in tears. She made a hurried obeisance to Draconda, and the next moment was beside Henry—the dark eyes of the queen, for a moment, fixed on her in a look that had something simply terrible in it.

Henry, we soon learned, had received but one wound, but that certainly was one of an alarming nature. I feared, as I looked, that he would never use that arm again.

"A tourniquet, my Farnermain!" said Draconda.

"I doubt—"

"Do not doubt," she said a little sharply, "but fetch me one of those curtain-cords! Something, anything to stop the flow! The physician should be here in a moment, but, in the meantime—"

I was already hurrying back with one of the cords, slashed off with my hunting-knife, and in a few moments the tourniquet was in place.

Mynine, her bloody fingers atremble, had started to help with this instrument of torture, but the queen had spoken sharply to her, whereupon the girl had sullenly desisted.

We checked the flow, but stop it we could not.

Henry was sitting on the bed; finally he lay down.

"Winged me, all right," he smiled.

"That man!" exclaimed Draconda. "Why doesn't he come?"

Scarcely had she spoken, however, when her Esculapius entered—one of the skinniest, ugliest men I ever have set eyes on, and as cool as an icicle. A skillful man, however, was our Dr. Quixote—who, by the way, was a priest also; all physicians are here. Remembering Sallysherib, I felt a little uneasy on that score, even though I assured myself that Draconda knew what she was about.

But my fears were groundless: Draconda had no stancher friend (even though he was a purple-robe) than this doc of the sorrowful figure.

In a few minutes he had stanched the flow and was dressing the wound. This latter done, the soiled bed-clothes were removed and new ones put in their place.

Not long afterwards, Dr. Quixote left us.

Draconda was sitting on the bed, her eyes on Henry's face, while Mynine, silent and motionless, stood watching the twain with an expression that cut me to the very heart.

Of a sudden a new thought struck the queen. Her eyes rested for a moment on The Wolf, then she arose, and, going to that doorway through which she had entered, she spoke a few words, whereupon some men came in and bore away the body of her whilom lover.

She stood watching the melancholy little group till it had vanished with its lifeless burden, and then, turning to me, she said:

"I never dreamed that Atropos would commission me to sever the thread of that life. The Moerae are more cruel than kind. They will not let us wander for long on the flowery ways of our hearts' desire. They drive us forth to the brambled and jagged ways of our hearts' loathing—ways which we must tread or surely we shall perish and upon which maylap we shall perish in the treading.

"But," and she sighed, "what is the use of talking thus? What is is, my Farnermain, and the ears of the Fates are deaf to our prayers and our wailing."

"The Fates obey, Draconda."

She looked at me quickly.

"'Tis so, my Farnermain. And sometimes 'tis we who command them."

"So it seems. But my poor intellect has no plummet to sound those deeps in the Ocean of Being."

"But the golden dawns, the sunsets of glory and the storms that sweep over it—why, my Farnermain, what Columbus, unless indeed he be mad, thinks the black sea abysms more wondrous than the beauties and the mystery through which he is sailing?"

"Yet, in fancy, he wanders down into coral halls and the awful abysms below them."

"In fancy—yes, my Farnermain. And, in fancy—at times, indeed in truth—we can wander through the coral palaces and the terrible sea caves of Fate."

Now came the most surprising thing, in its way, that I have seen in all my life. There, in the presence of the golden-haired woman who loved him so well, to say nothing of my own—why did Henry Quainfan tell Draconda there? I fancy, however, that Henry could not answer that question himself.

For, after pondering for a moment, Draconda suddenly turned, went back and seated herself in a chair which she had drawn up to the bedside—her left hand resting on the bed-clothes, near Henry's right.

It must have been accidental; at any rate, his hand touched the queen's, whereupon his eyes opened and his fingers closed over hers. Draconda started, and I could see her atremble—trembling as she had not done at the slaying of Ta Antom.

I, too, trembled, and something rose up in my throat that threatened to suffocate me.

I wanted to go away, but something seemed to hold me in that spot.

He drew her to him, drew her close and whispered in her ear. Yes, with Morgan St. Cloud lying in the next room a corpse, with Mynine standing there so near him—thus did Henry Quainfan tell his love to this mysterious queen.

As he whispered, I saw her face light up until her beauty shone as if through a spiritual radiance—through a halo that rendered visible on that face of ineffable loveliness a glory not of the earth, one that would shine on in its beauty when the sun and the stars are dark.

Her lips were slightly parted, her breast, on which the dress was cut low, rising and falling tumultuously.

When Henry had done whispering, Draconda bent her head until her cheek touched his; though I could not see her lips, I knew that she was whispering back—words than which sweeter never fell on human ear. Suddenly she raised her head, kissed him softly but passionately on the lips. Then it was that I heard something like a sob, and yet not a sob at all, and which broke from the lips of Mynine.

I turned and looked at the girl. She was white, white as a sheet. Her hands had clenched so that, as I afterwards learned, the pink nails had broken through the soft white flesh. Her lips were slightly parted, discovering her snow-white teeth of pearl. And upon her quivering features was stamped the most awful suffering I have ever seen on a woman's face.

I have not attempted to describe, have left to the reader's imagination the effect this strange love scene had upon me. I felt that I was suffering in a degree beyond which no man's agony of heart ever had gone; but, so great was that suffering upon this poor woman's face, even in my own I was cut to the soul by the sight of it.

We had saved her from death, and now something had come perhaps as black and awful. There was no telling what this stricken woman might do.

Draconda, too, heard that sound. She arose, flushed and trembling. As the blue eyes met the dark, there was something in those cerulean depths that made the orbs actually hideous.

I took the stricken woman by the arm and tried to lead her away.

But Mynine would not budge.

CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

MYNINE GOES

"SO," said Draconda, as though speaking to herself, "it has come—so soon."

I turned my look to Henry Quainfan; his eyes were on Mynine, misty with tears.

Rather to my surprise, it was to me the queen addressed herself.

"Caught in the winds of Fate, my Farnermain!" she said. "And every moment whirls us into new troubles."

I nodded, though it was my opinion that Fate had been assisted somewhat in this matter.

The queen said:

"I understand—that is, this girl told me, this morning, that she is betrothed to—to my Quainfan here."

"It seems it is so, O Draconda. As for the customs of this land—well, how can I know of them?"

"True, true. How could you know. How could my Quainfan know? In this land, then, the prerogative of love-making is the woman's, and the woman's only; if the man accepts her advances, embraces or kisses her, then they are engaged; furthermore, strange though this may seem, the engagement can be broken only by the woman—except, that is, in certain cases."

She looked at me interrogatively; however, I stood silent.

By the goddess Melpomene, why select me as expositor?

"That the girl spoke the truth," the queen went on, "I believe. But—well, you see he loves me."

She blushed like the pale dawn.

"Yes," I nodded.

"Mynine did speak the truth," came Henry's voice, weak and troubled. "But I never loved her."

A curious look—probably one of bepuzzlement and passion commingled—shot across Draconda's features and lingered there.

"It seems," she said, "that there has been a strange, a terrible mistake."

"A terrible mistake, indeed," I told her.

"I do not understand. However, if Henry were a Venusian—but my Quainfan is not, and so the law can not apply.

"But," with a sudden alteration of voice, turning toward her lover, "this is very unpleasant, you are weak and wounded, and so I shall dismiss the girl, and the matter can be explained to her later."

"No," said he. "Now that it has come, let it be explained here. But—I know that Mynine will never believe me."

Draconda listened intently, holding her sweetheart's hand, the while Mynine stood like a statue.

"Mynine," said the queen, when Henry had finished, "explanation has been made and I regret exceedingly that it had to be given in a tongue that thou canst not understand, for perchance thou wilt think I use my office of translator to color the explanation. But I pray thee, my Mynine, do not think that, for that thing I will not do.

"This man whom thou lovest—my Mynine, the Lord Quainfan never did love thee. A great mistake hath been made, a strange mistake, and it hurteth him sorely. Hear now, my Mynine: knowing that thou didst love him, and believing that there was no escape from that tomb wherein ye had been imprisoned by the Lord Ta Antom, that all of you would surely perish in the awful blackness, and wishing to fill thy last earthly hours with that sweet which he knew the belief that thou wast loved would bring to thee—"

Here Mynine's face grew deathly pale, her body rigid as stone; only, the lips quivered, quivered so pitifully that I turned my eyes away.

"Because of this, my Mynine," the queen went on, a perceptible change in her tones, "the Lord Quainfan made believe that he did love thee. After the rescue, he could have told thee that he did not love, but he could have made no explanation; wherefore did he remain silent, continue to make believe that thou wast loved: That was why he did not tell thee the truth, my Mynine."

The girl made no response.

After looking at her queen for a space, with eyes somewhat vacant and yet very hard, she turned her blue orbs to the man who was the innocent cause of her tragedy; and, as they looked into his, her eyes did not change at all: they were somewhat vacant and very hard.

"Tell her, Draconda, that I am very sorry," Henry said, "and that I hope we will be friends always."

Draconda translated forthwith, but Mynine made not the slightest response.

Draconda's face showed her displeasure, and I saw that the poor girl noted this. Henry held out his hand to her; after glancing at her mysterious and dread queen, Mynine extended her own—the shudder that came when his hand touched hers telling more forcibly than any words could have done the awful revulsion that had come over the girl.

The blow had fallen; all her wondrous love had been metamorphosed into a frightful hate—how frightful we soon were to learn.

"After all, my Mynine," said Draconda, "there is a sweet cup beside the one that is so bitter: the Lord Quainfan and his companions did save thee from the sacrificial knife and flames."

And then it was that Mynine spoke:

"I would, O Queen, that he had been too late!"

There were no tears in her eyes now; her voice, though, was like that of a weeping woman.

Draconda went to the girl, placed a hand gently on her shoulder. At the touch, however, Mynine quivered like a leaf in the wind; hastily the queen removed her hand, looking at me with hurt eyes.

"I am very, very sorry, my Mynine," she said, "and I will do for thee whatsoever is in my power to do. Tell me, I pray thee, what thou wouldst have. And I hope, deep in my heart, that thou wilt not harbor black thoughts against me, my Mynine."

"I pray thee, O Queen, that I may depart hence. I pray thee to accept my poor thanks for thy proffered kindness, O Queen; but my life is like a tree blasted by the fire of heaven now, and I would go hence."

"But whither wilt thou go?"

"Nay—I know not, O Queen: Only do I know that I would be gone."

"Bethink thee well," said Draconda: "Here thou wilt have all that thou mayest desire; if thou go hence, I believe, then thou shalt surely die."

"Perchance, my Queen. But, pardon me, O Draconda, here I could not have aught that I desire—here I should have only pain and such an ache in the heart that death itself would be sweet. So I pray, O Queen, that I may go hence. And I thank thee for thy proffered kindness to one so unworthy—which my heart will always treasure."

"Well, do whatsoever thou wilt," said Draconda. "But I say unto thee, my Mynine, that I think thou art a fool. And—well, I did not mean in this very palace of Conderogan, if thou wouldst not so desire."

"May I go hence, O Queen?"

"Yes; thou mayest go. I have said that thou mayest do whatsoever thou wilt. But I say unto thee again, my Mynine: I think thou art a fool and that, if thou go hence, then surely shalt thou die."

Mynine made obeisance to her queen, courtesied to me; then, without even the most fleeting glance at Henry Quainfan (who had fallen asleep) the girl went, her face toward the dread Draconda until she had passed through the doorway.

I wondered if I would ever see her again, and I confess that I was a little bit afraid of Mynine.

CHAPTER FORTY

TO SALLYSHERIB

"ONLY fancy!"

So I told myself.

The queen's words, however, showed that it was not a fancy lightly to be dismissed:

"I should fear that girl, my Farnermain—were her position one of power."

"Are you sure, O Draconda, that you have nothing at all to fear?"

She laughed a little.

"Nothing! What can she do? In all likelihood, she shall be slain by the priests. I tell you, my Farnermain, I believe she is walking straight to her doom."

"But is there not perhaps some—?"

"My Farnermain, she can do nothing," Draconda interrupted lightly.

"I hope so," said I.

"Have no fear," she said, smiling.

But Draconda was mistaken.

For—as we learned some time afterwards, of course—Mynine went straight to the high priest, Sallysherib, and made such an impression on that pious gentleman that he decided she would be a good auxiliary in the prosecution of his scheme to overthrow the queen's power, destroy her and men from the stars.

And, as the issue proved, Sallysherib did not overvalue his fair confederate; indeed, how could even that son of iniquity have known the truth?

"I feel very sorry for that girl," the queen said after a pause. "It was a cruel blow, cruel indeed. What says Anac—do you know Greek, my Farnermain?"

"I have studied it."

She then quoted in the original the following lines of Anacreon's, though her Greek was not like that which I had studied:

"Yes—loving is a painful thrill,
And not to love more painful still;
But oh, it is the worst of pain,
To love and not be loved again!"

"I fancy, O Draconda, that Anacreon knew his subject."

"And to love and not be loved again sometimes causes terrible disaster, my Farnermain. However, we have nothing to fear from that girl. As I said, in all likelihood she shall be slain by the priests—mayhap before yon sun enters the gates of twilight."

She went to the sleeping man and kissed him tenderly on the forehead. Then she sat down softly on the bed, putting her hand on his, a rapt, angelic look on her lovely features.

For a little time, she sat watching his face, apparently oblivious to my very existence, then looked up and blushed a little.

"My Farnermain, did he tell you? I mean about the picture, his love picture of me."

I nodded.

"Did you ever hear of anything more strange and wonderful? And I have a picture of him, too, my Farnermain. And we have met at last, after all these years—after so many ages."

"Ages?" I exclaimed.

"Even so."

"What do you mean, O Draconda?"

"That it has been a long, long time, my Farnermain. But at last we have found each other. And I am so glad."

She certainly looked it. She was a queen, the ruler of a mighty empire; and the great ones bowed down before her—and a loving woman watching her beloved as he slept.

Suddenly Princess Nytes entered, pale of face and excited. She came alone. She courtesied to me, who arose and bowed in return, and then hurried to Draconda. They held talk in low tones; several time I caught the name Ta Antom.

This woman of mystery had just killed a man—and there she sat on the bed, talking quietly, her hand on Henry Quainfan's, while the man whom, until a few hours since, she had loved was lying dead in some other room in the palace.

Of course, however, at that time I did not know that Draconda had loved Ta Antom.

And there was Morgan St. Cloud. The thought of those dead men filled me with horror.

And she took it so coolly. This somehow contributed to the horror that I felt. I wondered if she had killed any one before. Perhaps, indeed, she had slain many persons. After all, what manner of woman was this Queen Draconda of Loom? Cleopatra-like? But I soon dismissed that dark thought. For something told me that this mysterious queen, who I wished soon would issue from that mystery which enshrouded her, was a women noble and pure.

Of course, it was obvious that Draconda and Henry Quainfan had lived and loved in some other world. But what world? And where? For thus only could be explained their love pictures of each other. This other world, no doubt, was a Paradise; and from this Paradise

all human beings had been banished because of some transgression, which doubtless must be expiated in some way during this life of the flesh.

Thus we have an explanation of those wonderful and elusive feelings and visions that are aroused in the human soul at times, especially by music and more especially and powerfully by love. Some one has said that music tells us of things that we never have seen and never shall see; but I do not believe that now.

For I believe that music arouses memories of that other world, a world that was—or, rather, is—a Paradise. These memories aroused by music and love are so faint and mysterious that we do not recognize them as memories, that is all. The predominant thing in them, as everyone knows, is their wondrous and elusive beauty; never is there anything sordid in them; never can they be aroused by things sordid or terrible; and what does this prove (or indicate, if you please) if not that these visions are visions of Paradise?

It is scarcely necessary, by the way, to suggest how this belief affects our conception of love.

As has been said, I believe that for some transgression (and a terrible one it must have been) human beings have been banished to this life of the flesh and that in this life they must make themselves fit to enter again into their Paradise home, perhaps, indeed, living many lives, and on many spheres, before the day of their redemption comes; and I believe that their redemption must be won—as, indeed, every redemption must be—through goodly deed and through love.

But to return.

At length Draconda said:

"I have told Nytes all. And I must go now, my Farnermain, as there are some important matters waiting. And probably more important ones forthcoming."

She looked at me curiously for a few moments.

"My Farnermain," she began, "would you mind—?"

"I would be glad, O Draconda."

"One of your revolvers," she said.

"Great heavens!" I exclaimed. "Is it like that?"

She nodded.

"Probably worse."

I began unbuckling one of the belts—not thinking that it was St. Cloud's.

"You came well-armed," Draconda observed.

"Yes. And yet not so well either: One of these—this one was Morgan's."

Her brows drew together.

"*Yours*, please, my Farnermain," she said.

Accordingly I removed the other belt, and in a few moments it was enzoning Draconda's waist.

"I shall keep it concealed—so," she said.

"It seems, O Draconda, that Trouble came with us, and in terrible guise."

"My Farnermain," she smiled, "don't be myopic!"

She bent and softly kissed Henry on the forehead, then turned to go; but, as she turned, her eyes fell on the blood-stained place of the struggle and the resultant tragedy, and she stopped.

