Weird Tales

The Unique Magazine

THE WICKED FLEA

by J. U. Giesy

Stories by
Nictzin Dyalhis
Greye La Spina
Seabury Quinn
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and other authors

October
1925 25¢

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THE WICKED FLEA

by J.U.Giesy

Author of "The Magic of Dai Nippon" and "Ashes of Circumstance"

Big fleas have smaller fleas upon their backs to bite 'em.
And these in turn have smaller fleas, and so ad infinitum;
And larger fleas have larger fleas, and larger fleas to go on,
And these in turn have larger fleas, and larger fleas, and so on.
—JONATHAN SWIFT.

"WHAT," said Professor Xenophon Xerxes Zapt, the eminent investigator of the unknown in science, sometimes called "Unknown Quantity" Zapt, both from the line of his research, as well as the double X in his name; "is life?"

"Why—I don't know." Bob Sargent, fiancé of the professor's motherless daughter, Nellie, glanced from the record he was just removing from the phonograph in the living room of the Zapt home, to the little man, with graying mutton-chop whiskers, his body clad in the limp and comfortable if somewhat antiquated black alpaca coat he customarily wore about the house. "That is—I'm afraid I don't just appreciate the bearing of your question."

Xenophon Xerxes nodded. "I didn't expect you would." He continued to stare at the stalwart young attorney through the heavy lenses before his near-sighted eyes. "And you are not alone in your lack of comprehension, Robert. Nowadays the rising generation seems to consider life as something akin to that form of syncopated phonetic vibration commonly denominated—jazz."

"Well—possibly." Sargent slipped the record into the cabinet. "Does our music annoy you, professor?"

"That, Robert, is entirely aside from the point. Music is no more than sound, and—er—sound is a form of vibration, as you are presumably aware. And"— Xenophon Xerxes paused as though to give weight to the ensuing climax—"so is life, Robert—so is life."

"Oh, yes, of course," Bob hastened to agree. "I see what you mean now. And if both sound and life are vibrations, isn't that possibly the reason jazz has enjoyed such a vogue? Isn't it possible that there is a difference in the rate of vibration, and that this particular form of music quickens the ratio of the human—"

"Exactly!" Xenophon Zapt rubbed his hands together. There were times when he did not wholly approve of the young man his daughter had declared she intended to marry, but now—he beamed. "God bless my soul, Robert—you surprize me. Really I am amazed to find your mental perceptions so active. Can you perhaps see where the established truism leads?"

"Why—naturally—I suppose it means jazz will have a long life."

"Jazz is merely an illustration," Xenophon Xerxes frowned. "It has nothing to do with the case. Given a hypothetical cause it should be possible to predicate a theoretical effect."

"The trouble is that theory doesn't always work out in practise," said Bob.

"Admitting that—the failures are indubitably due to some fallibility in the original premise, Robert. And—such things lend zest to the investigation of nature's laws."

Sargent turned his eyes to Nellie seated on the living room couch, with a handsome Persian Angora cat in her lap. He sighed. Once the professor got started, the best thing was to let him talk himself out. "You are—considering some serious life problem, then?" he remarked.

"All life is serious, Robert." The professor compressed his thin lips. "And facetiousness is not an inherent characteristic of my nature. I am not prone to idly employ those variant vibratory fluctuations of the vocal organs, briefly designated speech."

"Certainly not, sir," Bob protested. "I meant that you had some application of the established relation between the correlated facts in mind."

"Goodness," said Nellie softly, with a twinkle in the blue eyes under her soft brown hair.

"Exactly." Xenophon Xerxes gave her a glance. "The word 'correlated' is well chosen, Robert. It is the correlation on which the whole matter hinges, in fact. Life being vibration, what, in your estimation, would be the effect of increasing the vibratory ratio, upon the phenomenon of cell multiplication we are in the habit of calling growth?"

"Why—er—," Bob lifted his gaze to the ceiling as though for inspiration; "possibly—if you increased your cell multiplication numerically as well as in rapidity, you might get a—a giant."

"Precisely." Professor Zapt nodded. "You not only *might*—you necessarily would. There are times, Robert, when I feel that were you to devote yourself to the endeavor you *might* develop a really excellent mind. But—no matter. Were one to apply this principle in the right direction he would almost certainly gain some interesting results. Take the ant or the flea, for example—what would be the result were either multiplied indefinitely in size?"

"Jazz," Sargent said out of an irrepressible sense of humor. "If you applied it to the flea, that is. They'd make everybody dance—"

"Bob!" Nellie cautioned, while her father put up a slender hand and stroked his whiskers as was his way when thinking deeply or annoyed.

Sargent subsided, and the professor, after a dignified interval, resumed: "I referred to an experimental application, rather than to one at large. Both insects are possessed of a remarkable proportionate strength. Were man endowed with an equivalent commensurate to his size, he could easily cover a league at a single leap."

"That would be as bad as the fairy story of the Seven League Boots, wouldn't it?" Nellie looked up smiling from tweaking one of the Angora's ears.

Xenophon Xerxes sniffed. Without deigning a reply he rose and

passed from the room, disappearing up a stairway in the direction of the laboratory he maintained on the second floor of the house.

"And now he's mad again," Miss Zapt complained. "Bob, why can't you behave when he has something he wants to talk about?"

"Me?" Sargent protested with more vigor than grammatical correctness. "You were the one who mentioned fairy tales."

"But you made it worse. Anyway I don't care. Think of fleas as big as men—"

"I'd rather not. It sounds weird. I wonder how far it could jump."

"Oh—miles." Nellie smiled. "I s'pose I shouldn't have said that about the Seven League Boots, but—I could have done worse. You know that doggerel about fleas, don't you, Bob?"

"Can't say I do." Sargent shook his head. "But—almost any *doggerel* should harmonize with fleas."

Miss Zapt giggled. "'Big fleas have little fleas upon their backs to bite 'em. An' little fleas have littler fleas, and so—*ad infinitum,*'" she recited.

Bob nodded. "Just so: *ad infinitum*. Only this thing of your father's is the reverse. It's crescendo, rather than diminuendo. And that brings us back to music. Let's have a little more jazz."

2

"BOB," said Miss Zapt the next evening, "do you know what I saw Father doing this afternoon?"

"Rather not." Sargent grinned. "What was Father up to?"

"He was coaxing neighbor Brown's dog into our yard with a piece of meat, and then when the brute came over he took him into the garage."

"To hunt fleas!" Sargent sat down and eyed the little beauty before him. "Good Lord!"

"Bob!" Nellie's blue eyes widened swiftly.

"Sure!" Bob began to chuckle. "When your paternal ancestor get's an idea in his headpiece, Sweetness, the only way to get it out is to let it exhaust itself."

"But—you—you don't think he really means to try to—to—"

"Raise fleas? *Ad infinitum,*" Bob harked back to her quotation of the previous evening. "Translated, *ad infinitum* means 'no end', as our English cousins put it. Sure! I think he means to do just that."

"But—if he brings them into the house!" All at once Xenophon Xerxes' lone heir appeared a trifle aghast.

"Oh—he'll keep 'em shut up somehow," Bob soothed.

"But—if they should get out! If they should get on Fluffy!"

There had been times past when the eminent investigator had not hesitated to make use of her cat during the enthusiasm incident upon some experiment, without Nellie's prior knowledge. And although thus far her pet had escaped any serious consequences, Miss Zapt never knew what might happen next. Because of that she knit her brows as she went on: "It would be just like him to expect me to let him use her as a—a sort of incubator for this monstrosity he thinks he's going to raise."

Bob shook his head. "Not very long if he succeeds. He'll have to keep the thing on a chain—"

"Bob!"

"Well—you never can tell about an *ad infinitum* flea. It's apt to hop off six or seven miles at a jump. He'll probably cage it and feed it on raw beef."

"Bob!"

"Or blood. He'll have to. If he gets anything like what he's after, rather than feeding off Fluffy in the ordinary sense it's more apt to chase her around the house."

"Bob—you're simply teasing, and I think you're—horrid." Miss Zapt wrinkled the end of her nose.

"As a matter of fact I don't know whether I am or not," said Bob. "I know it sounds ridiculous, but—"

"But imagine a weeny-teeny thing like a flea grown that big!"

"I'm trying to. It's an appalling thought. I can't imagine how he expects to bring the thing about." Sargent sighed.

"Neither can I. But he spent the whole morning in the laboratory."

"And in the afternoon he made gustatory advances to friend Brown's dog." Sargent chuckled again. "He was ready to start the job. Honey—that father of yours knows a lot about natural laws."

"But—this isn't natural!" Nellie protested. "How do you suppose a flea that size would look?"

"Not having considered the matter before, I'm hardly qualified to state—except that it would look like a flea in a telescope, I guess." Bob glanced toward a bookcase in the corner. "There's the encyclopedia—we might find a picture of the brute."

Nellie rose, and returned from the case with a good-sized volume. She began turning leaves. "Fl-Fle-a. Here it is."

Bob bent to inspect the paragraph on which her finger was resting. "'*Flea*—(entom.) An insect of the genus Pulex, remarkable for its agility and troublesome bite. The common flea is *Pulex irritans*,'" he read, and paused to stare at a small illustration of the object in question. "*Pulex irritans. Irritans* is Latin for 'irritating' or 'annoying.' *Pulex* is his family name. Seems appropriate all right. The irritating or annoying Pulex."

"The whole thing is annoying." Miss Zapt closed the book with considerable force. "Why under the sun do you suppose father wants to waste his time enlarging or magnifying—or whatever he intends doing—a thing like that?"

"At first glance there does seem a reason for some such question," Sargent smiled. "But—I presume it's the principle involved."

"But—what's the use?" Nellie's tone showed exasperation.

"Why—I don't know. Don't they train 'em? Seems to me I've heard of trained fleas. Now if he could raise about a dozen Pulexes the size of a mouse or a—rat—"

"Bob! Talk sense. A flea that large would be—dangerous. Didn't you read what it said about their bite?"

"Yes. Troublesome, my child. But—he might use 'em in a moral crusade. A dozen turned loose on the beaches would discourage one-piece bathing suits. Mermaids would need a suit of armor and a club. And if he'd stencil 'em with anti-vice badges—"

"Oh, well, go on and be funny if you want to! I think it's simply crazy," Nellie declared with an irritated laugh.

3

IT WAS some ten days before Bob saw Miss Zapt again. A legal matter called him out of town the next morning, so suddenly that he said good-bye by telephone. Consequently, the next time they were together it was some time before their conversation turned on any topic save themselves. Then Nellie changed it rather abruptly:

"Well, you were right. Father is having me buy beef."

"Seems to agree with you," Sargent said, without taking his eyes from her face or his arm from about her waist.

"I'm not eating it, silly," she rejoined. "What's the use of being stupid? You know I mean you were right in saying he'd feed it to—those fleas."

"Oh! And how is the irritating Pulex—or Pulexes?" Bob grinned.

"I don't know. I haven't seen them, and I don't want to see them. But he's got them in the laboratory, and every morning I have to order meat. First it was one pound, then two, and yesterday four—"

"Four!" Bob erupted. "Four pounds of meat to feed fleas? Holy Smoke!"

Nellie sighed. "He takes it up there and that's all except that he's been quite excited the past few days, and spends all his time in the laboratory except when I call him to his meals. I don't believe he's slept much the last two nights."

"Hm-m-m!" Bob seemed suddenly lost in silent consideration of Nellie's statement.

"What's the matter, darling?" she asked all at once.

"Eh? I was thinking." Sargent flung up his head.

"And I wasn't speaking to you," Miss Zapt returned tartly. "What is it, Fluffy? What's the matter?"

Bob became aware of the Angora. She had slid into the room and was standing in the center of the floor with a bushily expanded tail held very nearly erect. Her entire bearing was one of hesitation and doubt. She seemed vaguely disturbed.

For a moment after her mistress had spoken she made no move, and then, without warning, she sat down on her haunches and turned her head in an almost quizzical way in Nellie's direction.

"Meow!" She emitted a whimper between anathema and perturbed complaint, and began to quiver, finally lifting a hind leg toward her back in tentative fashion and discovering it would not reach. Yet instead of being returned to the floor that leg remained extended and commenced to twitch.

"Bob! She's going to have a fit!"

"Wait." Sargent laid a hand on Nellie's arm, while he regarded the cat out of speculative eyes. "Give her time to reach a conclusion."

"Time?" Miss Zapt's tone resented the suggestion. She advanced upon her pet.

And Fluffy drew back. In a series of amazingly rapid lurches she retreated like a poorly tuned motor thrown into the reverse, toppled all at once sidewise, became in an instant a wildly gyrating ball of long hair, head, tail and feet.

"Bob!" Nellie went to her knees beside the madly contorting body. "Telephone for a veterinary! Quick! Fluffy!" With a swoop of anxious arms she gathered the Persian to her breast, staggered to the couch and dropped down upon it. "Bob!"

"Wait," Sargent said for the second time. "I think I can do quite as much for Fluffy as a vet. Hasn't it dawned upon you yet, Sweetness?"

"What?"

"Fleas—or a flea perhaps. *Pulex irritans.* She couldn't reach it to scratch it and—it annoyed her. She's an irritated cat."

Miss Zapt sniffed very much as Xenophon Xerxes might have done in a similar instance. At the same time Bob's suggestion appeared to find weight with her, to judge by her expression. She dug slender fingers into Fluffy's hair in search of the possible cause of her actions. And Fluffy seemed actually pleased. She began purring gently—stretched.

A minute, two minutes passed. "I don't see it," said Miss Zapt.

"Well, keep it up anyway," Bob said. "It seems to soothe her."

Nellie turned actually angry eyes back to her quest. Of a sudden they focused intently. "Bob!"

"What?"

"I saw it. But it moved."

"It would." Sargent knelt beside girl and cat. He parted the pelt in investigation—revealed a darkly mov-

ing object, jammed down a thumb and finger and withdrew an object the size of an ordinary bean. "Got it," he announced and rose to obtain a better light on what he had found.

"What—is it?" Nellie joined him. "Woodtick?"

"No-o. It's a flea all right. Well—I'm darned." Sargent's accents were those of a slightly awed wonder. "It's an honest-to-goodness flea, but—Good Lord!" The blood-swollen body between his digits burst and left them stained.