"Those stains must be removed at once," she said. "I forgot them."

Then she and the princess quitted the room.

In a few minutes, a couple of men entered and began to remove the blood stains and the other marks of the struggle.

And, as I watched them working, noiseless almost as shadows, some freak of memory brought these words of Southey's to mind:

"*Thou hast been busy, Death, this day, and yet But half thy work is done!*"

CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

ANOTHER MYSTERY

DARKNESS lay upon the palace of Conderogan when Henry Quainfan awoke.

"How late, Rider?" he asked.

"Dark about two hours. How's the fin?"

"Darned sore. So I fell asleep? Kind of—well, effeminate, eh? But—what happened?"

"Mynine went."

"Where?"

I shrugged my shoulders.

"Don't know."

"They'll probably kill her!" he exclaimed.

"That's what Draconda told her; but the girl wouldn't listen to reason."

Henry groaned in wretchedness of spirit.

"What a brute I've been, Rider!" he burst out. "Mynine believes that I lied—lied and acted like a mongrel. And how can you blame her for thinking that very thing?"

"Forget that," I told him. "How—?"

"You know well enough, Rider, that I never can forget it—that my manhood lies besmirched."

"You've hitched your fancy to a kite," I said—though full well did I know that he never could forget.

He was sitting on the edge of the bed now, bracing himself up with his right arm.

"Deucedly weak, Rider," said he. "Must have lost a deal of blood, or spirit, or something. However, to return to Mynine: you know, I should—"

"Stop it! Or, if you must indulge in reproach, let it be against the lady that deserves it."

"Who's that?" he demanded. "Not Draconda, certainly. And Mynine, poor girl—"

"I don't mean Draconda or Mynine: I mean Fate."

"Poor Fate!" he murmured. "What crimes they commit in your name!"

He sat staring at the carpet, his head sinking forward.

"I'll sound the alarm," said I, "for something to eat."

"No. I want nothing—only a drink of water. You know, my head feels like a collapsed balloon."

In a few minutes, he lay down and, rather to my surprise, was soon asleep once more.

In the meantime, I had seen much of Queen Draconda and had had much talk with her, which had enhanced the mystery of this extraordinary woman and revealed her marvelous intellectual possessions and powers. Her mathesis was, without exaggeration, simply amazing. Never had I dreamed that intellectual acquisitions so diverse or so gigantic could be found in one so young.

Also—and this puzzled me in a way of which I could give no adequate conception—there was a certain *maturity* in her thoughts, a cynicism even, that surprised me in a way as vague as it was disturbing. I thought I was prepared for anything, quite beyond surprise now; but, when I remarked on this cynical quality, it led to something that amazed me exceedingly, as I think it will the reader also.

"So you do not understand this cynicism, as you call it, my Farnermain?"

"No; it strikes me as strange that one so young should find that bitterness in the cup."

"Young!" she exclaimed.

And she laughed a little mysterious laugh.

"We become cynical, my Farnermain," she went on, "when many years and the bitter experience of many years are ours. And, indeed, what is cynicism

but a name for an unpleasant kind of truth?"

"I do not understand, O Draconda: what can many years have to do with *your* cynicism?"

"Many years have done it, my Farnermain," she smiled, "many years and experiences many and terrible. I know this sounds absurd to you; but it is a solemn fact. Now, how many years do you think I have seen? I mean, of course, terrestrial years, not Venusian."

"Twenty-five."

Again that mysterious smile.

"You said so, O Draconda!"

She shook her head.

"No, my Farnermain; I did not say solemn fact. Now, how many years do

"What?" I cried.

"I did not say that, my Farnermain," she laughed.

Good heavens, there was another one!

"You said that you had seen but three lustrums when Mayto was brought before you condemned," said I, not a little bewildered, "and than ten years, ten terrestrial years, have passed since then. That surely makes twenty-five years—unless, indeed, you meant Venusian lustrums, which would make you even younger. But surely you meant terrestrial ones."

She nodded.

"I meant terrestrial lustra."

"But, good heavens, O Draconda, twenty-five years are not many years!"

She laughed softly, her laughter like the music of falling waters.

The princess was watching us intently, a plaintive look on her lovely face.

"Of a surety twenty-five years are not many years," said the queen. "But I have seen more, many more. In all likelihood, this will seem an utter absurdity to you, my Farnermain, but I have seen—"

"Good heavens, O Draconda," I broke in, "what—?"

And there I stopped, and I stared.

"My Farnermain," she laughed, "I have seen five times twenty-five years! One hundred and twenty-five years have I seen! Think you not, my Farnermain, that *that* is many years?"

"I should say it is!"

She leaned back, laughing, and looked at me whimsically. Good heavens, there it was again! A hundred and twenty-five years old! And she was in the first flush of mature beauty! Two lustra since, she was fifteen years of age, and now she was one hundred and twenty-five! Ye gods and starfishes! That certainly was going some! Perhaps she had used a round number for convenience and was even a little older. One hundred and twenty-five years of age! And ten years before, she was but fifteen!

Draconda, who was hugely enjoying my mystification, broke the silence, saying:

"Well, my Farnermain, who do stare as though there was something unearthly before your eyes—well, my Farnermain, what do you think?"

"Nothing," said I, "nothing at all, O Draconda. I have discarded that function as useless."

She laughed a little.

"Do you think that I am a fibber?" she teased.

"O Draconda," I exclaimed, "why do you fool me thus? How in the name of Reason, can you, who are in the first full bloom of womanhood's flower, be one hundred and twenty-five years of age? It is absurd—utter nonsense—moonshine in daylight. Why do you befool me thus, O Draconda?"

"Pardon me, my Farnermain," she said sweetly, "but I did not say that I am one hundred and twenty-five years of age."

"What?" I cried.

She laughed.

"I did not say that I am one hundred and twenty-five years of age."

"Good heavens," said I, "what did you say then?"

"I did not say that, my Farnermain: I am but twenty-five—twenty-five terrestrial years, forty Venusian."

I was amazed, astounded. Draconda looked at me roguishly from under her lowered lashes for a little space, then burst into sudden and rippling laughter.

"You looked so funny!" she said.

"Funny? Is it any wonder that I looked funny? Your age is one hundred and twenty-five years, and yet you are only twenty-five years old! About as rational, that, as the old belief that the Universe was created in six days and yet in an instant of time."

"And how do you know, my Farnermain," said she, "that six days are any longer than an instant of time? Infinity of time and space there must be. Nothing can annihilate either time or space. Indeed, are they not one and the same? In order to annihilate them, nothing would have to be created, and nothing simply can not be. For, on the instant of creation, it would be *something*, would it not? What think you, my Farnermain?"

"That that, O Draconda, is a mystery unsolvable."

"And," she went on, "since time is infinite, how can one part of it be any greater than any other part or less than the whole?"

"It can not be," said I, "if time is infinite; and then those old priests were right. But that is only an assumption; in the nature of things, it can not be anything else. How can time be infinite? If it is, then the Almighty is not, and it is unutterably absurd, O Draconda, to think that God is finite. How could the Infinite create another infinity? The moment it came into being, God would lose His infinity, and, of course, the created *infinity* would be finite, for it would not be Omnipotence, and, in order to be infinite, it would have to be everything. If the Infinity created another infinity, then all infinity would be destroyed, and it is absurd to suppose for an instant that infinity can be annihilated."

Draconda laughed.

"Then how, my Farnermain—and watch your words—can God create a finite? And remember, if He can't, then He is not all-powerful."

"O Draconda, why ask the unanswerable?"

"No answer, my Farnermain!" she smiled, uplifting a finger.

"Of course not: one can not answer the unanswerable."

"But," said she, "if the Almighty were to create a finite, He too would be finite, for He would not be that created finite, and if the Almighty were not, how could He be infinite? Either infinity or its antithesis must be. Both can not. There is no such thing as a finite, my Farnermain: only infinity is. And what have you to say against that?"

"Preposterous!" I cried.

Again the silver of her laughter.

"From your own words, my Farnermain, I have asked it! But—let us not pursue the matter farther now. To return. I shall stop with the statement that I have seen one hundred and twenty-five yearsand yet am but twenty-five years of age—for, it seems, that will give you enough to think about for some time."

"I should say it will!"

"Do you think that I am fibbing?"

"That you are fooling, O Draconda."

"My Farnermain," she said with a tone of seriousness that had not been in her voice, though her eyes and lips remained smiling, "I am not befooling you—really I am not! What I have said is the truth, the whole truth and

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SPORT FOR LADIES

A Grim Little Tale

By STANLEY G. THOMPSON

"It is the first time that ever I heard the breaking of ribs was a sport for ladies." (As You Like It: Act I; scene ii.)

CITY newspapers have little time and less space for the small affairs of small persons which concern only themselves. If a police reporter had not been well acquainted with the craving for publicity of a detective friend even the following brief item might never have found space in the *Carrsville Journal*. It occupied but eight lines:

"Ed 'Cockney' Cravens, one of two convicts who escaped from Norton penitentiary last week, was arrested at eight-thirty o'clock last night by Detective Sergeant J. M. Sweeney at the home of Alma Brooks, 234 Ninth Street. He was very drunk, the detective said, and refused to tell what had become of his companion in the escape. He will be returned to the prison tomorrow."

The name of the Cockney's companion was left out of the brief story, and the readers neither noticed nor cared for the omission. If the arrest had any effect on the citizens of Carrsville, it was to make their sleep more peaceful, since they knew an escaped murderer was no longer at large, although Norton was so far from their city that they had not heard of the escape.

THERE was nothing spectacular in the flight of Cockney Cravens and Marshall Stollard from the Norton penitentiary. There never is anything spectacular about hard work, and that was what had effected their get-away. Six months of back-breaking, hand-blistering digging had preceded the night they crawled through the ceiling of their cell to the attic of the cell-house, slid down a pipe, scaled a wall and dashed five hundred yards into a dense thicket on the river bank before the alarm was given.

Two men more different in every way than Stollard and Cravens would be difficult to find. The former was American born. He stood six feet, three, in his bare feet and weighed a trifle over two hundred pounds. In his college days he was captain of the football team, a basketball star and a first-class pinch hitter, while as a swimmer he won every prize for which he was permitted to compete.

His sobriquet of "Cockney" was one of the few things Cravens had come by honestly. He was an under-sized man, a foot shorter than Stollard, skinny and unhealthy. His few remaining teeth were rotted. For athletics, or any other form of physical exertion, he had the utmost contempt. In manner, too, he was vastly different from the American. The latter was, like most very strong men, soft spoken and courteous, while in speech the Englishman was as wicked and as fierce as he was small in stature.

Each was serving a life sentence for killing a fellow man. Stollard had been sent to the prison after a trial which had attracted considerable attention in the small city where he lived and was known as a rising man in the general contracting "game." He had lost patience with a stock salesman who had visited his office several times, and had pushed the solicitor out of his door. The push was given with considerable force, throwing the salesman to the floor and causing a fracture of the skull which proved fatal. Cravens, who had left the London underworld with the police hot on his trail, was in prison for stabbing a drunken sneak thief in a brawl over a woman in a red light saloon.

These men occupied the same cell in the penitentiary for three years, during which the World War came to an end and the United States adopted prohibition, much to the disgust of the Cockney, though not to his immediate personal discomfort.

The plot to escape originated with Stollard. He would have preferred to have had for a partner any other man in the prison than Cravens, or, most of all, he would have liked to go it alone. But, he felt, escape he must and, as much as he abhorred the man, Cravens must be his partner. A reform wave had swept the State and he knew that parole or pardon within a decade was a remote possibility.

By superiority of mind and body Stollard kept his cellmate at the task of removing particles of stone from the ceiling of the cell. Often the little man groaned and begged the other to let him rest during the long nights, hating physical labor more than he loved freedom. These requests were granted as often as they were refused, but Stollard's inbred sense of justice prevented his doing all the work from which each would benefit equally.

Stollard lifted the Cockney through the aperture in the ceiling. When they reached the opening in the wall they had made by a drain pipe, the little man trembled and said he could not slide down. Patiently, the American took the little man on his back and slid down with him. The big man also boosted his companion over the wall, and half carried, half dragged him along as he ran toward the river. At the bank the two drew up. Cravens was panting.

"Wy the bloody 'ell 'ave ye come 'ere?" he demanded. "There ain't no rylewy 'ere."

"We want no railroad," whispered the other. "We're going by boat."

Cravens hated water in all its forms. As a means of transportation it appealed to him as little as a beverage or a cleaning fluid. Stollard ordered him to be quiet and to remain concealed in the bushes until he returned, and started away.

"Ditch me 'ere, will ye?" shrieked the little man, but the American interrupted with a command that silenced him.

The former athlete had once been a guest at the Norton Boat Club, and was able to make his way without difficulty to the boat house, not yet open for the summer. He took the best canoe he could find and broke open several lockers. Altogether, he managed to find clothes enough for the two of them, though the costumes were motley enough in make-up. The escaped convict then covered as well as he could evidences of his visit to the club.

Cravens was surprised to see Stollard return. He donned the clothes, still grumbling, but set up a howl of protest when he saw the canoe. He declared he would not ride on a river

three-quarters of a mile wide in such a "bloody fryle Hamerican" boat.

"Ride in it, or make it alone," said the American quietly. The Englishman already had begun to rely on his companion to such an extent that he feared not to obey.

Stollard disposed of the little man in the center of the canoe, threw one paddle into it, seated himself in the rear and pulled out, sticking close to the shore. Later, he decided, he would teach the cockney to handle a paddle. By daylight they had traveled thirty miles, and at dawn they camped, cold and hungry, in a thicket of willow trees where the insects of early Spring made life a burden. Stollard bore these hardships silently, while the other cried to high Heaven against them.

The next night, after a long altercation in which Cravens stormed and swore, while Stollard spoke with calm superiority, the little man undertook to master the art of handling the steering paddle, and did so with moderate success; so that, with Stollard pulling in front with long, clean strokes, the tired fugitives reached a small town ten miles from their camping place by midnight.

Here Stollard gave the Cockney an assignment which suited his tastes and training. He broke into a general store while the American kept watch.

Clothes, food, blankets, cooking implements and hardware useful in a camp were carried to the canoe. Cravens also rifled the cash drawer, taking thirty dollars and a revolver. These he carefully concealed from his companion.

FOR four days the fugitives continued their downstream journey, traveling by night and camping by day in the manner of Huckleberry Finn. Stollard reacted to the outdoor life, his muscles bulging and hardening, and the prison pallor leaving his face. He did most of the paddling and practically all of the camp work. Cravens, whose position at the rear paddle required but little exertion, spent his time in camp lying flat on his back and cursing everything in general.

On the fifth day the fugitives arrived near the city of Carrsville, one hundred and fifty miles from the prison and in another State. Stollard carried the canoe and the supplies several hundred yards inland, because of the numerous boats on the river around the city, and camp was made in an out-of-the-way ravine. After the American had cooked and served breakfast, Cravens became unruly. He demanded that the other consent to his going into the city; for by this time he had thoroughly accepted Stollard's leadership.

Wearied by his companion's entreating and wishing a few hours alone, Stollard permitted the Cockney to go shortly before noon, exacting a promise that he would return at three o'clock. The American, having been in prison, thought of the prohibition law as strictly enforced and respected, so feared nothing on that score. Otherwise, he would have held Cravens in the camp.

When Stollard awoke from a nap he knew by the sun that it was considerably after three o'clock. Cravens had not returned.

"That dirty rat has gotten himself arrested," he thought. "Now he will lead the police to me."

He began making preparations to flee. First, however, he took from a secret pocket in his undershirt a small sack he had concealed from his dishonest companion. It contained a number of coins and bills—eighteen dollars and seventy cents in all. He had counted it so often that he knew every piece by its individual marks. This was his prison treasure, the result of many a surreptitious trade with fellow-prisoners to whom he gave his allotment of tobacco and other luxuries.

The arrest of Cravens, Stollard decided, meant that he must give up his scheme to proceed down the river to its mouth, now only fifty miles away, and then down the Father of Waters, to the ocean, escaping observation by extreme caution. He had expected to arrive at the ocean before the fall days became too cool for canoeing. Then to some foreign land—

"Hi," a voice broke in on his thoughts. "So ye've been 'oldin' out on yer old pal, 'ave ye?"

The leering face of Cravens peeped from behind a tree. The cockney obviously was under the influence of liquor, as he hove into sight, snarling at the other.

"Glad you're back," said Stollard, quietly. "Now, we'll get ready to break camp."

"Bryke camp, 'ell! There'll be no bryking camp this night for we. Me jyne's wytin' for me now, an' ye'll gimme that money for more o' this."

Cravens flourished a bottle of moonshine, two-thirds empty. "An' bloody vile stuff it is. Blarst them thievin' temperance—"

The cockney finished with a string of oaths.

"Give me that." Stollard rose quickly, seized the bottle and threw it to the ground where it was dashed to pieces on a rock. Cravens was wild.

"Ye blarsted, bloody ————," he roared and, made bold by alcohol, rushed at Stollard, swinging his fists. The American thrust out one hand and pushed him back. Cravens lost his balance and fell to the ground.