"You've—killed it!" Nellie accused.

"Looks like it." Bob viewed the remains in rueful fashion. "Where's your father?"

"Upstairs. Do you think it's—one of his?" Nellie's eyes were wide.

"Judging by its size. Come along."

SARGENT started for the stairs. Nellie went with him. Outside the laboratory door they paused and Bob rapped.

"Well? Well?" Xenophon Xerxes replied in the tone of one not wishing to be disturbed.

"It's Sargent, professor," Bob called. "I've something that belongs to you, I fancy."

"You've what?" The laboratory door was jerked partly open and Xenophon Xerxes peered out.

Bob extended his hand with the dead flea upon it. "It was on Fluffy. It was disturbing her a good deal, and we caught it, and—it burst."

"Naturally. But—it doesn't matter, Robert." The professor drew the door farther open. "Come in—and I will show you a really interesting exhibit of the scientific application of modern knowledge applied to the metabolic processes, and the use of vitamines."

"You mean—you have—others?" Bob edged into the room behind Nellie.

"Of course." Xenophon actually beamed. "Did you imagine you had destroyed the only one? Not at all, Robert. Not at all. Here—" He led the way to a glass box pierced at each end by a metal bar from which wires led to a small electrical generator on an insulated table. "You can see how they are coming on."

"Ugh!" Nellie gave one glance and shuddered.

Bob stared out of suddenly narrowed eyes. Inside the glass were possibly a dozen of the insects even larger than the one he had found. They swarmed over a lump of raw beef. "Remarkable. I wouldn't have believed it possible," he said at length.

Xenophon Xerxes nodded. "Man stands today on the threshold of things undreamed in other years, Robert. Today we are beginning to lay hold upon an understanding of life forces, and hence the processes of life itself. Organic therapy, the study of endocrine glands, has done much. But even the endocrines are powerless to function unless given the substance with which to build. There has been a missing link in our knowledge. Then came the discovery of vitamines — the essential growth-producing elements of food—the—er—essence of food. It was the application of that knowledge I found essential in this experiment."

"But—I thought you said life was vibration?" Sargent seemed a trifle dazed.

"I did, Robert. I did. Life *is* vibration. But let me ask you—what maintains vibration once it is brought into manifestation?"

"Why—er—force. Do you mean—food?"

"Exactly!" Xenophon rubbed his thin hands together. "You're coming on, Robert, upon my word! Therefore in order to obtain the success I aimed at, it became necessary to raise a vibratory rate in the presence of a

food excess, and at the same time supply the impulse for that food's use. The generator here furnishes the vibratory rate. The beef is the food—its juices. As you know, in all electrical devices there is a negative and a positive pole. The negative is the active—the change-producing. Current flows from negative to positive. Therefore in order to supply my third essential, that small sponge on the negative electrode you see entering the cage is soaked in water-soluble vitamines, which are carried by the vibratory current to become a part of the contained atmosphere. The hypothetical requirements being correctly deduced and furnished—the result—well, Robert, you can see the result for yourself."

"Rather." Bob turned his eyes to the cage again and started. "I say, professor—are those things getting larger? They look bigger—"

"They are growing, Robert." Xenophon Xerxes smiled. "Don't let that surprize you. Growth is a multiplication of cells. And since a cell in multiplying, reproduces itself—you will perceive that the ratio of increase is the square of the primary number. For that very reason it will soon become necessary to destroy all save the best developed specimen of the lot. Of course when I stop the current passing, the rapid development halts."

Sargent nodded. "It's a good deal like compound interest, isn't it?" he said a trifle vaguely.

"I trust you find it interesting, purely as a demonstration." Zapt eyed him in a suspicious manner.

"Oh, yes, indeed." Bob took a long, deep breath. "I never saw anything like it, in my life."

"Without wishing to seem egotistical, Robert," Zapt accepted the assurance quickly, "I feel that I am justified in the assertion that until I brought about the necessary correlation of environment, outside of what has been called from time to time a freak of nature, neither did anyone else."

"I should hope not," Nellie broke into the conversation. "If he did, he probably thought he was drunk."

Her father viewed her in tolerant silence. He put up a hand and stroked his graying whiskers. "And as a matter of fact, Robert," he remarked, transferring his gaze to the already amazing products of his endeavors, "I may add that the experiment is scarcely more than begun."

4

With that statement Mr. Robert Sargent most emphatically agreed on a later occasion, when, having apparently heard his voice below stairs, Professor Zapt came down in his flapping coat and a pair of carpet slippers and invited him up to inspect advanced results.

There was a childlike quality about the little scientist at times, in that he desired to exhibit the fruits of his labors, as Bob had learned in the past. And he judged that Xenophon Xerxes was handicaped in the present instance by Nellie's attitude toward what she frankly declared was an unwarranted interference with nature's designs as affecting insect life. Moreover he was genuinely curious to learn to what extent the professor had succeeded as he accompanied him back up-stairs. Nellie went along.

Xenophon Xerxes threw open the laboratory door with the hint of a flourish and jerked his hand at the glass cage Bob had seen before.

"There," said he, "is Pulex."

Sargent stared and caught his breath. Where before had been some dozen surprizingly large fleas, there was now but one. And that one was immense. It was monstrous—huge—a swollen, bloated, overgrown, Brobdingnagian extravaganza of a flea, that nearly filled the glass walls inside

which it squatted, beneath a heavily weighted top.

"Call him Pulex, do you?" Bob began, and paused at Nellie's gasp.

He turned to her, found her gazing at the unbelievable inmate of the glass box with wide-open, pupil-stretched eyes. Her lips parted. "You mean —you've given — that thing — a name?" she faltered.

"Exactly. Pulex, my dear, from the entomological denomination derived from the Latin—*Pulex irritans* —genus *Pulex*—variety, *irritans,*" Xenophon Xerxes announced.

Bob nodded. "Well—he looks irritable. Isn't he sort of cramped in that box?"

"Possibly," Zapt assented. "But you see, Robert, the process of growth has slowed the last two days. It is my opinion that development has about reached its limit."

"It's horrible." Nellie's face was white. "Bob—look at it—look at its —eyes. It—knows we're here," she chattered. "It's looking at us. It's terrible—wicked!"

"The wicked flea," Sargent said, smiling, as she paused with clicking teeth. "The wicked flea, and no man pursueth."

Miss Zapt broke into hysterical laughter. "The wicked—flea—and—no man—pur-su-eth! Oh, ha, ha, Bob! That's the best thing—you've said—in a month!"

Xenophon Xerxes stiffened before that outburst of what he plainly regarded as unseemly mirth. "Get her out of here, Robert," he directed. "Take her down-stairs. Women have no scientific appreciation. They prefer an untimely humor."

"Come along, Honey Lamb Child, we'll fly while no wicked flea can pursue us," Sargent prompted and led her back down-stairs.

Once there she subsided upon the living room couch. "Oh, Bob! Did you—see Father's face?" she gasped.

Bob grinned and nodded. "He looked almost as irritable as Pulex," he said.

Nellie giggled. "Well—don't let's talk any more about it. I shouldn't have made him angry."

"All right," Bob agreed. Nor had he any intention of reverting to the subject when next he passed beneath the professor's roof.