"Now see here," said Stollard. "You go over to that tree and sit down while I make a fire. We're going to have a little chow and move on. I'll break camp while the food's cooking."

With the air of a whipped dog, Cravens obeyed.

Stollard busied himself gathering sticks with which to start a fire. Cravens noticed that his back was turned. At the Englishman's side lay one of the canoe paddles. Silently he rose. He picked up the paddle.

The big man whistled as he worked, while the cockney slipped nearer. Rising to his full height, Cravens swung and brought the paddle against the other's head, flat side front, with all the force in his little wiry body. Had he struck with the edge it might have been a death blow.

Stollard fell forward. He was momentarily stunned, but his great vitality brought him to his feet again, his head throbbing as if it would burst.

"You damned little cur!" he shouted, and seized Cravens. In the heat of his suffering, he struck the cockney several times in the face, drawing blood, and pommeled him in the side unmercifully before he regained his composure.

The cockney's resistance was futile, and he cried for mercy. Stollard flung him to the ground.

"You dirty little cur!" he said. "Another trick like that, and I'll break every rib in your miserable little body."

Suffering less now, Stollard turned to his work, while the Englishman crawled to the tree and lay in misery, groaning and rubbing his wounds.

The American was rather ashamed of his anger. "He's a miserable little rat," was the trend of his thought. "and I'll get rid of him soon, but I shouldn't have hurt him so much. Of course, one like him couldn't be expected to know what fair fighting means."

These thoughts prompted Stollard to step ten yards away to where the supplies were concealed under the overturned canoe. He would open a jar of sliced bacon and have a real feast, just to show the other he held no animosity against him.

Cravens saw his companion move away, and took from its place of concealment the revolver he had taken

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Here's a Quaint Little Fantasy
Born of Whimsical Imagination

The Man Who Dared to Know

By JUNIUS B. SMITH

THE MAN WHO DARED TO KNOW closed the book he was reading and studied its binding with the eye of a connoisseur. He had employed many experts to garner the data recorded on the engraved pages between its brownish-red, flexible leathern covers. It was the genealogical record of himself, James Windsor Bournette, last of his line of Bournettes.

He had started the work some twenty years before, and had spent thousands of dollars on it; and at last the completed book was in his hands. He was glad to have finished his research. He would have traced his ancestry to the dawn of creation . . . perforce he stopped because a forbear, who had come out of the wilderness, told not whence he had come. Well, it was quite a span: himself at one end; at the other, the ancestral being who had wooed with a club and talked a language now dead and forgotten.

He thought of the money spent upon this record. A hundredfold more would he spend could he but vivify the pages and see the deeds of those who had gone before him.

The room was lighted by the blazing fire of an open grate. He watched the dancing flames until his eyes were weary and his lids closed. He would let fancy weave a picture for each page of the record he had made.

A strange voice called his name. The leg of a chair dragged with muffled cadence against the soft carpeting of the room. He opened his eyes. Seated some four or five feet distant, was a man of wonderful physique, dark-complexioned, eyes with the glint of twin stars through a cloudless night, teeth of ivory showing as he smiled an unfathomable smile and clasped the arms of the mahogany chair in which he sat.

"You wished to see me." It was a statement, positive and in even tone, as though the verb were used advisedly.

"See you? Surely you are mistaken—"

"About your ancestors."

Bournette sat upright.

"Your pedigree is not complete," the visitor went on.

"It is as complete as human research can make it."

He shook his head: "I have records older than yours."

Bournette's first annoyance had passed. Whoever he was, perhaps his visitor also made a hobby of genealogical research. Their lines might even merge at some point, as was frequently the case. A man had two parents, four grand-parents, eight great grandparents, and so on till, theoretically, the world would not have held the people a few generations would make. Practically, however, they ran into each other—lines came together time and again. Blood streams flowed like fluctuating rivers, leaving islands here and there, narrowing to a tenuous thread, spreading here and there, disappearing, perchance, as in the sands of the all-consuming desert.

As for himself, he had traced his own blood back through devious channels until its source became lost in antiquity, the farthest removed authentic ancestor being he who had wooed with a club, had come out of the wilderness from nowhere and had told no one who he was.

Bournette leaned forward and regarded the other intently, eyes sparkling. "You have older records than mine . . . but tell me . . . give me proof . . . and you can charge your own price if they pass scrutiny."

"My records are not for sale; but—watch!"

He got up and crossed to a camera of which Bournette for the first time became cognizant. He focused it against one pale green-tinted wall, then waved a hand:

"Behold! An ancestor of yours in the Stone Age, beating to death an animal for food. Observe the club he is using; note the skins he is wearing for protection from the elements; see the hairy arms and legs, the knotted muscles, the low, receding forehead. Your blood and his are the same."

It was all clever trickery, of course. Some grafting photographer was showing him faked pictures for a purpose not yet disclosed. Yet he said nothing, for another picture had come upon the wall.

"I can show you the meanderings of your blood-stream, from yourself, till your slimy ancestors came out of the sea. But—if you look—it will destroy your peace of mind until you are gathered to your fathers."

"And what does it profit you?" Bournette found voice to ask.

"Kind must seek its kind; the restless consort with the restless. I would have company in my suffering." His manner was intensely serious.

"Show me things no one but myself knows," Bournette temporized.

The stranger turned to his camera and Bournette saw himself as of the present. An hiatus, and secret events were depicted. He saw his life weave back to the days of his boyhood—to the river, in which he had died save for a piece of floating wood caught in agonizing struggle. There against orders from home, he never told.

He saw his most sacred castles in the air, the soul travail through which he had one time passed.

"Go on!" he exclaimed in exquisite torture. "Show me who I am, whence I came, whither I may go."

"Of the future, it is not given for me to say. But the past—again I warn you . . . Dare ye take the risk?"

Bournette laughed shortly. "I will take the risk. I—dare—to—know."

A man, naked, save covered with matted hair, squatted before a fire. The burning sticks pointed like the spokes of a wheel. Forked stakes driven into the ground supported across the flame a green stick upon which was some meat. It was the leg of an animal . . . It was the leg of—a—man!

"Good God!" cried Bournette.

The picture changed. A beautiful woman, dressed in richest medieval silks, flashed before his vision.

"Honored in history: You descend through her."

A child was spirited away and given to the heathen—become as of another race.

"Her child. No one knew, save herself. The father died that he might not tell."

Bournette watched the child grow and become a mighty hunter; watched him rise to the command of his nomadic tribe; saw depicted the wars that netted to himself and tribal members, mothers for their children. He shuddered in fascinated horror.

Abruptly another form appeared: An impassioned orator, in Roman tunic, was haranguing an excited mob. Words fell from his lips in liquid fire. Bournette found himself on feet, wildly cheering what the orator—*his kinsman*—said.

Then he fell back into his leathern chair.

THROUGHOUT the night scenes reeled before him, not in sequence, but snatched here and there, out of forgotten history—out of the secret lives of his progenitors. He sat enthralled, experiencing the gamut of human emotions.

The fire in the grate burned low. He rose and replenished its fuel, then took his seat again.

"You have not shown me my *immediate* forbears," he pointed out when the night was nearly done.

"Your parents, you mean?"

"Precisely— parents, grandparents, great grandparents. Let me look upon some faces I would recognize."

"And some that you would not. It were wise that you see no further."

"I would see it all," Bournette insisted.

"Yet . . . your parents. It were best to forego seeing them."

"You imply?"

"Nothing."

"Then proceed with the pictures. But before you do—Who are you, anyway?"

His visitor regarded him intently, fully a minute, before he answered. Then he said:

"I am the one you have summoned to your presence. I am the one come to wreck your house upon the sands. The lives of others are their own and woe unto him who seeks to wrest from them their secrets. Behold! . . . The price you pay for transcending the bounds of material self."

He turned and flung on the wall a picture of two strange people.

"Your parents: their meeting: their wooing; their marriage; the child that was born to them.

"Yourself; your early life; the adoration of your father and mother; their poverty: Starvation. It threatens to lay hand upon *you*:

"The sacrifice! You are taken away and given to another: History ever repeats itself, with variations.

"Your foster parents, whom you always thought your own."

Bournette sprang to his feet and closed his eyes in agony. "My God! My God! It can't be true!"

The other laughed with ironic fiendishness.

"But my parents! Where are they? Do they live? Their names? Can I find them? Share with them my wealth?" His hands groped for support, as he reeled against the table beside which he had been sitting throughout the night.

And his visitor mocked him: "I told thee thou couldst not ask of the future."

Silence came down as a pall. Some way Bournette knew it was the end. He opened his eyes. Of the visitor, or his camera, there was not a sign.

One hand, still upon the table, touched a leathern-bound volume, viewed with so much pride the night before. He picked up the book and riffled its leaves. Then he tossed it into the fire and staggered from the room.

True Courage

WHEN the American army was at Valley Forge, in the winter of 1777, a captain of the Virginian line refused a challenge sent him by a brother officer, alleging that his life was devoted to the service of his country, and that he did not think it a point of duty to risk it, to gratify the caprice of any man. His antagonist gave him the character of a coward throughout the whole army. Conscious of not having merited the aspersion, and discovering the injury he should sustain in the minds of those acquainted with him, he repaired one evening to a general meeting of the officers of that line. On his entrance he was avoided by the company, and the officer who had challenged him insolently ordered him to leave the room, a request which was loudly re-echoed from all parts. He refused, and asserted that he came there to vindicate his fame; and, after mentioning the reasons which induced him not to accept the challenge, he applied a large hand-grenade to the candle, and when the fusee had caught fire, threw it on the floor, saying, "Here gentlemen, this will quickly determine which of us all dare brave danger most." At first, they stared upon him for a moment in stupid astonishment, but their eyes soon fell upon the fusee of the grenade, which was fast burning down. Away scampered colonel, general, ensign, and all made a rush at the door simultaneously and confused. Some fell, and others made their way over the bodies of their comrades; some succeeded in getting out, but for an instant there was a general heap of flesh sprawling at the entrance of the apartment. Here was a colonel jostling with a subaltern, and there fat generals pressing lean lieutenants into the boards, and blustering majors and squeaking ensigns wrestling for exit; the size of the one and the feebleness of the other making their chance of departure pretty equal, until time, which does all things at last, cleared the room, and left the captain standing over the grenade with his arms folded, and his countenance expressing every kind of scorn and contempt for the train of scrambling redcoats, as they toiled and bustled, and bored their way out at the door. After the explosion had taken place, some of them ventured to return, to take a peep at the mangled remains of their comrade, whom, however, to their great surprise, they found alive and uninjured. When they were all gone, the captain threw himself flat on the floor, as the only possible means of escape, and fortunately came off with a whole skin and a repaired reputation.

An Eventful Night in a Haunted Forest

THE GHOST-EATER

By C. M. EDDY, Jr.

MOON-MADNESS? A touch of fever? I wish I could think so! But when I am alone after dark in the waste places where my wanderings take me, and hear across infinite voids the demon echoes of those screams and snarls, and that detestable crunching of bones, I shudder again at the memory of that eldritch night.

I knew less of woodcraft in those days, though the wilderness called just as strongly to me as it does now. Up to that night I had always been careful to employ a guide, but circumstances now suddenly forced me to a trial of my own skill. It was midsummer in Maine, and, despite my great need to get from Mayfair to Glendale by the next noon, I could find no person willing to pilot me. Unless I took the long route through Potowisset, which would not bring me to my goal in time, there would be dense forests to penetrate; yet whenever I asked for a guide I was met with refusal and evasion.

Stranger that I was, it seemed odd that everyone should have such glib excuses. There was too much "important business" on hand for such a sleepy village, and I knew that the natives were lying. But they all had "imperative duties," or said that they had; and would do no more than assure me that the trail through the woods was very plain, running due north, and not in the least difficult for a vigorous young fellow. If I started while the morning was still early, they averred, I could get to Glendale by sundown and avoid a night

in the open. Even then I suspected nothing. The prospect seemed good, and I resolved to try it alone, let the lazy villagers hang back as they might. Probably I would have tried it even if I had suspected; for youth is stubborn, and from childhood I had only laughed at superstition and old wives' tales.

So before the sun was high I had started off through the trees at a swinging stride, lunch in my hand, guardian automatic in my pocket, and belt filled with crisp bills of large denominations. From the distances given me and a knowledge of my own speed, I had figured on making Glendale a little after sunset; but I knew that even if detained over night through some miscalculation, I had plenty of camping experience to fall back on. Besides, my presence at my destination was not really necessary till the following noon.

It was the weather that set my plans awry. As the sun rose higher, it scorched through even the thickest of the foliage, and burned up my energy at every step. By noon my clothes were soaking with perspiration, and I felt myself faltering in spite of all my resolution. As I pushed deeper into the woods I found the trail greatly obstructed with underbrush, and at many points nearly effaced. It must have been weeks—perhaps months—since anyone had broken his way through; and I began to wonder if I could, after all, live up to my schedule.

At length, having grown very hungry, I looked for the deepest patch of shade I could find, and proceeded to eat the lunch which the hotel had prepared for me. There were some indifferent sandwiches, a piece of stale pie, and a bottle of very light wine: by no means sumptuous fare, but welcome enough to one in my state of overheated exhaustion.

It was too hot for smoking to be of any solace, so I did not take out my pipe. Instead, I stretched myself at full length under the trees when my meal was done, intent on stealing a few moments' rest before commencing the last lap of my journey. I suppose I was a fool to drink that wine; for, light though it was, it proved just enough to finish the work the sultry, oppressive day had begun. My plan called for the merest momentary relaxation, yet, with scarcely a warning yawn, I dropped off into a sound slumber.

II

WHEN I opened my eyes twilight was closing in about me. A wind fanned my cheeks, restoring me quickly to full perception; and as I glanced up at the sky I saw with apprehension that black racing clouds were leading on a solid wall of darkness prophetic of violent thunderstorm. I knew now that I could not reach Glendale before morning, but the prospect of a night in the woods—my first night of lone forest camping—became very repugnant under these trying conditions. In a moment I decided to push along for a while at least, in the hope of finding some shelter before the tempest should break.

Darkness spread over the woods like a heavy blanket. The lowering clouds grew more threatening, and the wind increased to a veritable gale. A flash of distant lightning illuminated the sky, followed by an ominous rumble that seemed to hint of malign pursuit. Then I felt a drop of rain on my outstretched hand; and though still walking on automatically, resigned myself to the inevitable. Another moment and I had seen the light; the light of a window through the trees and the darkness. Eager only for shelter, I hastened toward it—would to God I had turned and fled!

There was a sort of imperfect clearing, on the farther side of which, with its back against the primeval wood, stood a building. I had expected a shanty or log-cabin, but stopped short in surprise when I beheld a neat and tasteful little house of two stories; some seventy years old by its architecture, yet still in a state of repair betokening the closest and most civilized attention. Through the small panes of one of the lower windows a bright light shone, and toward this—spurred by the impact of another raindrop—I presently hurried across the clearing, rapping loudly on the doors as soon as I gained the steps.

With startling promptness my knock was answered by a deep, pleasant voice which uttered the single syllable, "Come!"

Pushing open the unlocked door, I entered a shadowy hall lighted by an open doorway at the right, beyond which was a book-lined room with the gleaming window. As I closed the outer door behind me I could not help noticing a peculiar odor about the house; a faint, elusive, scarcely definable odor which somehow suggested animals. My host, I surmised, must be a hunter or trapper, with his business conducted on the premises.

The man who had spoken sat in a capacious easy-chair beside a marble-topped center table, a long lounging-robe of gray swathing his lean form. The light from a powerful argand lamp threw his features into prominence, and as he eyed me curiously I studied him in no less detail. He was strikingly handsome, with thin, clean-shaven face, glossy, flaxen hair neatly brushed, long, regular eyebrows that met in a slanting angle above the nose, shapely ears set low and well back on the head, and large expressive gray eyes almost luminous in their animation. When he smiled a welcome he showed a magnificently even set of firm white teeth, and as he waved me to a chair I was struck by the fineness of his slender hands, with their long, tapering fingers whose ruddy, almond-shaped nails were slightly curved and exquisitely manicured. I could not help wondering why a man of such engaging personality should choose the life of a recluse.

"Sorry to intrude," I ventured, "but I've given up the hope of making Glendale before morning, and there's a storm coming on which sent me looking for cover." As if to corroborate my words, there came at this point a vivid flash, a crashing reverberation, and the first breaking of a torrential downpour that beat maniacally against the windows.

My host seemed oblivious to the elements, and flashed me another smile when he answered. His voice was soothing and well modulated, and his eyes held a calmness almost hypnotic.

"You're welcome to whatever hospitality I can offer, but I'm afraid it won't be much. I've a game leg, so you'll have to do most of the waiting on yourself. If you're hungry you'll find plenty in the kitchen—plenty of food, if not of ceremony!" It seemed to me that I could detect the slightest trace of a foreign accent in his tone, though his language was fluently correct and idiomatic.

Rising to an impressive hight, he headed for the door with long, limping steps, and I noticed the huge hairy arms that hung at his side in such curious contrast with his delicate hands.

"Come," he suggested. "Bring the lamp along with you. I might as well sit in the kitchen as here."

I followed him into the hall and the room across it, and at his direction ransacked the woodpile in the corner and the cupboard on the wall. A few moments later, when the fire was going nicely, I asked him if I might not prepare food for both; but he courteously declined.

"It's too hot to eat," he told me. "Besides, I had a bite before you came."

After washing the dishes left from my lone meal, I sat down for a while, smoking my pipe contentedly. My host asked a few questions about the neighboring villages, but lapsed into sullen taciturnity when he learned I was an outsider. As he brooded there silently I could not help feeling a quality of strangeness in

him; some subtle alienage that could hardly be analyzed. I was quite certain, for one thing, that he was tolerating me because of the storm rather than welcoming me with genuine hospitality.

As for the storm, it seemed almost to have spent itself. Outside, it was already growing lighter—for there was a full moon behind the clouds—and the rain had dwindled to a trivial drizzle. Perhaps, I thought, I could now resume my journey after all; an idea which I suggested to my host.

"Better wait till morning," he remarked. "You say you're afoot, and it's a good three hours to Glendale. I've two bedrooms upstairs, and you're welcome to one of them if you care to stay."

There was a sincerity in his invitation which dispelled any doubts I had held regarding his hospitality, and I now concluded that his silences must be the result of long isolation from his fellows in this wilderness. After sitting without a word through three fillings of my pipe, I finally began to yawn.

"It's been rather a strenuous day for me," I admitted, "and I guess I'd better be making tracks for bed. I want to be up at sunrise, you know, and on my way."

My host waved his arm toward the door, through which I could see the hall and the staircase.

"Take the lamp with you," he instructed. "It's the only one I have, but I don't mind sitting in the dark, really. Half the time I don't light it at all when I'm alone. Oil is so hard to get out here, and I go to the village so seldom. Your room is the one on the right, at the head of the stairs."

Taking the lamp and turning in the hall to say good-night, I could see his eyes glowing almost phosphorescently in the darkened room I had left; and I was half reminded for a moment of the jungle, and the circles of eyes that sometimes glow just beyond the radius of the campfire. Then I started upstairs.

As I reached the second floor I could hear my host limping across the hall to the other room below, and perceived that he moved with owlish sureness despite the darkness. Truly, he had but little need of the lamp. The storm was over, and as I entered the room assigned me I found it bright with the rays of a full moon that streamed on the bed from an uncurtained south window. Blowing out the lamp and leaving the house in darkness but for the moonbeams, I sniffed at the pungent odor that rose above the scent of the kerosene—the quasi-animal odor I had noticed on first entering the place. I crossed to the window and threw it wide, breathing deep of the cool, fresh night air.

When I started to undress I paused almost instantly, recalling my money belt, still in its place about my waist. Possibly, I reflected, it would be well not to be too hasty or unguarded; for I had read of men who seized just such an opportunity to rob and even to murder the stranger within their dwelling. So, arranging the bedclothes to look as if they covered a sleeping figure, I drew the room's only chair into the concealing shadows, filled and lighted my pipe again, and sat down to rest or watch, as the occasion might demand.

III

I COULD not have been sitting there long when my sensitive ears caught the sound of footsteps ascending the stairs. All the old lore of robber landlords rushed on me afresh, when another moment revealed that the steps were plain, loud, and careless, with no attempt at concealment; while my host's tread, as I had heard it from the head of the staircase, was a soft limping stride. Shaking the ashes from my pipe, I slipped it in my pocket. Then, seizing and drawing my automatic, I rose from the chair, tiptoed across the room, and crouched tensely in a spot which the opening door would cover.

The door opened, and into the shaft of moonlight stepped a man I had never seen before. Tall, broad-shouldered, and distinguished, his face half hidden by a heavy square-cut beard and his neck buried in a high black stock of a pattern long obsolete in America, he was indubitably a foreigner. How he could have entered the house without my knowledge was quite beyond me, nor could I believe for an instant that he had been concealed in either of the two rooms or the hall below me. As I gazed intently at him in the insidious moonbeams it seemed to me that I could see directly through his sturdy form; but perhaps this was only an illusion that came from my shock of surprise.

Noticing the disarray of the bed, but evidently missing the intended effect of occupancy, the stranger muttered something to himself in a foreign tongue and proceeded to disrobe. Flinging his clothes into the chair I had vacated, he crept into bed, pulled the covers over him, and in a moment or two was breathing with the regular respiration of a sound sleeper.

My first thought was to seek out my host and demand an explanation, but a second later I deemed it better to make sure that the whole incident was not a mere delusive after-effect of my wine-drugged sleep in the woods. I still felt weak and faint, and despite my recent supper was as hungry as if I had not eaten since that noonday lunch.

I crossed to the bed, reached out, and grasped at the shoulder of the sleeping man. Then, barely checking a cry of mad fright and dizzy astonishment, I fell back with pounding pulses and dilated eyes. *For my clutching fingers had passed directly through the sleeping form, and seized only the sheet below!*

A complete analysis of my jarred and jumbled sensations would be futile. The man was intangible, yet I could still see him there, hear his regular breathing, and watch his figure as it half-turned beneath the clothes. And then, as I was quite certain of my own madness or hypnosis, I heard other footsteps on the stairs; soft, padded, doglike, limping footsteps, pattering up, up up . . . . And again that pungent animal smell, this time in redoubled volume. Dazed and dream-drowsed, I crept once more behind the protecting opened door, shaken to the marrow, but now resigned to any fate known or nameless.

Then into that shaft of eery moonlight stepped the gaunt form of a great gray wolf. Limped, I should have said, for one hind foot was held in the air, as though wounded by some stray shot. The beast turned its head in my direction, and as it did so the pistol dropped from my twitching fingers and clattered unheeded to the floor. The ascending succession of horrors was fast paralyzing my will and consciousness, *for the eyes that now glared toward me from that hellish head were the grey phosphorescent eyes of my host as they had peered at me through the darkness of the kitchen.*

I do not yet know whether it saw me. The eyes turned from my direction to the bed, and gazed gluttonously on the spectral sleeping form there. Then the head tilted back, and from that demon throat came the most shocking ululation I have ever heard; a thick, nauseous, lupine howl that made my heart stand still. The form on the bed stirred, opened his eyes, and shrank from what he saw. The animal crouched quiveringly, and then—as the ethereal figure uttered a shriek of mortal human anguish and terror that no ghost of legend could counterfeit—sprang straight for its victim's throat, its white, firm, even teeth flashing in the moonlight as they closed on the jugular vein of the screaming phantasm. The scream ended in a blood-choked gurgle, and the frightened human eyes turned glassy.

That scream had roused me to action, and in a second I had retrieved my automatic and emptied its entire contents into the wolfish monstrosity before me. *But I heard the unhindered thud of each bullet as it imbedded itself in the opposite wall.*

My nerves gave way. Blind fear hurled me toward the door, and blind fear prompted the one backward glance in which I saw that the wolf had sunk its teeth into the body of its quarry. Then came that culminating sensory impression and the devastating thought to which it gave birth. This was the same body I had thrust my hand *through* a few moments before . . . and yet as I plunged down that black nightmare staircase *I could hear the crunching of bones.*

IV

HOW I found the trail to Glendale, or how I managed to traverse it, I suppose I shall never know. I only know that sunrise found me on the hill at the edge of the woods, with the steepled village outspread below me, and the blue thread of the Cataqua sparkling in the distance. Hatless, coatless, ashen-faced, and as soaked with perspiration as if I had spent the night abroad in the storm, I hesitated to enter the village till I had recovered at least some outward semblance of composure. At last I picked my way down hill and through the narrow streets with their flagstone sidewalks and Colonial doorways till I reached the Lafayette House, whose proprietor eyed me askance.

"Where from so early, son? And why the wild look?"

"I've just come through the woods from Mayfair."

"You—came—through—the Devil's Woods—*last night*—and—*alone?* The old man stared with a queer look of alternate horror and incredulity.

"Why not?" I countered, "I couldn't have made it in time through Potowisset, and I had to be here not later than this noon."

"And last night was *full moon!* . . . . My Gawd!" He eyed me curiously. "See anything of Vasili Oukranikov or the Count?"

"Say, do I look that simple? What are you trying to do—jolly me?"

But his tone was as grave as a priest's as he replied. "You must be new to these parts, sonny. If you weren't you'd know all about Devil's Woods and the full moon and Vasili and the rest."

I felt anything but flippant, yet knew I must not seem serious after my earlier remarks. "Go on—I know you're dying to tell me. I'm like a donkey—all ears."

Then he told the legend in his dry way, stripping it of vitality and convincingness through lack of coloring, detail, and atmosphere. But for me it needed no vitality or convincingness that any poet could have given. Remember what I had witnessed, and remember that I had never heard of the tale until *after* I had had the experience and fled from the terror of those crunched phantom bones.

"There used to be quite a few Russians scattered betwixt here and Mayfair—they came after one of their nihilist troubles back in Russia. Vasili Oukranikov was one of 'em—a tall, thin, handsome chap with shiny yellow hair and a wonderful manner. They said, though, that he was a servant of the devil—a werewolf and eater of men.

"He built him a house in the woods about a third of the way from here to Mayfair and lived all alone. Every once in a while a traveler would come out of the woods with some pretty strange tale about being chased by a big gray wolf with shining human eyes—like Oukranikov's. One night somebody took a pot shot at the wolf, and the next time the Russian came into Glendale he walked with a limp. That settled it. There wasn't any mere suspicion now, but hard facts.

"Then he sent to Mayfair for the Count—his name was Feodor Tchernevsky and he had bought the old gambrel-roofed Fowler place up State Street—to come out and see him. They all warned the Count, for he was a fine man and a splendid neighbor, but he said he could take care of himself all right. It was the night of the full moon. He was brave as they make 'em, and all he did was to tell some men he had around the place to follow him to Vasili's if he didn't show up in decent time. They did—and you tell me, sonny, that you've been through those woods at night?"

"Sure I tell you"—I tried to appear nonchalant—"I'm no Count, and here I am to tell the tale! . . . But what did the men find at Oukranikov's house?"

"They found the Count's mangled body, sonny, and a gaunt gray wolf hovering over it with blood-slavering jaws. You can guess who the wolf was. And folks do say that at every full moon—but sonny, didn't you see or hear anything?"

"Not a thing, pop! And say, what became of the wolf—or Vasili Oukranikov?"

"Why, son, they killed it—filled it full of lead and buried it in the house, and then burned the place down—you know all this was sixty years ago when I was a little shaver, but I remember it as if 'twas yesterday."

I turned away with a shrug of my shoulders. It was all so quaint and silly and artificial in the full light of day. But sometimes when I am alone after dark in waste places, and hear the demon echoes of those screams and snarls, and that detestable crunching of bones, I shudder again at the memory of that eldritch night.

Turkish Enthusiasm

THERE are in Turkey two kinds of monks, very different from each other, but equally remarkable. The difference between them proceeds from the sort of regulation that their founder has imposed respectively upon them; that of the Mewliach Dervise is to turn round like a totum, to the sound of a tolerably soft music, and to acquire a holy intoxication from the vertigos, which are the natural consequences of this strange exercise, if habit did not prevent that effect, which, however, they generally make up for at the tavern. The custom of the other monks, called Tacta-tepen, is more doleful, and more savage. It consists in gravely marching one after another round their chapel, and pronouncing the name of God with a loud voice, which they strain at every stroke of a drum beaten on the occasion; but very soon the strokes gradually following closer, become so loud that these wretches are obliged to make great exertions of their lungs, and the most devout never finish the procession without spitting blood. The appearance of these monks is always gloomy and austere, and they are so persuaded of the sanctity of their practice, and so sure of pleasing heaven by their howlings, that they never look on other men but with the most profound contempt.

A Five-Minute Tale of Supernatural Adventure

THE THING

By FRANK MARION PALMER

IT IS easy to recall it, bit by bit, just as it occurred, though it should have been forgotten long ago.

I can, even now, visualize the THING as I saw it in all its frightfulness. Time has accentuated the memory of that haunting half hour.

The immediate result of my enervating experience was a benumbing of the senses —a partial paralysis of the mind. The frenzied fear, the gripping horror of it, came to me later when miles away from the scenes of its occurrence.

I had retired late. My room, number 307, was on the third floor of a downtown hotel, which town and which hotel, for good and sufficient reasons, I shall not say. Several cups of strong coffee had rendered sleep out of the question. The weather was warm, but a damp, sticky, smoke-laden haze, due to the crowded shipping that lay in the harbor below, penetrated everywhere. I fancy the night was dark, but the electric glare of the city turned night into day.

At last, lulled by the stillness within and the hum of the city which came to me through my open window, I slept. My sleep was a dreamless, leaden unconsciousness, far from refreshing. Then came the introduction to my unusual experience.

I could never explain why I heard it so distinctly. Soundly asleep, my ears were painfully smitten by a dull, heavy, sickening, smothered explosion.

I was awake and alert in an instant, trying to account for it. Light of day was paling the electric glare and objects were plainly visible within the room. Without my open window I could see, through the blue murk, the outlines of buildings across the street, the serrated sky-line far above. I got up, stretched and yawned; took a turn around the room, lit a cigarette and laid down again. I had not accounted for the noise, but finally concluded that it came from some natural cause—apparently out on the street. At any rate, I thought no more of it as I lay there enjoying my morning smoke.

I was about to doze again when the room was suddenly filled, saturated with the vilest smell of burned powder I have ever encountered. It was absolutely sickening and seemed mingled with the smell of burning human flesh—the stench that hangs over a battlefield the morning after a carnage.

So, I said to myself, that explosion *was* in this building, on the third floor and not far from my room!

I was still reclining and had taken another cigarette when the THING came into my room, putting an end to all thought of immediate investigation.

It came in through the wide open window from the fire-escape. Its shape was that of a human body, entirely nude, perfectly distinct in outline and detail, yet lacking in the extremities—a torso only—so distinct and lifelike that I could *see* the folds of flesh, the contour of muscles, the pinky-yellow color of the skin, and yet, so transparent was it, the window casing, the figured wall paper, the outlines of the dresser and everything it passed, were visible *through* it —as plainly discernible as though *it* were not there.

It floated in—slowly, slowly, as a mist of early morning might enter one's casement or a wisp of smoke, wafted in on a stray breeze—unsubstantial, filmy, yet *seeming* to have the substance of flesh and blood.

The head of my bed was exactly opposite the window, and I had splendid vantage for contemplation. I was not long in discovering the incompleteness of that spectral visitor. It lacked hands and forearms, the lower extremities were cut off above the knees, and, to complete the phantasmal horror of it, there was no head upon those broad, powerful shoulders—only the stump of a muscular neck.

The awfulness of this armless, legless, headless shape was further intensified by the fact that the extremity of each truncated member seemed to drip red blood!

All this I saw as it floated into my room through the open window—a ghastly shape that defied description—while I was breathing the stench of a day-old battlefield.

And now, the last, the most weird detail of all—the most inexplicable—the one that indeed filled me with astonishment was yet to come.

Between my open window and the door, against the wall, stood a dresser surmounted by a large plate glass mirror.

As the THING advanced, floated through my room, to melt, vanish, or draw through the solid panels of my door, it, perforce, must pass by this mirror. So clear was my mind in those trying moments, that I had dwelt upon this very fact as the THING advanced, and had speculated as to what the *reflection* of a spectre would be like.

Let science explain this singular phenomenon; I can not. The reflection of my spectre was no spectre, at all! It was the solid, substantial, flesh, blood and bone of a six-foot man about thirty years of age, not lacking a single member, perfect in color, form, feature, as nude as the day he was born, gracefully floating by the big looking glass; his eyes closed, a contented smile lighting up his handsome features—much like one asleep whose face is transfigured by a pleasant dream.

And then, just as the figure was floating free of the glass—as the bevel on the edge of the plate began to distort the otherwise perfect lineaments, the head was turned by some odd movement of the body, the eyes opened and looked straight into mine!

With a start, I half arose and called out:

"Arnold! Oh, Arnold, *is* it, *can* it be. . . . !"

Even as I called—foolishly, idiotically, pleadingly—in a hollow, unnatural voice, I knew there would be, *could* be no response. For an instant, fear—fear that he *might* heed my cry—that he *might* delay his noiseless flight through my room, gripped my throat and stilled my voice.

But now the apparition *out* of the glass, was at the door. Through it I could plainly see the outlines of the door casings—and it was becoming less and less. It was gone. The phantom drew *through*

the locked and bolted door as vapor through the meshes of a sieve.

Such was the THING that visited me in my room on the morning of September 2.

As soon as it was gone my feet touched the floor. I unlocked the door and went into the hall. All was quiet out there. I heard no sound, smelled no burning powder. If there were guests in the other rooms they all must have been sound asleep. One could have heard a mouse creep in that gloomy hallway. I closed the door and got into bed. When I awoke again the clanging jar of the street traffic told me it was late.