Neither did he contemplate coming into contact with Xenophon Xerxes himself. The seclusion the eminent investigator had maintained during his experiment rather precluded that. Consequently it was with a feeling of distinct surprize that he found him puttering about the lower floor.

Furthermore, Zapt's demeanor was a thing calculated to attract attention, though he manifestly aimed at the reverse. His bearing, indeed, was that of a man in a state of mental unrest. He replied to Bob's greeting in absent-minded fashion, went over and moved a chair out of a corner, tilted it on its legs and set it back in place. Immediately afterward he left the room, and in five minutes he was back. He hung about, twiddling his fingers beneath the tail of his shapeless coat, until, seizing a moment when he fancied himself unobserved, he bent and glanced under the couch.

"Father!"

Xenophon straightened at the sound of Nellie's voice.

"What is the matter?"

"Nothing—er—that is, nothing." Xenophon went over and sat down in his favorite chair beside a table loaded with scientific journals and books. He sighed. For possibly three minutes he sat with forehead furrowed into a frown of what might have been consideration. Then he bounced up and went into the hall. Sounds indicated his investigation of a closet where umbrellas and raincoats were stored.

Nellie glanced at Bob, rose and passed silently to the archway through which the hall was reached.

"Father—what are you hunting?" she asked.

Silence followed, punctuated by the closing of the closet door. Xenophon Xerxes joined her, re-entered the living room and regained his seat. For a moment he drummed on the table with nervous fingers. He cleared his throat.

"As a matter of fact," he announced at the end of possibly a minute, "Pulex has escaped."

"Pulex?"

"Escaped?"

Bob and Nellie spoke at once.

"Yes." The professor got up again. "It's really most annoying. I—I can only blame myself. Quite early this evening I fell into a doze while observing what I felt sure were the final hours of his growth. I—er—forgot to shut off the generator, connected with the cage. I can only presume that it continued to run and—er—Pulex became too large for the container. At all events it—burst. When I awoke it was in fragments and the—er—insect had disappeared."

"And," Nellie accused, "that's why you've been roaming around looking under things the last hour?"

"Yes, my dear," Xenophon Xerxes sighed. "I—er—confess I have been in hopes of coming across it—that it had—er—secreted itself. I've been intending to have it permanently mounted as a demonstration of—" He broke off at sounds of a commotion in the rear of the house, cocked his head as though seeking to appraise them, and then exclaimed: "God bless my soul! Perhaps—"

Without finishing the hypothetical conclusion, he started for the hallway.

SARGENT and Nellie followed quite as a matter of course. The trio made their way to the rear, Xenophon Xerxes being the first to reach the kitchen and snap on a light.

His act revealed a remarkable sight.

Crouched on the floor was Pulex, and regarding him from a corner, half in terror and half in defiance, with every hair on her body in a state of furry excitement, was Nellie's cat.

"Fluffy!" Miss Zapt started forward to the rescue after a moment of breathless amaze.

"Hold on!" Bob swung her back, thrust himself before her, taking her task upon himself. He bore straight down on Pulex.

But Pulex did not wait. As Bob started he leaped.

"Catch him!" Xenophon lifted his voice in admonitory treble.

"Catch him yourself!" Sargent whirled. Pulex had leaped not from, but directly at him, and though he had ducked instinctively, a passing leg had rasped his cheek. As he turned, Pulex leaped again, missing him again as he dodged, and hit the farther wall with a heavy thud.

"Damn!" The expletive seemed jolted from Sargent's mouth.

Fluffy scampered between his legs, tripped him and sent him down to the floor with a bump.

"God bless my soul!" Xenophon Xerxes faltered. "The thing is—actually vicious. Did you notice that it seemed—inclined to attack you, Robert?"

"Yes." Bob scrambled up. "I noticed it." His eyes sought Pulex and found him squatted warily observant against a baseboard. "He's a wicked flea—but this time there's a man going to pursue him." He flung himself forward.

And Pulex exercised discretion. The kitchen window was open, and he lifted himself through it, butting headlong against a screen, tearing it loose along one edge and scrambling frantically through the resulting avenue of escape.

"God bless my soul!" said Xenophon Xerxes again. "I fear we've lost him, Robert."

"I don't know whether we have or not." Bob's blood was up. He dashed at the kitchen door and vanished through it.

Nellie joined him outside.

Zapt followed.

The three stood staring into the gloom of the back yard, faintly illuminated by the rays of a second quarter moon. There came presently to their ears a rasping, scratching sound from overhead.

Bob ran farther out and sought for its source. "There he is," he announced, and pointed to where Pulex was ambling sedately along the ridgepole of the house. As they watched, the fugitive gained the shadow of a chimney and disappeared.

"I'll get him out of that soon enough," Bob promised. "They can't stand water. Where's the hose?"

"I'll—bring it, Robert." Xenophon Xerxes hurried off, his coat tails flapping.

"Get a broom or a stick." Bob turned his glance to Nellie. "He'll jump when the water hits him. Be ready to swat him."

"Swat the flea," Nellie giggled and ran off to obtain the suggested means for so doing.

Zapt came back with the hose. He had turned on the water and thrust the nozzle into Sargent's hands.

Nellie reappeared with a broom and the handle of a mop.

Bob explained their purpose and Xenophon took the mop, stepping back from the wall of the house, with Nellie posted a short space from him.

"Now!" Bob lifted the stream of water against the chimney, and saw a dark object hurtle above him.

"Catch him!" he cried, turning toward Nellie and her father.

The hose turned with him. Its stream struck Xenophon Xerxes just below an uptilted chin.

"Professor!" Bob began in a tone of consternation.

"Ass!" The eminent investigator hurled his mopstick upon the ground and strode, dripping, into the house.

5

OFFICER DANIEL MC GUINESS, patrolman of the district embracing the Zapt residence, rang in at the end of a round and gave ear to a question couched in the station sergeant's voice:

"Say, Mac, what sort of people are M. K. Brown and wife on Elm Street? Is the lady by any chance bugs?"

"Why," Danny frowned at the transmitter, "not thot I know of, sarjunt. For why do ye ask?"

"Well," the voice came back, "she called up a bit ago and wanted to know if we'd send out there. Said a flea chased her dog into the house."

"A—flea?" Danny steadied himself against the patrol box.

"That's what *she* said."

"Ut—chased her—dog?"

"Accordin' to th' lady."

"How big—was th' dog?"

There was a pause while Danny waited for an answer. When it came its delay seemed explained by the sergeant's intention to make it sufficient:

"See here, McGuiness, don't get funny! Go find out what sort of hootch they're using,' th' next time you pass their house."

"Yis, sor." Danny hung up, removed his helmet and scratched his head. Resuming his beat he turned over the amazing information he had just received—a flea—had chased—Brown's dog—into the house.

"It ain't possible," said Danny to himself. "It's been hot th' last few days, though. Maybe—anyway, when I git over there, I'll stop—though if there are any sich anymiles about th' place, 'tis more a job fer th' sanitary squad."

Wherefore, when he approached the Brown residence, he turned in from the street, mounted the front porch and set a heavy finger to a bell.

His summons was answered by Brown himself.

Danny knew him. "Good evenin', Misther Brown," he said. "Th' sar-junt was sayin' as how—maybe I'd better stop."