I bathed, shaved and dressed. As I walked down the hall and took the elevator to the office I scanned the faces of the late risers. There was no look of surprise, curiosity—consternation, on a single set of features. All was as commonplace as upon any other morning. Nothing unusual had happened.

And such was the effect of those passing and re-passing guests that my harrowing experience of the early morning began to seem unreal and all but passed, for the time, out of my memory. At the office I paid my bill, listened to the commonplace talk of a garrulous clerk and went away, without having mentioned a word of my experience.

On the stage, homeward bound, a chat with a seat mate and the beauty of Autumn foliage painting the borders of the highway red, brown and yellow, occupied my attention. But when I arrived at Maple Shadows I was silent no longer.

I horrified my wife and daughter until they ran away from me. Then I followed them up.

"But Arnold Mathews was killed at Chateau Thierry. You told me so," said my daughter.

"He was! I saw him killed with my own eyes. His legs, arms and head blown into bits by an exploding bomb dropped from the air. Not a shred of his clothing remained—"

"And this one—Ugh! do go away! You make me shudder. Oh, dad, how awful!"

From the sheer lack of an audience I desisted.

"Watch the papers tonight and tomorrow," I ventured again at the dinner table. "A man committed suicide this morning at the Savoy Hotel. *How* he did it I am not quite prepared to say, but I should think, that, owing to the character of the explosion and the appearance of the THING after. . . ."

My wife stopped me with a gesture of disgust.

"George, that is not a nice subject for the dinner table."

"Well," I reiterated, unwilling to be squelched so suddenly, "he killed himself, just the same, in a room across the hall from mine. . . You'll see. Watch the papers."

And this is what we read in the evening paper:

"SUICIDE AT SAVOY HOTEL

"Arnold Mathews, a guest at the Savoy Hotel, occupying room 308, committed suicide last night or early this morning.

"About the middle of the afternoon, when it was found that the man would not respond to repeated knocking and that the door was locked from the inside, the room was broken into. A gruesome sight met the eyes of the landlord, clerks and officers of the law.

"On the bed, in a sitting position, braced against the footboard and swathed in all the blankets the room contained, was found the dead body of Mathews. Thorough examination of the mutilated body together with bits of evidence found on the bed and elsewhere in the room, led those present to believe that the deceased had attached a piece of fuse to a large dynamite cap, placed the cap in his mouth, raised his feet and legs from the floor, then, covering himself completely with blankets, sheets, pillows and his own clothing, (the man was entirely naked), lighted the fuse and, deliberately folding his arms, calmly awaited the end.

"The bed, floor, walls and ceiling were bespattered with blood. The body was a ghastly sight. Nothing but the trunk was left to indicate that the remains had once been a human being. Arnold Mathews was about 28 years of age, six feet in height, light complexion, brown hair and eyes. He was a stranger in the city, and an effort is being made to locate some friend or relative. The motive is still unknown.

"No one has as yet been found who heard the sound of the explosion. This is not strange, as the entire third floor with the exception of two rooms—Mathews' room and the one opposite—was unoccupied.

"The officers are trying to locate one G. R. Lawton, an ex-army surgeon, the man who slept in number 307, the room opposite the one occupied by Arnold Mathews last night."

Extraordinary Escape

SOME time since a chief in the village of the Lake of the Two Mountains, when going to bed, incautiously stuck a lighted candle against the wainscot of a garret where he and his household, amounting to eighteen persons, had retired to rest. After some time, the tallow, by which the candle adhered, melting, it fell down, unfortunately, into a basket where there was a bag containing eighty-four pounds of gunpowder. The consequence was an immediate explosion, which blew off the roof, rent away the sides, and, in a word, reduced the house to splinters. By such an accident, one would suppose that many were killed and wounded: but it was quite the reverse; for not a single person, though all were blown out of an upper story to the distance of thirty yards, was injured materially.

The chief, whose name is Jacob Commandant, alighted on his feet in a canoe on the beach, through which his legs penetrated as far as the ankles, and held him fast, as it were, in the stocks. There he was found by some of the inhabitants, in inexpressible terror, imagining his situation to have proceeded from some malicious demon, whose exit and entrance had destroyed his house. A child who was sleeping with its head near the basket, suffered no other hurt than having its hair singed: and to crown all, a leathern bag, containing three pounds more of gunpowder, and lying in the same basket, was found near the house unexploded.

NEMESIS

By H. P. LOVECRAFT

Thro' the ghoul-guarded gateways of slumber,
Past the wan-moon'd abysses of night,
I have liv'd o'er my lives without number,
I have sounded all things with my sight;
And I struggle and shriek ere the daybreak, being driven to madness with fright.

I have whirl'd with the earth at the dawning,
When the sky was a vaporous flame;
I have seen the dark universe yawning
Where the black planets roll without aim,
Where they roll in their horror unheeded, without knowledge or lustre or name.

I have drifted o'er seas without ending,
Under sinister grey-clouded skies
That the many-fork'd lightning is rending,
That resound with hysterical cries;
With the moans of invisible daemons that out of the green water rise.

I have plunged like a deer thro' the arches
Of the hoary primordial grove,
Where the oaks feel the presence that marches
And stalks on where no spirit dares rove,
And I flee from a thing that surrounds me, and leers thro' dead branches above.

I have stumbled by cave-riddled mountains
That rise barren and bleak from the plain,
I have drunk of the frog-foetid fountains
That ooze down to the marsh and the main;
And in hot curs'd tarns I have seen things I care not to gaze on again.

I have scann'd the vast ivy-clad palace,
I have trod its untenanted hall,
Where the moon writhing up from the valleys
Shows the tapestried things on the wall;
Strange figures discordantly woven, that I cannot endure to recall.

I have peer'd from the casement in wonder
At the mouldering meadows around,
At the many-roof'd village laid under
The curse of a grave-girdled ground;
And from rows of white urn-carven marble I listen intently for sound.

I have haunted the tombs of the ages,
I have flown on the pinions of fear
Where the smoke-belching Erebus rages;
Where the jokuls loom snow-clad and drear:
And in realms where the sun of the desert consumes what it never can cheer.

I was old when the Pharaohs first mounted
The jewel-deck'd throne by the Nile;
I was old in those epochs uncounted
When I, and I only, was vile;
And Man, yet untainted and happy, dwelt in bliss on the far Arctic isle.

Oh, great was the sin of my spirit,
And great is the reach of its doom;
Not the pity of Heaven can cheer it,
Nor can respite be found in the tomb;
Down the infinite aeons come beating the wings of unmerciful gloom.

Thro' the ghoul-guarded gateways of slumber,
Past the wan-moon'd abysses of night,
I have liv'd o'er my lives without number,
I have sounded all things with my sight;
And I struggle and shriek ere the daybreak, being
driven to madness with fright.

A Five-Minute Yarn—

SHADOWS

By FRANK OWEN

IN ABJECT terror, Tod Grogan crouched on the stairs.

The house was in utter darkness, supposedly deserted, yet down below he could hear the sound of someone moving stealthily about. Cold perspiration broke out on his forehead as though his brow were a sieve. His teeth chattered and his hands shook as if he were palsied.

In the great folds of blackness, which enveloped him like a shroud, nothing could be discerned. From the bleak and barren mountain solitudes, the wail of coyotes drifted to his ears, but from the room below came a sound still more terrible, the faint rustle of someone moving cautiously about.

Tod Grogan was a fugitive from justice. In fact, he had always been a fugitive. Since earliest childhood, he had fought incessantly against shadows, and now he was menaced by the greatest shadow of all. Folks used to say of him, "He is afraid of his own shadow." But what no one suspected was that he was afraid of everybody else's shadow as well. When there were no shadows, Tod Grogan was fearless, but where they existed his terror was boundless.

The fears which he had encountered during his lifetime had made of him a pitiful wreck, fears none the less frightful because they existed only in his own twisted mind.

And then there had come a day which had marked a nauseating climax in his life. He had killed a man in a fit of temporary insanity. Up in the hills, where the huge pine trees loomed up to meet the sun like great gaunt spectres, when the ground was covered with frozen snow which crunched beneath his feet like breaking bones, he had been lost for three days and nights. During the hours of sunlight he had been far from valiant, but as the shadows of evening crept down over the purpling hills, fear drove him absolutely mad and he raced through the weird, eerie forests shrieking like a madman.

Thus he raved and tore about through the echoing woods until he fell exhausted. Then one night, as he rushed through the mountains in the pitch-blackness, he had run full-tilt into a man. With a cry of horror, Tod Grogan drew his knife and struck. When the authorities found him he was still chopping away at the shapeless, lifeless body.

SEVERAL days later he was given a perfunctory trial, convicted of murder in the first degree and thrust into prison. His guilt was established. The trial was merely a legal formality.

Then followed dreary hours of solitude, unbroken save when the old guard brought him food. At night he lay on his cot in the dark prison cell, waiting for the dreaded hour that would rob him of life, his mind a chaos of fantastic emotions. He wondered about death, what would come afterward. Perhaps a man's life was simply snuffed out by death and his soul existed no longer.

He did not really fear death, but the thoughts of the countless shadows through which he would have to pass before the ultimate end, made of him a pitiful thing. In the yard they were building a scaffold. The sound of the hammering came to his ears like the ominous beating of drums playing a funeral dirge. Only a few more days and the black cap would be placed over his eyes and he would be led out like a beast to be strangled in the presence of a few friends of the State who had been invited to witness the event. Lying in his cell, he imagined he could see his blackened face, protruding eyes and foaming lips. And it would all happen in darkness. That was the most terrible thought of all.

One morning he overpowered the old guard and after stealing his clothes, he left the prison without opposition from anyone. Whether or not he had killed the guard, he neither knew nor cared. He was free; nothing else mattered. And yet can a fugitive ever be free? Tod Grogan had escaped from jail but he could not break away from the clutching grip of shadows.

Now, as he crouched on the stairs, his blood had turned to ice. He listened. There was no mistaking the fact that someone was moving about in the room below. Perhaps there were more than one; perhaps the house was surrounded and escape impossible. There was not the faintest ray of light anywhere discernible. Even the moon was hidden by billows of cloud. The blackness yawned up the stairs with such an intensity that it seemed peopled by a thousand grotesque shapes.

In his hand, Tod Grogan clutched a revolver which he had stolen from the prison guard. In it lay his only hope. He crept cautiously down the stairs. The boards creaked as loudly as the snap of a whip. At the foot of the stairs he paused. The sound was much more distinct now. He tried to locate the corner from whence it came, then fired twice.

For a moment he waited, and then, as the sound was repeated, he knew that he had failed. Again he fired, once, twice, three times. But the sound continued.

He had only one cartridge left. He hesitated for a fraction of a second only, then placing the revolver to his temple, he fired the last cartridge.

And now the moon broke through the clouds and shone softly into the room. Tod Grogan's body lay in the direct path of the light. His glazed eyes seemed turned toward the moon. Out of the shadows a huge black cat padded softly forth and licked the dead man's cheek.

A Series of Vivid Articles
Written by SEABURY QUINN

WEIRD CRIMES

No. 5. *Mary Blandy*

TWO dirty, unkempt urchins fought and struggled in the gutterway of Henley. The elder, a ragamuffin lad of thirteen or so, bore his antagonist to the kidney stone pavement, pressed his knee upon the other's chest and leaned forward, intent upon gouging the little fellow's eyes with thumb and forefinger. It was a trick he had learned from the bullies of the waterfront; a trick no decent English lad would stoop to—but this little alley rat was not a decent English lad.

"Help, help!" screamed the smaller boy, fighting desperately to keep the sharp, unclean nails of his enemy from his eyes.

There was a clatter of flying, iron-ringed hoofs against the paving flints, a shout of command to the older boy, and a tall, auburn-haired girl, slim and straight as a youth, flung herself from her pony, laying her riding crop mercilessly across the unfair fighter's shoulders.

Surprised by the sudden rear attack, the boy loosed his grip on his opponent's face and turned furiously to defend himself. He might as well have attempted to beat back the north wind. Right cut, left cut, back and forth, the girl swung her whip with the speed and skill that mark the practiced fencer and the strength that tells of healthy young muscles grown strong and supple through systematic exercise.

"Thou churl, thou mean, base varlet, thou *Frenchman!*" she cried, still plying her whip. "Dost fight with teeth and nails, like a yowling gib-cat? Thou'rt not fit to breathe the air of England!" She cut him again across his writhing shoulders.

Hopelessly worsted in the combat, the boy drew off a safe distance and made the oldest gestures of insult the world knows—that of the thumbed nose. "Yah, garn, tomboy!" he mocked from his zone of safety beyond the cut of her whip.

"Tomboy, tomboy, live like a man and die like a man.

"'Fighting girls and crowing hens
Always come to some bad ends.'

"Ye'll die on the gallows, Mary Blandy, and all yer father's money can't save ye from it. Tomboy, tomboy, gallows-bird tomboy!"

The girl made a threatening gesture, and he took refuge in flight, but his raucous taunt of "Tomboy, tomboy, gallows-bird tomboy!" could be heard long after the patter of his broken-soled brogans no longer sounded in her ears.

She tossed a copper for comfort to the lad she had rescued, remounted her pony and rode slowly toward her father's house.

Mary Blandy was the only child of Francis Blandy, a prominent solicitor of the town of Henley, on the Thames; and because her father had wished a son and been disappointed with a daughter, he had done the next best thing and had Mary educated more like a young squire than a young noblewoman.

At fourteen she could ride, fence and shoot as well as most boys several years her senior, and better than some, and her proficiency in the classics was a source of wonderment and no little shame among parents with sons in the neighborhood. Many of these, piqued by the girl's extraordinary ability, contented themselves with saying such training and efficiency were unladylike, unfeminine and entirely disgusting. So, at an early age, Mary Blandy suffered unpopularity among the parents of her boy acquaintances.

In a few years unpopularity was increased a hundred per cent., for Mary, the young woman, proved herself as apt at all feminine accomplishments as Mary, the girl, had excelled in boyish pastimes.

Her father's house became a rendezvous for the eligible young men of the vicinity, and many a "womanly woman" sat beside her lonesome fireside while young professional men and officers from the nearby garrison made the rafters of the Blandy withdrawing room ring with their song and laughter.

Of all the gay young Redcoats who came to court Lawyer Blandy's daughter, the most favored was Captain William Henry Cranstoun, an infantry officer, brother to Lord Mark Ker, of Scotland, and possessor of a yearly income of £1,500—a very respectable fortune in those days.

Other suitors gradually drifted away, and in the course of time the captain's proposal of marriage was duly made, discussed by the Blandy family, and accepted.

Happy in the possession of her gold-laced lover, Mary Blandy went about her preparations for marriage, choosing silks and taffetas for gowns with the nice discrimination that marked all her dealings, embroidering silk stockings for wear at the grand court levees she would attend when her precious sweetheart should at last be promoted and ordered for duty at London town, and between whiles dreaming the long, long, open-eyed dreams every girl dreams during her engagement.

Then, one day, came a letter for Lawyer Blandy from "the North"—Scotland. It was signed by a young woman claiming to be Captain Cranstoun's wife, and, what was more, the mother of his son.

Mr. Blandy called his daughter to him, showed her the letter, and told her she must have nothing more to do with the captain.

Shocked as she was, Mary still held faith in her lover, believing the best of him, as all good women do of the men they love, declaring there was either some mistake or that the captain would be able to make a satisfactory explanation.

This he was given an opportunity to do that very night, and when confronted with the documentary evidence of his perfidy, coolly denied any attachment

with the letter's sender. When Lawyer Blandy, worldly wise from forty years' practice of a profession which has its tap-roots in human frailties, declared he needed something more than the young officer's bare denial, the captain asked a few days' grace in which to marshal his defense, declaring he, too, would produce documentary evidence.

Blandy was a just man, and acceded to the captain's request, but put him on his honor not to see or communicate with Mary until he showed the promised papers.

A FEW days later Captain Cranstoun appeared at the Blandy residence with a letter bearing a signature identical with the one Mr. Blandy had received. This letter, addressed to the captain, admitted its sender was neither his wife nor his son's mother, and had no claim whatever upon Captain William Henry Cranstoun of His Majesty's Army.

The canceled engagement was renewed, and preparations for the wedding were almost complete when a second letter came for Mr. Blandy, imploring him not to let his daughter marry a scoundrel. The writer averred she had been led into making a denial of her wifehood by an urgent appeal from Captain Cranstoun, telling her he had no intention of marrying Miss Blandy, having become engaged to her merely as a diversion. He had urged his wife to stultify herself because he had no chance of preferment in the service if it were known he was married, whereas, if he could pass as single a few months longer, he would surely be promoted and would then acknowledge her as his wife and bring her to live with him.

With womanly unselfishness she had agreed to write the letter he sought; but far from feeling proper gratitude for her sacrifice, the unprincipled rogue had sent copies of her renunciation to her family, who thereupon turned her out of doors. She was reduced to starvation, and prayed Mr. Blandy to release her husband from his engagement and restore him to her. To prove the truth of her claims, she enclosed the letter Cranstoun had written, asking her to sully her reputation for his sake, and declaring his engagement to Mary a mere frivolous pastime.