"Yes. Come in, McGuiness." Brown held the door wide.

Danny removed his helmet and followed into a room where Mrs. Brown sat. He accepted a chair. "An' now just phawt was th' trouble?" he suggested. "Th' Sarge was sayin' somethin'—about a—about a—"

"About a flea," Mrs. Brown declared in a tone of nervous excitement. "That is, it looked like a flea, except that it was so large. I never saw anything like it."

Danny nodded. "An'—ut chased —your dog?"

"Yes. He ran up on the porch and whimpered, and when Mrs. Brown went to let him in, this thing was right behind him," Brown said.

"Th' dog's a little felly?"

"He's a full-grown Gordon setter."

"You seen ut yourself?" Danny looked Brown full in the eyes.

"Yes." They did not falter. "When Mrs. Brown screamed I ran out to see what was wrong and there it was in the hall. Oh, I know it sounds crazy, McGuiness, but a man believes what he sees."

"Yis, sor—sometimes." Danny sniffed. It was almost as though he were seeking some definite odor.

And Brown noted the action. He laughed shortly. "Oh—I'm not drunk, McGuiness."

"Yis, sor—no, sor," Danny corrected himself quickly. "An' so this here—whatever ut was—follied th' dog inside?"

"It did."

"An' where is ut now?"

"It's gone. We didn't keep it as a pet. I tried to throw my coat over it, but it jumped back through the door."

"Oh, thin—ye druv it off." Danny rose. "Thot bein' th' case I don't see phawt I can do at prisint. If ye see anything more of it—of course—"

Mrs. Brown spoke again. "I suppose it was foolish to report it. But —it was so strange—I thought somebody ought to know such a thing was at large. So—I rang up."

"Yis, ma'am," said McGuiness. "I'll report to th' sar-junt th' next toime I ring in, that I come over an'—"

He broke off at the sound of a feminine scream from the street, whirled quickly, clapped on his helmet and bolted out of the house.

HE EMERGED to find a young woman clinging to the arm of a masculine companion and clattered heavily toward them.

"Phawt's th' matter?" he demanded, coming to a halt.

"I've—been bitten," the girl said in a gasping voice.

Danny eyed her escort in suspicious fashion. "Phawt was ut bit ye?" he asked.

"The—the—toad."

"Th'—toad?" Danny McGuiness stared. His words came like a belated echo at the end of an appreciable pause.

"Yes. At least I guess it was a toad. It hopped out, just as we were passing." The young woman released her escort's arm and faced Danny.

Danny considered. "It hopped out an' bit ye—how?" he asked at length.

"Why—with its mouth, I suppose."

"Th' toad did?" Danny was breathing deeply.

"Certainly." The girl's companion spoke for the first time. "See here, officer, what's the matter with you, anyway?"

Danny took a grip on his senses and his club. "There ain't anything th' matter with me, young felly," he averred. "Where was ut this here toad bit ye, ma'am?"

"Why, right here," the victim declared.

Danny nodded. "Yis, yis, but—whereabouts on—yerself?"

"Oh—why, on the ankle—just above the foot."

"'Tis the usual location of ankles." Danny nodded again. "An' afterwards—phawt did th' toad do after ut bit ye?"

"Just a minute, officer," the other man interrupted. "We were talking of a—"

"You were talkin' of a toad," said Danny gruffly.

"Yes. And there's no use in going at the matter as though it had been a holdup or a thug. It hopped out and bit Miss Grant and hopped off again down the road. Then you ran out and asked what had happened. That's all there is to it. Are you able to walk, dear?"

Miss Grant murmured an assent.

Her escort turned back to Danny. "So now that you know all the details, if you don't mind, we'll proceed."

"Yis, sor." Danny drew back. "I run out because th' young lady screamed. An' phawt ye told me filled me wid surprize, because"— for the life of him he could not resist a parting shot, in view of the other man's manner—" 'tis th' first toime I ever heard of a toad bite, by th' token that th' varmints haven't anny teeth. Good noight, sor. I hope ye git home all roight. Now if ut had been a flea—"

"A flea?" The other man eyed him, and all at once he laughed. "Officer, you've lost your sense of proportion. I saw it. It was as big as a—a scuttle of coal, at least."

"Yis, sor—'tis sort of dark along here." Danny watched the pair move off, before he removed his helmet and wiped his forehead with the back of a hand. "Phew!" He replaced the helmet. "Th' flea was big enough to chase th' kiyoodle an' th' toad was big as a hod o' coal. Somebody's lost their sinse of proportion, all roight, I guess." He resumed his sadly delayed patrol.

" 'Tis a funny noight," he mused. "Dog-chasin' fleas, an' bitin' toads. Domned if ut *don't* sound home brewed. An' as for my sinse of proportion"— he gazed about him and chuckled—"iverything looks nacheral enough. Most loikely thim two was swateheartin' along an' th' poor toad hopped out an' scared her, an' she thought she was bit. Wimmen git funny notions, whin they're tuk suddint off their guard. As fer th' flea—beloike ut was somethin' th' fool dog treed."

But if Danny's line of argument satisfied him, what complacency he had evolved by the time he once more arrived at the end of his round was destined to receive a shattering jolt.

"McGuiness," the sergeant demanded, "what sort of a menagerie has broken out up there tonight? There's a man just come into th' emergency, says he was bitten in a taxicab."

"Bit-ten?" Danny faltered.

"Yes, bitten. Shut up and listen. He drove up there in a cab and went into a house. When he came out something was in the cab and bit him and jumped out of the window. He's got a wound on his leg and they're giving him anti-tetanic serum. He says he thinks it was a cat with hydrophobia—"

"A—a—cat?" McGuiness babbled.

"Yes. A cat—a mad cat. Understand? Now get busy and see what's broke loose. If you find anything—shoot it."

(Continued on page 568)

THE HORROR ON THE LINKS

by Seabury Quinn

Author of "Servants of Satan," "The Phantom Farmhouse," etc.

IT MUST have been past midnight when the skirling of my bedroom telephone bell wakened me, for I could see the moon well down toward the western horizon as I looked through the window while reaching for the instrument.

"Dr. Trowbridge," came an excited feminine voice through the receiver, "this is Mrs. Maitland. Can you come right over? Something terrible has happened to Paul!"

"Eh?" I answered, half asleep. "What's wrong?"

"We—we don't know," she replied jerkily. "He's unconscious. You know, he'd been to the dance at the country club with Gladys Phillips. We'd all been in bed hours when we heard someone banging on the front door. Mr. Maitland went down, and when he opened the door, Paul fell into the hall. Oh, doctor, he's been terribly hurt! Won't you please come right over?"

Physicians' sleep is like a park—public property. With a sigh I climbed out of bed and into my clothes, cranked my superannuated motor to life and set out for the Maitland house.

Young Maitland lay on his bed, his eyes closed, teeth tight clenched, his face set in an expression of unutterable dread, even in his unconsciousness. Across his shoulders and on the backs of his arms I found several long incised wounds, as though his flesh had been raked by a sharp, pronged instrument.

I sterilized and bandaged the cuts, and applied restoratives, wondering what sort of encounter had produced such hurts.