Such evidence could not be ignored. In spite of fervent protestations of innocence, Mr. Blandy sent the cockscomb captain about his business and forbade his daughter, on pain of disinheritance, ever to see him or write to him again.

But the love that laughs at locksmiths pays even less attention to parental commands, and, though Mary dutifully forbore seeing the captain, she carried on a continual clandestine correspondence with him. His earnest disavowals of all wrong-doing, his passionate declarations that he was the victim of a designing woman who sought to stand between him and happiness, overbore Mary's customary keen judgment. In a short time she ceased to think of him as a deceiver and regarded him as a greatly wronged man.

Once or twice she undertook to plead her lover's cause with her father; but her advances called forth such outbursts of temper from the indignant old gentleman that she ceased the attempts. Mary had not inherited her father's auburn hair and gray eyes without a fair share of his choleric disposition, and in the course of their arguments she repaid most of his irascible remarks with compound interest, forgetting that keyholes are as fairly adapted to servants' ears and eyes as to keys.

Her father's adamant attitude and her lack of intimate acquaintances among the neighborhood young women forbade her telling her troubles to a disinterested listener, and with this safety vent denied her, she poured forth her woes to her companion in misery, Captain Cranstoun. That gentleman was absent on leave from his regiment, visiting relatives in Scotland, and it may well be supposed his replies were far from urging her to meek obedience or patient waiting. Yet never did he counsel her to defy her parent openly, nor did he suggest a romantic elopement. Mr. Blandy possessed a considerable fortune and an unrelenting temper. If Mary contracted an unsanctioned marriage, she would certainly come dowerless to her husband, and that eventuality was far from being included in Cranstoun's program.

In these circumstances he had recourse to a strategem. Pretending great elation, he wrote his forlorn sweetheart that he had met a witch in the highlands of Scotland, a woman able to brew all sorts of potent draughts. She could concoct potions which begot instant and undying love in the breasts of those who took them, she could charm birds from their nests and snakes from their holes; best of all, she could prepare a medicine—quite harmless to the taker—which, could Mr. Blandy but be induced to swallow it, would instantly turn his aversion to Captain Cranstoun's marriage with his daughter into a beaming consent.

Mary knew the power of Scottish witches—were they not being condemned for sorcery at every court term?—and this particular witch, Cranstoun wrote, was more powerful in her magic, both black and white, than any yet condemned to hang.

Trusting implicitly in her lover's promises, Mary joyfully awaited the coming of the packet which should bring her a happy issue out of all her afflictions. In due time the drug arrived, marked, as had been agreed, "Powders for polishing Scottish pebbles." It was fine, white, and, when applied to the tongue with a moistened finger, had the faint, tart-sweet taste of apples.

At her first opportunity, Mary mixed a generous portion of the medicine with her father's morning gruel, then waited expectantly for an abatement of his hatred of Captain Cranstoun. But instead of becoming complaisant, Mr. Blandy grew more testy than ever.

Fearing the charm had lost some of its potency in the long trip from Scotland, Mary administered a still stronger dose the following morning.

Shortly afterward her father took to his bed with violent stomach pains.

For a few days Mary gave him no more of the powders, and his health began to mend gradually, but his temper remained as hot as formerly. Letters from the captain urged her to continue the "treatment," and, feeling sure her lack of success was due to insufficient dosage of the magic powder, she prepared a larger portion than ever, pouring it into the broth prescribed by the physician.

Almost immediately Mr. Blandy became desperately ill. The doctor was summoned post-haste, but declared his skill unavailing. The patient was dying.

Then, and not till then, was Mary's consciousness awakened to the enormity of her actions. At last she realized the mysterious powders and her father's illness were cause and effect. Overcome with horror at the part she had unwittingly played, she rushed into her father's bedchamber, and falling to her knees, sobbed, "Oh, father, dear, dear father, do what you will with me, mete out any punishment you see fit, but forgive your foolish, love-blinded child. Oh, my father, my father, forgive me; forgive me."

In spite of the violent pain he suffered, Mr. Blandy lay calmly while she told her story, tears streaming down her cheeks, her words split with sobbing. At last he put forth his hand, laying it gently on his daughter's bowed head.

"My dear," he gasped, "I forgive thee freely. Nay, more, I bless thee, and pray God will bless thee. Now go, and

say no more of this business, lest thou shouldst let drop some word to thine own prejudice. Farewell, my child, and may God pity and watch over thee."

As the weeping girl groped her way blindly from the room, Lawyer Blandy muttered, "Oh, the villain, the graceless villain! To come to my house, eat at my table, and in return take away my life and ruin my daughter!"

Beside herself with grief and remorse, Mary ran from the house, seeking solitude in which to weep away some of the anguish in her heart. At last, feeling she must see her father to implore his forgiveness once more before he died, she re-entered the house and sought the death chamber.

A strange man, roughly dressed and armed with a heavy bludgeon, stood at the door. As she approached he smiled malignantly at her.

"Tomboy," he announced, "thou'lt not enter here. Thy devil's work is already done."

With a start Mary recognized the bailiff. Though age had altered him, he still bore a strong resemblance to the gutter urchin she had thrashed years before for fighting with his nails "like a yowling gib-cat." And, at his repetition of the epithet "tomboy," she remembered his shouted prophecy in the streets of Henley: "Ye'll die on the gallows, Mary Blandy."

Now he was a hanger-on at the jail, a thief-taker, servant to the constable. "Tomboy," his taunt of years ago came back to her, "gallows-bird tomboy." She had been a girl of fourteen when the dirty street Arab had called her that. Now—

She leaned weakly against the wall for support, closing her eyes in hopeless misery. *"Tomboy, tomboy, gallows-bird tomboy!"* the words seemed beating a rhythm in her pulses.

A hand fell on her shoulder. "Mary Blandy, in the name of our lord the King . . . . !"

She was under arrest.

HER trial for parricide was held at Oxford on March 3, 1852. Among the witnesses for the crown were her servants, all of whom testified to the heated debates she had with her father over Captain Cranstoun. Not one, however, could be made to say she had shown any evidence of harboring a grudge. On the contrary, all the testimony showed that her anger evaporated almost as soon as it boiled.

While England today enjoys what is, perhaps, the best system of criminal procedure in the world, a system under which speedy results are achieved, and few, if any, innocent persons suffer injustice, she was just emerging from the dark ages, in which to be accused of crime was almost tantamount to being convicted, when Mary Blandy was called to the bar.

Persons accused of felony were permitted counsel, it is true, but only to a limited extent. Their lawyers might advise them on matters of law, but, though the crown was numerously and ably represented by trial lawyers, counsel for the accused might neither examine witnesses for the defense, cross-examine witnesses of the prosecution nor advise their clients respecting examination of witnesses or any other matter of fact.

This might not seem so great a hardship at first glance, but when it is remembered that a trial consists merely of measuring facts developed in evidence by the yardstick of the law, it will be seen that for one untrained in the law to develop a proper legal defense from the testimony of his witnesses, or to break down the prosecution's case in law by astute cross-examination, was almost an impossibility. Add to this the fact that, while the crown's lawyers might address the court and jury at length, the defendant's counsel might not be heard in argument, and the hopelessness of the accused's plight may be realized.

To offset the inability of the defendant to be heard through counsel, the theory that the judge himself was charged with the protection of the defendant's rights was laid down, but only too often, in those days, this theory was no more than a legal fiction—a grim jest at the prisoner's expense.

The indictment for murder covered several parchment sheets and charged that Mary Blandy, spinster, "not having the fear of God before her eyes, did wickedly, wilfully, maliciously and of her deliberate and premeditated malice feloniously kill and murder her father, the said Francis Blandy, of the town of Henley aforesaid, against the form of the statute in such case made and provided and against the dignity of our lord, the King."

"How will you be tried, Mary Blandy?" asked the court's clerk when he had finished reading the interminable hodge-podge of legal verbiage accusing her of murder.

"By God and by my country," the girl replied, using the prescribed formula which signified she desired trial by jury.

Twelve residents of the vicinity were sworn "well and truly to try and a true deliverance make between our lord and King and Mary Blandy, spinster," and the trial commenced. It lasted eleven consecutive hours.

When all the crown's witnesses had been examined (no testimony was offered by the defense), and the attorney-general had harangued the jury, charging Mary Blandy with the foulest of crimes, next to treason, known to the law, the judge nodded to the girl. Her time to speak had come.

Bewildered by the unfamiliar surroundings, denounced by the very servants of her father's house, and with not one friendly eye upon her in all that crowded court room, an inexperienced girl rose to plead for her life.

An eyewitness of the trial describes her as being above medium height, erect and proud in bearing and with calm eyes and unruffled brow. She was plainly, but decently, dressed in a gown of dark woolen stuff, with white linen collar and wristbands. Her voice, though low, was distinct, firm and unhurried, and her wide gray eyes never left the judge's face as she spoke.

Among all the addresses delivered in court since man first sat in judgment on man, Mary Blandy's surely deserves high rank for strength and simple eloquence. The speech attributed to Robert Emmet has long been held a masterpiece of forensic oratory; but Emmet was a practiced orator and fired with patriotism. Mary Blandy had never addressed a public gathering in her life and was on the point of exhaustion at the end of eleven hours of denunciation—an ordeal sufficient to break the spirit of a strong man.

"My lord," she began, dropping a courtesy to the court, "it is mortally impossible for me to detail to you all the hardships I have endured—but worst of all, I have been aspersed in my character. In the first place, it has been said I spoke ill of my father, that I cursed him. That is entirely false. Sometimes little family affairs have happened, and we did not speak as kindly to each other as I could have wished. I own I am passionate, my lord, and in my passion I may have dropped some hard words; but your lordship must have noticed what great care has been taken to recollect every word I have said which could be applied to my disadvantage. These are hardships, my lord, such as you yourself must allow to be so.

"It has been said, too, that I endeavored to make my escape. Your lordship will judge the difficulties I labored under. I had lost my father; I was accused of being his murderess; I was

not allowed to go near him. I was forsaken by my friends, affronted by the mob, insulted by my servants.

"Although I begged to have the liberty to listen at the door when he died, I was not allowed it.

"My keys were taken from me, my shoebuckles and garters, too—to prevent my making away with myself—as though I were the most abandoned creature. What could I do, my lord? Was this a condition in which to attempt an escape?

"When I was arrested in my home I was locked up for fifteen hours without a maid to attend the decencies of my sex.

"I was sent to jail, and the high sheriff told me he must put an iron on me. A little later he came again and said he must put a still heavier iron on my ankles until my day in court arrived. I was chained like a savage beast, my lord.

"Newspapers and ballade mongers have made free with my reputation; I have been represented as the most abandoned of my sex and prejudiced in the eyes of the world.

"I submit myself to your lordship and to the worthy jury. I do assure you, as I am to answer at the great tribunal where I am some day to appear, I am entirely innocent of my father's death. I really thought the powder an innocent, inoffensive thing, and I gave it to him to procure his love.

"It has been mentioned, I should say, that I have been 'ruined'. My lord, in the sense the witnesses mean, I have not. I am virtuous. But when a young girl loses her character, is not that her ruin? Is it not ruining my character to have this vile charge of murder laid upon me?

"Whatever may be the event of this trial, my lord, I am already ruined most effectually and beyond the hope of redemption."

Carefully and painstakingly, the judge instructed the jury in the legal definitions of murder in the first degree, murder in the second degree, manslaughter, and innocence. He seems to have been a just man who took his duty to conserve the prisoner's legal rights seriously. The instructions done, the court rose, waiting the jury's retirement. But no movement came from the jury box. The clerk frowned in annoyance. A bailiff motioned to the jury's foreman to retire, but was answered by a stubborn shake of the head.

"Gentlemen of the jury," exclaimed the clerk, "have you agreed upon a verdict?" He was prepared to suggest sarcastically that they retire and deliberate when the foreman answered in the negative.

He was not given the opportunity.

"We have," replied the foreman.

"Prisoner, look on the jury; jury, behold the prisoner," cried the clerk mechanically. Then, as Mary Blandy rose and regarded the men who held her fate, the clerk continued: "Gentlemen of the jury, how do you find the prisoner at the bar, guilty or not guilty?"

"Guilty!" the foreman spoke the word of doom gruffly.

Mary Blandy's unpopularity in the neighborhood had paid its final dividend.

"YOUR verdict is that you find the prisoner at the bar guilty of murder in the first degree? So say all of you?" the clerk intoned, following the ritual of all criminal trials.

Again the jurors nodded solemnly.

"Bring me my cap," the judge ordered. An attendant fetched a small, black silk cap, which the judge fitted over his full-bottomed judicial wig. No sentence of death could be pronounced in an English court unless the judge wore this symbol of mourning. The symbolism of the black cap in English courts was equivalent to the broken wand in German tribunals when the death sentence was given.*

Briefly the court congratulated Mary Blandy on having had a fair and impartial trial by a jury of her peers, and ordered that she be hanged by the neck until dead on the sixth of the following month. As legal form prescribed, he ended the sentence with the prayer that God would have mercy on her soul.

The girl received her sentence calmly, nor did she waste breath in vain pleas for mercy. She was not a lawyer's daughter for nothing. None knew better than she the inexorable course of British justice.

During the thirty-three days of her imprisonment Mary's conduct was marked by the utmost gentleness. Not once was she heard to protest against her fate or to reproach the servants and former friends on whose testimony she had been condemned. Poor girl, why should she cling to life? Her father was dead, and she condemned in the world's opinion as his murderess; her lover had forsaken her; in all the world she had not a single friend or well-wisher.

April sixth dawned bright and warm. Mary Blandy arrayed herself in a modish gown of black bombazine with a white kerchief about her throat. When the sheriff's men came to lead her to execution she wished them a cheerful good morning.

Executions in England in those days were publicly conducted, and the gallows on which criminals were hanged was not erected in the jailyard for each execution. It was kept standing in an open field, where its grim shadow was a constant reminder to evildoers, and this field was nearly a mile from the jail where Mary Blandy was confined.

A carriage was offered her, but she declined, saying she would enjoy the April sunshine as long as possible. So, accompanied by the officers and a clergyman, she set out upon her last journey a-foot.

Previous to leaving the jail, her wrists had been crossed and bound before her with black ribbons, a concession to her sex and gentility, and this mode of tying her hands permitted her to hold a prayer book before her. This was another courtesy, for condemned criminals' hands were customarily lashed behind their backs with rope.

The attending clergyman read the office appointed for executions in the Book of Common Prayer, but Mary Blandy opened her book to the Psalter appointed for the sixth day of the month and read from Psalm 32: "Blessed is he whose unrighteousness is forgiven and whose sin is covered. I said 'I will confess my sins unto the Lord,' and so Thou forgavest the wickedness of my sin."

Beneath the gibbet a stepladder, draped in black bunting, had been set up, and on this she mounted two rungs, saying, "Gentlemen, I beseech you, hang me no higher, for decency's sake."

But the knotted noose, swinging from the gallows' crossbar, would not reach her where she stood, so she climbed to the ladder's top. A puff of wind caused the ladder to sway slightly, and the poor girl cried out in terror of falling, raising her helpless, bound hands to steady herself.

"Fear ye not, tomboy," called a hoarse voice from the group about the gallows, "ye'll fall clean to hell in a minute!" The chief constable turned and struck her tormentor such a heavy blow in the mouth that his lips bled. So her old enemy's last meeting with Mary Blandy was like his first, the occasion of a beating.

When the rope had been adjusted, Mary raised her hands, drew her kerchief over her face, and stood a moment in silent prayer. Then she held her prayer book forward.

This was the signal agreed upon be-

*1. *See article III of this series, "The Magic Mirror Murders."*

tween her and the sheriff. Two husky jail attendants heaved the ladder from beneath her, and Mary Blandy's slender body swung between earth and heaven.

It was half an hour before they cut her down, for her weight was not great enough to break her neck, and she strangled slowly, while the great crowd of mean folk, gathered to watch the execution, stood in hang-jawed amazement to see a woman fight so long for life.

At one o'clock the following morning she was carried by torchlight to the family vault at Henley, and, with the rope that strangled her still about her slim, white throat, buried beside the father for whose murder, rightly or wrongly, she was hanged.

DILIGENT search was made for Captain Cranstoun, but the scoundrel had heard of Mary's arrest, and, deserting the army, fled to France. For five years he lived a fugitive from justice, but the government took legal proceedings to attach the source of his income. At last, reduced to abject poverty, he died in a home for the indigent kept by the church at Boulogne, and was buried in a nameless grave in foreign soil.

This is the Fifth Article of a Series That Seabury Quinn is Writing for WEIRD TALES. *The Sixth Will Appear in Our Next Issue. It is Entitled "The Werewolf of St. Bonnot," and Describes Some Startling Things that Happened in France Under the Reign of Charles IX. Be Sure to Read this Gripping Article in the May* WEIRD TALES.

DRACONDA

(Continued from page 67)

nothing but the truth: I was born in this very city of Loom, in this very Palace of Conderogan, and that was twenty-five years ago, and so I am but twenty-five years of age! How could I be any older? Now—"

"But—" I struck in.