"Help, help! Oh, God, help!" the lad muttered thickly, like a person trying to call out in a nightmare. "Oh, oh, it's got me; it's"—his words gave way to a gurgling, inarticulate cry of fear, and he sat bolt upright in bed, staring about with vacant, fear-filmed eyes.

"Easy, easy, young fellow," I soothed. "Lie back, now; take it easy, you're all right, you're home in bed."

He looked uncomprehendingly at me a moment, then fell to babbling inanely. "The ape-thing—the ape-thing!" he screamed in a frenzy. "It's got me! Open the door; for God's sake, open the door!"

"Here," I ordered gruffly as I drove my hypodermic into his arm. "None o' that. You quiet down."

The opiate took effect almost immediately, and I left him with his

parents while I returned to catch up the raveled ends of my interrupted sleep.

HEADLINES shrieked at me from the front page of the paper lying beside my grapefruit at breakfast:

SUPER FIEND SOUGHT IN GIRL'S SLAYING

BODY OF YOUNG WOMAN FOUND NEAR SEDGEMOOR COUNTRY CLUB MYSTIFIES POLICE—CRIMINAL PERVERT BLAMED FOR KILLING—ARREST IS IMMINENT

Almost entirely denuded of clothing, marred by a score of terrible wounds, her face battered nearly past recognition and her neck broken, the body of pretty Sarah Humphries, 19, a waitress in the employ of the Sedgemoor Country Club, was found lying in one of the bunkers of the club's golf course by John Burroughs, a green keeper, early this morning. Miss Humphries, who had been employed at the clubhouse for three months, completed her duties shortly before midnight, and, according to statements of fellow workers, declared she was going to take a short cut across the links to the Andover Road, where she could get a trolley to the city. Her body, terribly mutilated, was found about twenty-five yards from the road on the golf course this morning.

Between the golf links and the Andover Road is a dense growth of trees, and it is thought the young woman was attacked while walking along the path through the woods to the road. Deputy Coroner Nesbett, who examined the body, gave his opinion that she had been dead about five hours when found. She had not been criminally assaulted.

Several suspicious characters have been seen in the neighborhood of the club's grounds recently, and the police are checking up on their movements. An early arrest is expected.

"There's two gintelmen to see ye, sor," Nora, my housekeeper, interrupted my perusal of the paper. "'Tis Sergeant Costello an' a Frinchman, or Eyetalyun, or sumpin. They do be warntin' ter ax ye some questions about th' murther of th' pore little Humphries gurl."

"Ask *me* about the murder?" I protested. "Why, the first I knew of it was when I looked at this paper, and I'm not through reading the account of the crime yet."

"That's all right, Dr. Trowbridge," Detective Sergeant Costello answered with a laugh as he entered the dining room. "We don't figure on arresting you; but we'd like to ask you some questions, if you don't mind. This is Professor de Grandin, of the Paris police. He's been doing some work for his department over here, an' when this murder broke, he offered the chief his help. We'll be needin' it, too, I'm thinkin'. Professor de Grandin, Dr. Trowbridge," he waved an introductory hand from one to the other of us.

The professor bowed stiffly from the hips, in continental fashion, then extended his hand with a friendly smile. He was a perfect example of the rare French blond type, rather under medium height, but with a military erectness of carriage which made him look several inches taller than he actually was. His light blue eyes were small and exceedingly deep-set, and would have been humorous had it not been for the curious cold directness of their gaze. With his wide mouth, light mustache waxed at the ends in two perfectly horizontal points, and those twinkling, stock-taking eyes, he reminded me of an alert tom-cat. Like a cat's, too, was his lithe, noiseless step as he crossed the room to shake hands.

"I fear Monsieur Costello gives you the misapprehension, doctor," he said in a pleasant voice, almost devoid of accent. "It is most true I am connected with the *Service de Sûreté*, but not as a vocation. My principal work is at the University of Paris and St. Lazaire Hospital; at present I combine my vocation of savant with my avocation of criminologist. You see—"

"Why," I interrupted, grasping his hand, "you are Professor Jules de Grandin, author of *Accentuated Evolution?*"

He shrugged deprecatingly. "Yes, I am he," he admitted with a smile; "but at present our inquiries lie in another field. You have a patient, one young Monsieur Paul Maitland, is it not? He was set upon last night in the Andover Road?"

"I have a patient named Paul Maitland," I admitted, "but I don't know where he received his injuries."

"Nor do we," he answered with a smile, "but we shall inquire. You will go with us while we question him? No?"

"Why, yes," I acquiesced. "I should be looking in on him this morning, anyhow."

"AND now, Monsieur," Professor de Grandin began when introductions had been completed, "you will please to tell us what happened last night to you. Yes?"

Paul looked uncomfortably from one of us to the other and swallowed nervously. "I don't like to think of it," he confessed, "much less talk about it; but here's the truth, believe it or not:

"I took Gladys home from the club about 11 o'clock, for she had developed a headache. After I'd said good-night to her I decided to go home and turn in, and had gotten nearly here when I reached in my pocket for a cigarette. My case was gone, and I remembered laying it on a window ledge just before my last dance.

"The Mater gave me that case last birthday, and I didn't want to lose it, so, instead of telephoning the club and asking one of the fellows to slip it in his pocket, like a fool, I decided to drive back for it.

"You know—or at least Dr. Trowbridge and Sergeant Costello do—the Andover Road dips down in a little valley and curves over by the edge of the golf course between the eighth and ninth holes. I was just in that part of the road nearest the links when I heard a woman scream twice—it really wasn't two screams, more like one and a half, for her second cry was shut off almost before it started.

"I had a gun in my pocket, a little .22 automatic—good thing I did, too—so I yanked it out and drew up at the roadside, leaving my engine running. That was lucky, too, believe me.

"I ran into the woods, yelling at the top of my voice, and there in the path I saw something dark, like a woman's body, lying. I started toward it when there was a rustling in the trees overhead and—*plop!*—something dropped right into the path in front of me.

"Gentlemen, I don't know what it was, but I know it wasn't anything human. It wasn't quite as tall as I, but looked about twice as broad, and its hands hung down—clear down to the ground.

"I yelled, 'Hey, what're you doin'?' and pointed my gun at it, and it didn't answer, just started jumping up and down, bouncing with its feet and hands on the ground at once. I tell you, it gave me the horrors.

"'Snap out of it!' I yelled again, 'or I'll blow your head off.' Next moment—I was so nervous and excited I didn't really know what I was doing—I let fly with the pistol, right in the thing's face.

"That came near being my last shot, too. Believe me or not, that thing, whatever it was, reached out, snatched the gun out of my hand and *broke it.* Yes, sir, snapped that pistol in two with its bare hands as easily as I could break a match stick.

"And then it was on me. I felt one of its hands go clear over my shoulder, from breast to back in a single clutch, and it pulled me toward it. Ugh! It was hairy, sir. Hairy as an ape!"

"*Morbleu!* Yes? And then?" de Grandin murmured eagerly.

"Then I lunged out with all my might and kicked it on the shins. It released its grip a second, and I beat it. Ran as I never did on the quarter-mile track, jumped into the car and took off down the road with everything wide open. But I got these gashes in my back and arms before I got into the roadster. He made three or four grabs for me, and every one of 'em took the flesh away where his nails raked me. By the time I got home I was almost crazy with fright and pain and loss of blood. I remember kicking and banging on the door and yelling for the folks to open, and then I went out like a light."