"Oh, you big goose," she laughed, "stop butting and do some thinking!"

"What's the use?" I wailed. "What's the use of even trying to think?"

"My Farnermain," she said seriously, "can you not see how what I have uttered can be divested of its seeming absurdity? For I assure you it is no more than that."

I shook my head.

"Won't you explain, O Draconda?"

"In due season," she smiled. "I must go now. And I pray you to ponder on the *absurdities* that I have uttered, to seek the key that will unlock the mystery. I tell you, the human mind is one of the blindest of all things created, what with its prison walls of the flesh.

"You, my Farnermain, put all your faith in those beliefs and thought processes that the wise ones have declared infallible, and thus you do not see (who should long ago have seen) and think that the darkness which is in your own brain is gibberish uttered by me.

"Your mind, my Farnermain, is like an eagle with its wings weighted down—though it is not your fault at all. But strive to cast off those weights, my Farnermain, which are but the blunders of divers flesh-entombed souls, and thus let your mind soar up to the wonder heights, even as the free-pinioned eagle soars."

But I shook my head, feeling certain that it would be futile to try to discover in her gibberish anything save gibberish.

"Well, I must go now," she said, smiling at my mystification.

Then, with the princess, she quitted the room, saying with a little laugh as she vanished:

"Think hard, O Farnermain."

For a little space, I stared at the curtains through which this extraordinary creature had vanished, then began to walk back and forth, my feet falling noiselessly on the rich carpet.

Think! I did think, but I could not make out anything rational.

She was born on Venus, had passed all her life on Venus, and yet she had known Morgan St. Cloud on the earth! She had seen one hundred and twenty-five years, and yet she was but twenty-five years of age!

That, to use a phrase of Natty Bumppo's, certainly was a "nonplusser."

"Draconda" Will be Concluded in the Next Issue of WEIRD TALES. *It Rises to an Astounding Climax. Be Sure to Read the End of this Story!*

"I would like to have my case postponed for a week, your honor, as my lawyer is ill."

"But you were caught with your hand in this gentleman's pocket. What could your counsel say in your defense?"

"That's what I'm curious to know, your honor."

Two women went for a walk and presently climbed to a cemetery which overlooks one of the most beautiful valleys in Yorkshire.

"I think," said one of them to her friend, after they had admired the view, "that I should like to be buried here. It's such a healthy spot."

SPORT FOR LADIES

(Continued from page 69)

from the general store. It contained but one cartridge.

Stollard got the bacon and returned to the fire he had started without looking directly at the Cockney. His back again was turned. Slowly Cravens rose and took deliberate aim.

Simultaneously with the report Stollard's body fell, dying, into the fire, extinguishing it and scattering embers. A thin stream of blood flowed from the wound in his temple.

Cravens paused to make certain he was dead. Then he walked to the body and turned it over on its back. It was the work of a few seconds to remove the sack of money from the lifeless man's pocket.

"Bryke me ribs, will ye?" snarled Cravens into the lifeless face. "Not with this ye won't," looking fondly at the pistol. Then he gave the weapon a far fling into the bushes.

"Bryke me ribs, will ye?" he repeated, as he prepared to leave the ravine which Stollard had selected for a camping place because it was evidently so far from the beaten paths of man.

"Bryke me ribs, will ye?" again repeated this man, who never had heard of Shakespeare. "I'll have ye know that for me the bryking of ribs is a sport for ladies." And, with a final kick to the body of his erstwhile leader, he went back to the city, where Alma Brooks and Detective Sergeant Sweeney were waiting for him.

The proprietor of a village store was sitting with the loafers who had formed a circle around the stove. His sole assistant was a youngster who had lately drifted in from parts unknown. A woman entered and asked for a pound of cheese. She would not allow the assistant to wait on her but insisted on having the proprietor. The lad must have been trained in some city office, for to this demand he made firm reply.

"Can't disturb him now. He's in conference."

A man arrested for murder bribed a simple member of the jury with a hundred dollars to insist on a verdict of manslaughter. The jury were out a long time, and at last came in with the desired verdict. Afterward the prisoner had an opportunity of seeing the simple juror, and said: "I'm obliged to you, my friend. Did you have a hard time?"

"Yes," replied the man. "A deuce of a time. The other eleven wanted to acquit you."

ASK HOUDINI

THIS department is open to all readers of Weird Tales who have some question to propound. Houdini will attempt to answer any logical question on subjects relating to physical or psychic phenomena. Readers are requested not to duplicate* questions that have already been answered by Houdini in these columns. Questions pertaining to the future and personalities will receive no attention. They must have a general interest, otherwise they will not be considered. All correspondence will be handled by Houdini personally and he is especially interested in hearing from those having unique experiences not easily explained.—*The Publishers.*

FOREWORD

Ingrained in me is a love of mystery and marvel. As a child, Red Riding Hood, Ali Baba, and the Arabian Nights found as much favor with me as the stories from the Bible. All were read to me by my mother. Stories of the weird and wonderful exercise a surpassing charm over my imagination. I feel there are m y thousands like me and from these I will be delighted to hear. Who knows but that this department may be the means of bringing to light another Poe or another Hawthorne? Only by writing can you learn to write. By throwing off restraint, the greatest pieces of literature have been produced. This department is yours as much as mine.—HOUDINI.

No. 1

Terre Haute, Ind.

Houdini,
c|o Weird Tales,
Chicago, Ill.

Dear Sir:

Years ago there traveled around the country a man named Samri S. Baldwin, known as the "White Mahatma." Could you tell me if he is still living, and if so, where a letter could reach him.

Were there any other White Mahatmas that did the same kind of work?

Yours very truly,

H. L.

Answer to No. 1

There were a number of White Mahatmas, all imitating Samri S. Baldwin, who is still alive and now resides in San Francisco, California. A letter addressed to the Golden Gate Assembly of the Society of American Magicians, care of the Tiffin Studio will reach him.

Detroit, Mich.

Houdini,
c|o Weird Tales,
Chicago, Ill.

Dear Sir:

I have just finished reading your expose of spiritualism in the March issue of Weird Tales, and can assure you that I am very anxious to read the next installment.

I was born in a section of England, where it is the custom for those who wish to sink a well, to employ the services of a "dowser."

A "dowser" is a person who travels around with a forked twig, jabbing it in the ground, and when this twig moves, turning suddenly in his hand, he states that water will be found below. Experience shows that in this practice, he is usually though not invariably correct.

Now these "dowsers" are not as a rule scientific or learned men, nor have they any special local knowledge. Very often indeed, they are merely laborers.

Sometimes this man dispenses with the use of the "dowser" being able to tell by his own sensation that he is over water. So common is this custom in this part of England I refer to, and so great is the belief in these "dowsers" that few people indeed would think of sinking a well without the aid of one of these men.

Many explanations have been offered of this practice and I am anxious to hear your opinion regarding same.

It is very true that in sticking this twig in the ground, it will move at times "just as if it were alive" in this particular section of the country where I come from, but a large percentage of people are great believers in spiritualism, and people who have faith in this sort of phenomenon insist that it is a spirit manifestation.

(Continued on page 88)

**Hundreds of letters have been received by Houdini since the announcement of this department in the March issue. Time does not permit taking up as many of these as desired on account of the rush to get the April issue on sale on time. This department bids fair to become an interesting feature of* WEIRD TALES *and the publishers assure you that sufficient space will be alloted it to cover all worth while subjects.*

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(Continued from page 86)

Thanking you for any attention you may give this,

Yours very truly, J. H.

Answer to No. 2

This is not new; in fact, it is centuries old and you will find any number of books in your library regarding same.

The fact remains that these "dowsers" or water diviners were not always accurate, and in view of this infallibility, it is unwise to believe that they were capable of locating water or metals.

The Psychical Research Society have gone thoroughly into this class of humans, and I would advise you to look up their literature on this subject.

Houdini, Peoria, Ill.
c|o Weird Tales,
Chicago, Ill.

Dear Sir:

Some time ago I attend a seance in this town, at which quite a few people were present and the manifestations were really wonderful.

I went there, purporting to be an ardent believer in spiritualism and was well received and was made the object of quite a little attention by the medium.

Now as a matter of fact, I am an out and out skeptic, but confess I do not know how to explain some of the phenomena I have witnessed.

During one of the sittings or seances, the medium sat directly in front of me, held both of my hands in her right hand, and placed her other hand on my shoulder. Then I could see by glancing upward a trumpet moving around the room, then a guitar and then a mandolin. This instrument would float over the heads of the sitters, and I have never been able to discern how this was accomplished. Can you explain?

Yours very truly, H. W.

Answer to No. 3

There are several ways of the medium getting one hand free when you are supposed to hold both. It is one of the best known ruses used by fraud mediums.

In order to guard yourself in the future, when you go into a seance room, insist on holding the medium's hand in your own. You do the holding, and do not allow the medium to hold you. See that there is no confederate to produce the manifestations, which is frequently done.

Houdini, Springfield, Ill.
c|o Weird Tales,
Chicago, Ill.

Dear Sir:

You are answering all questions on spiritualism. Do you consider yourself a human encyclopedia on the subject? I know you will not dare to answer this.

How do you explain Jacoby, who in his autobiography said he saw a number of musicians in his room and they played until early morning? Jacoby was a brilliant man and a gifted scholar.

How can you, at the present time, explain how this happened?

I do not think you would care to answer this question, but am sending it to relieve my mind.

Yours truly,

H. W.

Answer to No. 4

No, I do not consider myself a human encyclopedia, but I have been delving in mystery ever since I could walk and talk, and if there is anything in the line of mystery I do not know, I certainly am going to try and find out.

Any time you see me billed anywhere, drop around and have a chat.

I am not prejudiced, as I keep telling people. I am perfectly willing to believe, but I have not been convinced or converted as yet.

Jacoby did write that he saw and heard musicians in his room. He called in his servants, if you remember the incident, but they were unable to see them.

After I am suspended from the top of a building by my ankles and make my escape from the restraint and come down to earth, the whole population and the houses whirl about me, but that does not signify it is true.

Therefore, I claim that he might have thought he had seen the musicians and heard them, but that does not necessarily make it true, although in his own mind, it was true.

You go to any insane asylum where you are permitted to go by the authorities, and you will find a lot of poor mortals who hear voices and see forms. I think that Jacoby simply had hallucinations at the time this happened, and that is all there is to it.

No. 5 Louisville, Ky.
Houdini,
c|o Weird Tales,
Chicago, Ill.

Dear Mr. Houdini:

Am glad to see that you are writing for Weird Tales, as it is my favorite magazine, and I am sure many other readers will bear this same opinion.

In this city, which is a hotbed for spiritualism, you are confronted by believers and non-believers at every turn. I have attended many seances, and probably never get a "kick" out of any, on account of my pronounced views against this sort of stuff. I have been told be-

(Continued on page 90)

Again She Orders —
"A Chicken Salad, Please"

FOR him she is wearing her new frock. For him she is trying to look her prettiest. If only she can impress him—make him like her—just a little.

Across the table he smiles at her, proud of her prettiness, glad to notice that others admire. And she smiles back, a bit timidly, a bit self-consciously.

What wonderful poise he has! What complete self-possession! If only she could be so thoroughly at ease.

She pats the folds of her new frock nervously, hoping that he will not notice how embarrassed she is, how uncomfortable. He doesn't—until the waiter comes to their table and stands, with pencil poised, to take the order.

"A chicken salad, please." She hears herself give the order as in a daze. She hears him repeat the order to the waiter, in a rather surprised tone. Why had she ordered that again! This was the third time she had ordered chicken salad while dining with him.

He would think she didn't know how to order a dinner. Well, did she? No. She didn't know how to pronounce those French words on the menu. And she didn't know how to use the table appointment as gracefully as she would have liked; found that she couldn't create conversation and was actually tongue-tied; was conscious of little crudities which she just knew he must be noticing. She wasn't sure of herself, she didn't know. And she discovered, as we all do, that there is only one way to have complete poise and ease of manner, and that is to know definitely what to do and say on every occasion.

Are You Conscious of Your Crudities?

It is not, perhaps, so serious a fault to be unable to order a correct dinner. But it is just such little things as these that betray us—that reveal our crudities to others.

Are you sure of yourself? Do you know precisely what to do and say wherever you happen to be? Or are you always hesitant and ill at ease never quite sure that you haven't blundered?

Every day in our contact with men and women we meet little unexpected problems of conduct. Unless we are prepared to meet them it is inevitable that we suffer embarrassment and keen humiliation.

Etiquette is the armor that protects us from these embarrassments. It makes us aware instantly of the little crudities that are robbing us of our poise and ease. It tells us how to smooth away these crudities and achieve a manner of confidence and self-possession. It eliminates doubt and uncertainty, tells us exactly what we want to know.

There is an old proverb which says "Good manners make good mixers." We all know how true this is. No one likes to associate with a person who is self-conscious and embarrassed; whose crudities are obvious to all.

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If a Dinner Follows the Wedding—

Would you know exactly how to proceed to the dining room, when to seat yourself, how to create conversation, how to conduct yourself with ease and dignity?

Would you use a fork for your fruit salad, or a spoon? Would you cut your roll with a knife, or break it with your fingers? Would you take olives with a fork? How would you take celery—asparagus—radishes? Unless you are absolutely sure of yourself, you will be embarrassed. And embarrasment cannot be concealed.

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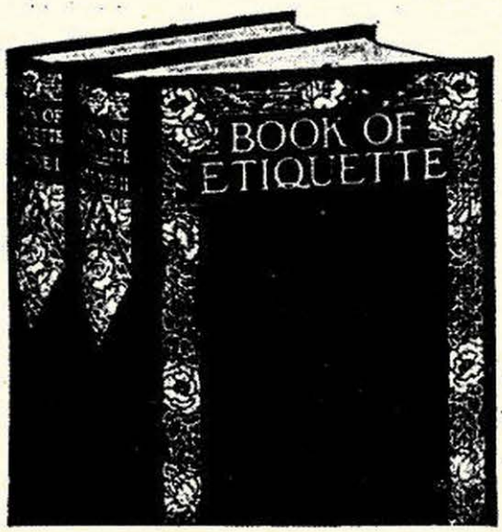

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(*Continued from page 88*)

cause of the fact that I am a non-believer, I will never be visited by any real manifestation.

The only thing I could never understand is why do all mediums employ various paraphernalia in conducting their seances. For instance, why is it necessary for the departed one to speak through the medium with the aid of a trumpet or horn? If there is such a thing as communication with the dead, can you advance a logical explanation of why a trumpet or horn should be used?

Yours very truly,

H. M.

Answer to No. 5

The aid of trumpets, tambourines and musical instruments used in seances, to the best of my knowledge and belief is simply to give auricular proof that the spirits are present, and in speaking through a trumpet, it is the simplest thing in the world to muffle your voice and make it difficult to recognize.

At one seance which I attended in New York I distinctly detected the odor of the departed spirit, the medium having indulged in the brand of spirits which are prohibited.

I have known mediums who could talk through trumpets almost any time or place, depending upon how they were seated at the seance.

I did one seance with Mrs. Wreith, the celebrated Detroit trumpet medium. Dr. Wallace being friendly with both of us, made an appointment, not telling her my name. This was in London. It was very difficult to get a seance, and when I did, I went in unannounced, but after an hour the seance was blank.

As I left, she merely said, "I am sorry Mr. Houdini, that we could get no results." I was startled. She said, "You did not think I knew you, but we traveled together on the 'Mauretania'" —so you see had Mrs. Wreith not recognized me, we might (?) have had results. She evidently was afraid of taking a chance with me.

No. 6

Buffalo, N. Y.

Mr. Houdini,
c|o Weird Tales,
Chicago, Ill.

Dear Mr. Houdini:

I attended a spiritualistic seance recently presided over by a lady medium. There were some fifty odd people in the audience. Slips of paper were passed around with the request that each one write on the slip of paper and ask a question that he desired to be answered. We were requested to fold the paper with the writing inside. The questions were collected and placed on a table, the medium paying no attention to them whatsoever. The medium then invited someone to blindfold her. As I was sitting in the front row, I volunteered. She requested a kid glove from some lady in the audience and, receiving this, placed it over her eyes while I tied it securely over her eyes with a handkerchief. I am positive of her inability to see.

All were requested to speak right out and identify their message when read. She said that she would make no attempt to answer the questions asked, or read them, but that she would give them the impressions which she would receive from them. Then she took a seat at the table at the side opposite the audience, facing the audience with the table between her and the sitters. She opened several of the questions, smoothed them out and laid them on the table. Then she took one of them and pressed it to her bandaged forehead and began.

It was remarkable the effect she created with those present. Women cried aloud at the questions and answers the medium gave out. Finally she came to my question and said:

"I get the influence of a young man. His name is Henry. I get the vibration of a young man who has suffered continual illness."

Then the medium addressing me asked, "Is that correct?" I replied that it was. Then she stated that Henry was well and happy and not to worry about him as he was beyond all physical suffering.