The boy paused and regarded us seriously. "I know you think I'm the biggest liar out of jail," he announced; "but I've been telling you the absolute, honest-to-goodness truth."

Costello looked skeptical, but de Grandin nodded eagerly, affirmatively. "But of course, you speak truth," he replied. "Now tell me, young Monsieur, if you can, this *poilu,* this hairy one, how was he dressed?"

"Um," Paul wrinkled his brow in an effort at remembrance. "I can't say surely, for it was dark in the woods and I was pretty much excited, but—I—think he was in evening clothes. Yes; I'd swear to it. I saw his white shirt bosom."

"Ah," muttered de Grandin softly. "A hairy thing, a fellow who leaps up and down like a jumping-jack or an ape in his anger, and in evening clothes. It is to think, *mes amis.*"

"I'll say it is," Costello agreed. "What sort o' hootch did they have out to th' club last night, young feller?"

"Dr. Trowbridge is wanted on the 'phone, please," a maid announced from the door. "You can take it on this one, if you wish, sir; it's connected with the main line."

I picked up the instrument from young Maitland's bedside table and called, "Hello, Dr. Trowbridge speaking."

"This is Mrs. Comstock, doctor," a voice informed me. "Your housekeeper told us you were at Mrs. Maitland's. Can you come to my house, please? Mr. Manly, my daughter's fiancé, was hurt last night."

"Hurt last night?" I repeated.

"Yes, out by the country club."

"Very well, I'll be over shortly," I answered, then held out my hand to de Grandin.

"Sorry to have to run away," I apologized, "but another man was hurt at the club last night."

"Ah?" he replied interrogatively. "That club, it is an unfortunate place. May I accompany you, doctor? This other man, he may tell us something also."

"Very well," I agreed, "I'll be pleased to have your company."

YOUNG Manly's injury proved to be a gunshot wound inflicted by a small caliber weapon, and was located in the left shoulder. He was very reticent concerning its cause, and neither de Grandin nor I felt inclined to inquire too insistently, for Mrs. Comstock hovered about the sickroom from our entrance until the treatment was concluded.

"*Nom d'un petit porc!*" de Grandin muttered as we left the Comstock residence. "He is close-mouthed, that one. Almost, it would seem—pah! I talk the rot. Let us get to the morgue, *cher docteur.* You shall drive me there in your motor and tell me what it is you see. Ofttimes you gentlemen of the general practise see things which we specialists overlook because of the mental blinders of our specialties. *N'est-ce-pas?*"

In the cold, uncharitable light of the city mortuary we viewed the re-

mains of poor little Sarah Humphries. As the newspaper had said, she was disfigured by twenty or more wounds, running, for the most part, in converging lines down her shoulders and arms, deeply incised, deep enough to reveal the bone where skin and flesh had been completely shorn through in places. On her throat and neck were five distinct livid patches, one some three inches in size, roughly square, the other four extending in parallel lines almost completely around her neck, terminating in deeply pitted scars, as though the talons of some predatory beast had been sunk into her flesh. But the most terrifying item of the grisly sight was the poor girl's face. Repeated blows had reduced her once pretty features to an empurpled level, bits of sand and fine gravel still bedded in the cuticle told how her countenance must have been ground into the earth with terrific force. Never, since my days as emergency hospital interne, had I seen so sickening an array of injuries on a single body.

"Eh, what do you see, my friend?" the little Frenchman demanded in a raucous whisper. "You think—what?"

"It's terrible"—I began, but he interrupted impatiently:

"But of course. One does not expect the beautiful at the morgue. I ask what you see, not for your esthetic impressions. *Pardieu!*"

"If you want to know what interests me most," I answered, "it is those wounds on her shoulder and arms. Except in degree, they are exactly like those which I treated on young Maitland last night."

"Ah—yes?" de Grandin responded, his little blue eyes dancing with excitement, his cat's-whiskers mustache bristling more fiercely than ever. "Name of a little blue man! We begin to make progress. Now,"—he touched the lividities on the dead girl's throat daintily with the tip of one well manicured nail—"these marks, do they tell you anything?"

I shook my head. "Possibly the bruise left by some sort of garrote," I hazarded. "They are too long and thick for fingerprints; besides, there's no thumb mark."

"Ha, ha," he laughed mirthlessly. "No thumb mark, do you say? My dear sir, had there been a thumb mark, I should have been all at sea. These marks, they are the stigmata of truth on the young Monsieur Maitland's story. When were you last at the zoo, eh?"

"At the zoo?" I echoed stupidly.

"But of course, have you never noted the quadrumana, how they take hold? My dear sir, it would, perhaps, not be too great an exaggeration to say the thumb is the difference between man and monkey. Man and the chimpanzee grasp an object with the fingers, using the thumb as a fulcrum. The gorilla, the orang-utan, the gibbon, he is a fool, he knows not how to use his thumb. "Now see"—again he indicated the bruises—"this large patch, that represents the heel of the hand, these encircling lines, they are the fingers, these wounds, they are nail prints. Name of an old one-eyed tom-cat! It was truth the young Maitland told. It was an ape which accosted him in the *bois*. An ape in evening clothes! What think you from that, *hein?*"

"God knows," I answered helplessly. "I give up."

"*Qui, Monsieur le Docteur,*" de Grandin lapsed into his native tongue in his earnestness, "truly, God does know. But I, do I give up? Me, I am like your so splendid Paul Jones, I have but commenced to fight!"

He turned abruptly from the dead girl and, seizing my elbow, urged me from the morgue. "No more, no more now," he declared. "You have your mission of help to the sick to perform, and I have my work, also, to do. If you will take me once more to your

charming suburb I will leave you to your duties while I pursue mine, and, if the imposition is not too great, I will dwell at your house while on this case. You consent? Good!

"Until tonight, then," he hailed as he leaped agilely from the car at the village limits. "I shall attempt to be at the house before you have—how do you say?—hit into the straw? *Bien, au revoir, cher ami.*"

IT WAS somewhere about 8 o'clock when de Grandin returned to my house, laden with almost enough bundles to tax a motor truck's capacity. "Great Scott, professor," I exclaimed as he laid his parcels on a convenient chair and gave me a grin which sent the waxed points of his mustache shooting upward like a miniature pair of horns, "have you been buying out the town?"

"Almost," he admitted as he seated himself and lit a vile-smelling French cigarette. "I have talked much with the grocer, the druggist, the garage keeper and the tobacconist, and at each place I make purchases. I am, for the time, a new resident of your so pleasant suburb, anxious to find out about my neighbors and my new home. I have talk, talk, talk. I have milled over much wordy chaff, *hélas!* But from it I have extracted some good meal, *grâce à dieu!*

He fixed his curiously unwinking cat-stare on me and asked: "You have a Monsieur Kalmar resident here, have you not?"

"Yes," I replied, "I believe we have."

"And you can tell me of him?"—he paused, raising eyebrows questioningly.