Now, Mr. Houdini, I am convinced that this medium was a fraud. I have attended a number of seances with poor results and have little faith in them but this medium puzzled me a lot. The question I asked on the slip of paper was, "H*——, have you any relief from your suffering?" My handwriting was purposely bad and I wrote the proper noun in such a manner that it would be hard to distinguish whether the word was Harry or Henry. I did this to discover if the medium actually read the questions or not. I am convinced that she did but how? Perhaps you can offer an explanation.

K. H.

Answer to No. 6

The method used by this medium is very simple and is not new. It has been greatly improved upon recently. If I am not mistaken it was first used in the early '70's. When you tied the handkerchief with the gloves over her eyes, she simply frowned as much as possible. Then by raising the eyebrows she was

(*Continued on page 92*)

New Hair for You in 30 Days

—or Your Money Instantly Refunded

My amazing guarantee means just exactly what it says! I don't care how thin your hair is—I don't care how many treatments you have taken without results—if new hair fails to grow after using my method—then the test costs you absolutely NOTHING! The convincing evidence of what I have done for others is now yours—entirely free. Simply mail the coupon below.

By ALOIS MERKE
Founder of the Famous Merke Institute, Fifth Avenue, New York

NO matter how long you have been troubled with loss of hair—no matter how many different treatments you have taken without results—I have discovered a startling new treatment which I absolutely guarantee will grow new hair in 30 days—or every penny you have paid me will be instantly—and gladly—refunded.

No one, so far as I know, has ever dared to make such a sweeping guarantee before! But do you suppose that I could make it unless I was absolutely confident that my treatment would do all I claim? Never! I would be out of business in a week. But I KNOW what my method will do. For I judge, its remarkable value is shown by actual statistics covering thousands of cases treated—*only three people in every hundred asking the return of their money!*

Not One Penny's Risk!

What Users Say

(Letters like the following are received almost every day by the Merke Institute.)

"In the short time I have used your treatment I have gained remarkable results. Dandruff has disappeared entirely. My scalp is now all full of fine, new hair. I would not part with my treatment for 10 times its cost." A. W. B.

"The top of my head is now almost covered with new hair about one-half in h long. I have been trying five years, but could never find anything to make my hair grow until your treatment." T. C.

"Ten years ago my hair started falling. I use hair toni s constantly, but four years ago I displayed a perfect full moon. I tried everything—but without results. Today, however, thanks to your treatment, I am pleased to inform you that I have quite a new crop of hair one inch long. My friends are astonished at the result." F. H. B.

Now I realize that you have perhaps wasted a lot of time and money on treatments which could NEVER restore your hair. Very likely you are skeptical. All right. I don't blame you. And I'll admit right here that my treatment may not help you either. For your case may be one of the few in every hundred that is absolutely hopeless. In any case, I want

you to try my treatment at my risk—and if after 30 days you are not more than delighted with the results produced—then all you need to do is tell me so, and without asking a single question I'll mail you a check refunding every cent you have paid me. I don't want a cent of your money, unless I *actually grow hair on your head!* You, of course, are to be the sole judge.

Entirely New Method

My treatment is the result of long years of experience gained in treating thousands of cases of loss of hair. This included many years which I spent in such famous centers of scientific research as Heidelberg, Berlin, Paris, Geneva, and Buenos Ayres. And my method is entirely different from anything known or used before.

There is no massaging—no singeing—no "mange cures"—no unnecessary fuss or bother of any kind. Yet results are usually noticeable even after the very few first treatments.

My treatment proves that a very great many cases of loss of hair are caused—not by *dead* hair roots—but by *dormant* hair roots, which can now be awakened and made to grow hair again. The reason other treatments failed is because they did not penetrate to these dormant roots. To make a tree grow you would not think of rubbing "growing fluid" on the bark. Instead you would get right to the roots. And so it is with the hair.

In all the world there is only one method I know about of penetrating direct to the roots and stimulating them into new activity. And the principle of this method is embodied in the treatment that I now offer you on my positive guarantee of satisfactory results, or the trial costs you nothing.

Already great numbers of men and women who only recently were troubled with thin, falling hair have, through this method, acquired healthy hair that is the envy and admiration of all their friends. As for dandruff and similar scalp disorders, these in many cases disappear, often with the very first few treatments. The treatment can be used in any home in which there is electricity.

Free Booklet Explains Treatment

If you will merely fill in and mail the coupon below I will gladly send you—without cost or obligation—an interesting 32-page booklet, describing my treatment in detail.

This booklet contains much helpful information on the care of hair.

No matter how thin your hair may be—no matter how little hair remains, this booklet will prove of deepest interest to you. So mail the coupon now—and it will be sent you by return mail.

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Please send me, without cost or obligation on my part, a copy of the new booklet describing in detail the Merke Institute Home Treatment.

Name _____
(State whether Mr., Miss or Mrs.)

Address _____

City _____ State _____

(Continued from page 90)

enabled to see enough to suit her purpose.

You understand I am not exposing a legitimate performer's efforts. When a medium resorts to trickery, I feel that the deception should be explained to prevent their playing upon the gullibility of the public as much as possible.

No. 7

Evanston, Ill.

Houdini,
c|o Weird Tales,
Chicago, Ill.

Dear Sir:

When modern science dawned, the world was dark with superstition. Fantastic notions fettered the human intellect. Witches, with their bony hands, wove a spell of death and ruin. Sorcerers, with their magic signs and incantations cast enchantments over the reason of men. Astrology, with its tradition and dogmas, held the common mind in thrall.

Against these ideas, the learned voiced vigorous opposition. The belief in the transmutability of one element into another was opposed to its fundamental conceptions. The transmission of thought through leagues of barren space was cried upon as impossible. The casting of spells was sneered at as unworthy of discussion. The notion of a world of reality, interpenetrating the natural world, yet defying the grasp of the natural senses, was brushed aside as a poetic fancy. The idea of physical matter being rendered invisible at will was laughed away.

It is noticeable, however, during the past century, although the philosophers have remained steadfast in their attitude of resistance to the claims of the mystics, that the march of discovery has been tending more and more to the occult. Scholars of the old school have given more attention to beliefs they once sneered at.

Surgery and medicine today attest to the favorable results obtained by the use of hypnotism. There is a marked difference between the early and present attitude of science toward the phenomena of telepathy. There was no law known to physics which would lend probability to the claim of telepathists. The advent of wireless and radio-phone, pulsing their messages through vacancy have aroused thinking people to the possibility of psychic phenomena. Those advanced in science, tend to pave the way for those eager to pursue the doctrines of spiritualism, and the trend is not against, but toward spiritualism, despite the efforts of a dominant resistant force and such men as you.

It is interesting to learn what you have to say against the ability of those persons commonly said to possess mediumistic powers. I do not deny that the spiritualistic movement is attended by some who practice fraud, but, Houdini, do you know of any movement of scientific research or otherwise, in which quackery does not, at some time, or other, make its advent?

Is it possible that your mind may be influenced against spiritualism by reason of the fact that in your efforts to entertain or instruct the people before whom you appear, you may find it necessary to be somewhat studied or in other words, unreal?

I do not mean to say that you are not a practical man, for I believe you are, but I am inclined to think that your life as an entertainer does not lend itself to the proper mental condition to take up the subject of spiritualism, in the frame of mind that you really should have, to become an honest investigator.

I am sure you are seeking for the truth in this great subject, and I am indeed sorry to see you take the decided stand you have against such learned and sincere men as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Sir Oliver Lodge and others.

It is possible that you may be doing your fellow men a great service, but I really feel that in your capacity as a public man and a man who enjoys the following you do, that you may be committing a grievous error.

I trust that in the conducting of this department, you will leave it open to both sides of the controversy, if such you may call it.

In closing I wish to say that I am pleased to see your appearance in Weird Tales, for I am sure you will be adding quite a little to this publication, which is blazing the trail of a literature loved by men, since childhood.

Yours very truly,

S. T.

Answer to No. 7

I have carefully digested your letter, and it might interest you to know that for the past 30 years, I have been a mystifier, not only of the public but of magicians.

In fact the work I do appears so easy to duplicate, that up to date four human beings have lost their lives imitating some of my hazardous stunts, and the reason they apparently seem so easy is because I have been at this so long, that it seems to be second nature to me, or possibly a sixth sense.

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In this way, I have the advantage of everyone attending a seance, as I know how things must be done or must start, to be accomplished successfully.

I admit that mediums claim that some seances must be genuine in order to have imitators. I am willing to grant that, but I simply make the statement that I have never attended a seance which was genuine, in my 30 years of investigation, and I believe I have attended the seances of the best known mediums of our times.

Some mediums object to magicians as investigators, but one thousand magicians could not stop the advance of the radio or telephone, irrespective of who or how many would be present. Therefore, I believe that mediums' objections to real investigators is entirely out of place.

If, at any time, you feel that you have something of interest to me in the way of actual proof of psychic phenomena, I promise you that I will make an honest effort to witness same. The very fact that I am constantly before the public eye should give me some opportunity to study the public. Knowing something of the gullibility of the public from a performer's standpoint, I feel I am doing a service in rendering my honest opinion to as many as possible.

A man was giving a lecture on the subject of "Honesty."

He related that when a boy he saw a cart laden with melons outside a shop and nobody about. On the spur of the moment he stole a melon and darted into a passage.

"I soon got my teeth into that melon," he said, "but instantly a queer sensation assailed me, and a shiver ran through me. My resolve was taken at once. I went back to that cart. I replaced the melon [loud applause]—and took a ripe one!"

A famous bishop had the trick of pronouncing "o" like "u" thus: "I am fund of hut cuffee." Once he was giving advice to a working girls' club and impressed on the members the necessity for arranging full occupation of their spare time. "Above all, girls," he said earnestly, "try by all means available to cultivate a hubby!"

DEATHS OF LANGOIRAN AND THE ABBE DUPUIS

AT the entrance of the court-house of Bourdeaux, the Abbe Dupuis received a first wound; others soon leveled him to the ground. A young lad, of about fifteen or sixteen, cut a hole in the cheek with a knife, to hold up the head by, while others were employed in haggling it from the body which was still in agonies. This operation not succeeding in such a crowd they took hold of the legs, and drew the carcass about the strects and around the ramparts.

Mr. Langoiran had but just set his foot on the first step of the stairs, when he was knocked down. His head was hacked off in an instant, and a ruffian held it up, crying aloud: "Off with your hats! long live the nation." The bare-headed populace answered: "Long live the nation." The head was then carried round the town in signal of a triumph, gained by a tumultuous populace and ten thousand soldiers under arms, over a poor defenseless priest.

A visitor to a lunatic asylum was approached by an inmate, who begged that his hard case might be laid before a magistrate and his release obtained. The visitor promised to take the necessary steps immediately.

"You will not forget?" said the lunatic.

"Oh, no."

"You are sure you will not forget?"

"Certainly not."

As the visitor turned to go he received a kick that laid him in a heap a few feet away.

"That," said the lunatic, "is in case you should forget."

Little Tommy Truffle had made a discovery and, being of a very generous disposition, was eager to share it with others.

"I is—" he began.

Teacher swooped down at once, that superior smile, so irritating to the sensitive mind of youth, upon her lips.

"'I am,' not 'I is,'" she corrected.

Tommy looked a little pained; almost, perhaps, a little doubtful. But he was an obedient little boy.

"I am the ninth letter of the alphabet," he announced.

The maiden was pretty and charming and young.
Coquettish she stood where mistletoe hung—
He was fondly intent upon kissing the miss
But only succeeded in missing the kiss.

Table of Contents

 All communications should be addressed to the publishers' main office at 854 North Clark St., Chicago, Ill. Subscription, $3.00 a year in the United States; $3.50 in Canada. Single copies, 25c.

An English motorist was stopped by a policeman on account of poor lights.

"I'll have to take your name, sir."

"John Smith," was the reply.

"Don't try that on me, sir," warned the man in blue. "I want your proper name and address."

"Then if you must have it, it's William Shakespeare, Stratford-on-Avon."

"Thank you, sir," said the policeman, jotting it down. "Sorry to have troubled you."

"Don't mention it," said the motorist, driving on.

Rits of the ginkgo tree are roasted by the Chinese, and being similar to almonds, are served as a confeetion or an appetizer at banquets and dinners.

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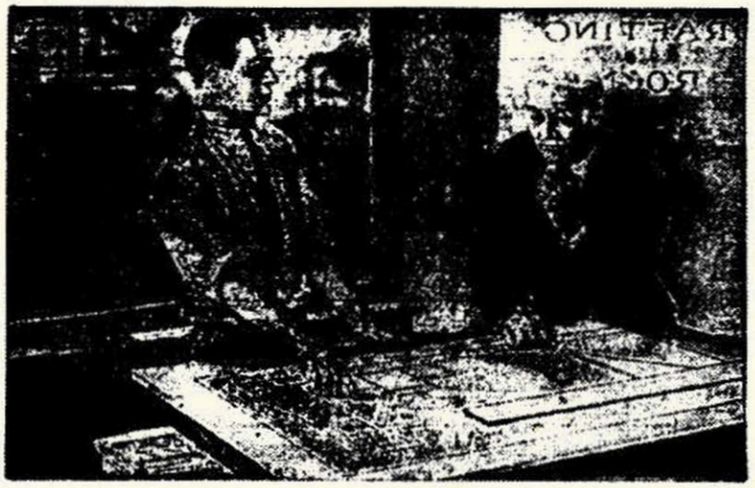

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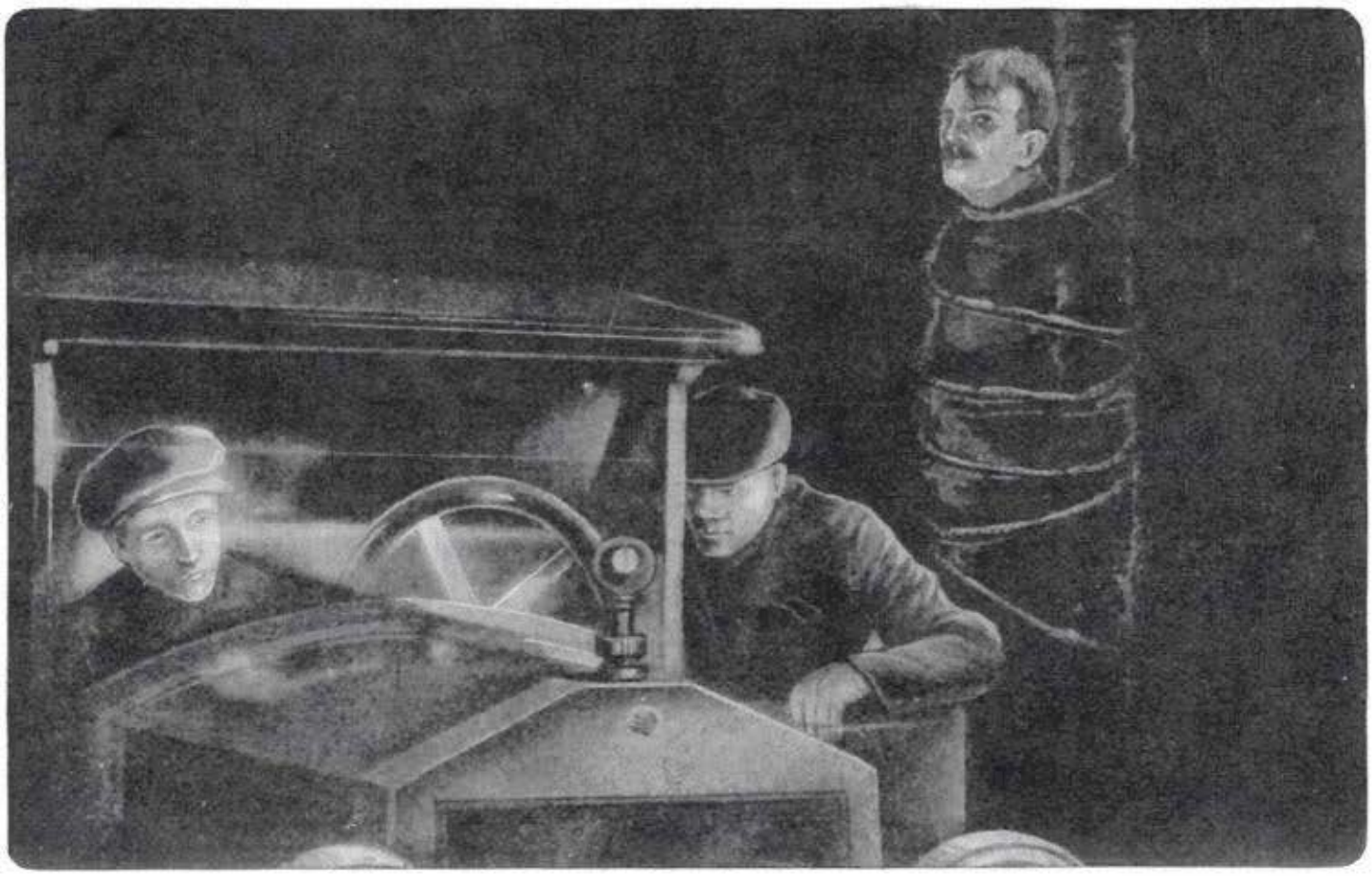

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