"No," I answered, "I'm afraid I can't. He's lived here about a year, and kept very much to himself. As far as I know, he has made friends with no one in the village, and has been visited by no one but the tradesmen. I've been given to understand he is a scientist of some sort, and took the old Means place, out on the Andover Road, so he could pursue his experiments in quiet."

"Ah, yes, I see," de Grandin tapped his cigarette case thoughtfully with his finger tips, "that much I have already gathered from my talks this day. Now tell me, if you can, is this Monsieur All-Unknown a friend of the young Manly's—the gentleman whose wound from gunshot you treated this morning?"

"Not that I know," I replied. "I've never seen them together. Manly is a queer, moody sort of chap, never has much to say to anyone. How Millicent Comstock came to fall in love with him I've no idea. He rides well, and is highly thought of by her mother, but those are about the only qualifications he has as a husband, that I've been able to see."

"He is very strong, no?" de Grandin queried.

"I don't know," I had to confess.

"Well, then," he returned, "listen at me. You think de Grandin is a fool, eh? Perhaps yes; perhaps no. This day I make other business besides talk. I go to that Comstock lady's house and reconnoiter. In an ash-can I find one pair of patent leather dress shoes, much scratched. I grease the palm of a servant and find out they are that Monsieur Manly's. I also look farther and find one white-linen dress shirt, with blood on it. It is torn about the cuffs and split at the shoulder, that shirt. It, too, I find, belong to Monsieur Manly. I am like a Jewish second-hand man when I talk with that servant of Madam Comstock—I buy from him that shirt and those shoes. Behold!"

Undoing a parcel, he exhibited a pair of dress shoes and a shirt, as though they were curios of priceless value. "In Paris we have ways of making the inanimate talk," he asserted as he thrust his hand into his pocket and drew forth a bit of folded

paper. "That shirt and those shoes I put through the third degree, and I find this." Opening the paper he disclosed three coarse, dull-brown hairs, varying from a half-inch to three inches in length.

I examined them curiously. From their appearance they might have been from a man's head, for they were too long and insufficiently curved to be body-hairs, but their texture seemed too harsh for human growth.

"Um," I commented non-committally.

"Um," he mocked. "You cannot classify them, eh? No?"

"No," I admitted. "They are entirely too coarse to have come from Manly's head. Besides, they are almost black; his hair is a distinct brown."

"My friend," de Grandin leaned forward suddenly, staring me straight in the eyes, "those hairs, I have seen such before. So have you, but you do not recognize. *They are from a gorilla!*"

"Impossible!" I jerked back. "How could a gorilla's hair get on Manly's shirt?"

"Not on," he corrected, still gazing directly at me. "They were *in* it, below the neck line, where a bullet had torn through the linen and wounded him. The hairs were embedded in the dried blood. Look at this garment" —he held the shirt before me for inspection—"behold how it is split. It has been upon a body too big for it. Monsieur Trowbridge, that shirt was worn by the thing—the monster—which killed that pitiful girl dead on the links last night, which attacked the young Maitland a few minutes later—and which got this paint from the side of Madam Comstock's house on these shoes when it climbed that house last night.

"You start, you stare? You say to yourself, 'De Grandin, he is *caduc*—mad?' Listen, I prove each step in the ladder:

"This morning, while you examine Monsieur Manly's wound, I examine him and his room. On his window sill I note a few scrapes—such scrapes as one who drag his legs and feet might make climbing over the window ledge. I look out at the window, and on the white-painted side of the house I find fresh paint-scratches. Too, also, I find marks on the painted iron pipe which carry the water from the roof down in rainy weather. That pipe runs down the corner of the house, near Manly's window, but too far away for a man to reach it from the sill. But if that man have arms as long as my leg, what then? Ah, he could make the reach most easy.

"Now, when I buy these shoes, that shirt, from the Comstock servant, I note the paint on the shoe, and the scratch also thereon. I compare the paint on the shoe with the paint on the house-sides. He are the same.

"I note that shirt, how he are blood-stained, how he are all burst, as though the man who wear him suddenly grow great and break him out. I find the beast-hairs in the blood-stain on the shirt. I take that shirt to the laundry and ask the excellent *Chinois,* 'Whose shirt are this?'

"He reply, 'Not know.'

"I say, 'You are liar, but I give you this'—I show him a bill of ten dollair—'to tell the truth.'

"He take my bill and smile like summer as he reply, 'Mr. Manly's.' *Voilà!* You see?"

"No, I'll be hanged if I do," I denied.

He bent forward again, speaking with rapid earnestness: "That servant, he tell me more. Last night the young Manly was nervous—what you call ill at ease. He complain of headache, of backache—he feel r-r-rotten. He go to bed early, and his *amoureuse,* she go without him to the country club dance. The old madam, she, too, go to bed.

"The young man, he go for walk, because he can not sleep, he tell that servant that this morning. But the servant, he was up with the toothache all night, and while he hear the young man come in after midnight, *he did not hear him leave.*

"Now, what you think? A policeman of the motorcycle tell me he see the young Manly come from that Monsieur Kalmar's house, staggering like one drunk. He wonders, that policeman, if Monsieur Kalmar keep so much to himself because he are a legger-of-the-boot? Eh? What now, *cher docteur?* You say what?"

"Damn it!" I exploded, "You're piecing out the silliest nonsense-story I ever heard, de Grandin. One of us is crazy as hell, and I don't think it's I!"

"Neither of us is crazy, *mon vieux,*" he returned gravely, "but men have gone mad with knowing what I know, and madder yet with suspect what I am beginning to suspect. Will you drive me past the house of Monsieur Kalmar?"

A few minutes' run carried us out to the lonely house occupied by the eccentric old man whose year's residence near the village had been a twelve months' mystery.

"Ah, ha," de Grandin exclaimed as we passed the place, "he works late, this one. Observe, the light burns in his workshop."

Sure enough, from a window at the rear of the house a shaft of electric light cut the evening shadows, and, as we stopped the car and gazed, we could see Kalmar's bent form, swathed in a laboratory apron, passing and repassing the window as he shuffled nervously back and forth across the room.

"Let us go," de Grandin suggested, turning from his silent contemplation of the worker. "While we drive back, I will tell you a story.

"Before the war which racked the world, there came to Paris from the University of Vienna one Doctor Beneckendorff. As a man he was intolerable, as a scholar he was incomparable. The knowledge of the greatest savants concerning organic evolution and comparative anatomy were but as children's A, B, C to that one. With my own two eyes I have seen him perform experiments which, in an age less tolerant of learning—perhaps in your own America, with its so curious laws against the teaching of scientific truth—would have brought him to the stake as a wizard.

"But science is God's tool, my friend, and it is not meant that man should play at being God. That man, he went too far. We had to restrain him in prison."

"Yes?" I answered, not particularly interested in the narrative. "What did he do?"

"Eh, what did he not do?" de Grandin replied. "Children of the poor were found missing at night. They were nowhere. The gendarmes' search narrowed to the laboratory of this Beneckendorff, and there they found not the poor infants, but a half-score ape-creatures, not wholly human, not wholly simian, but partaking horribly of the appearance of each, with fur and handlike feet, but with the face of something which had once been of mankind. They were dead, those poor ones, fortunately for them.

"He proved mad, like the bug of June, as you Americans say, but ah, my friend, what a mentality, what a fine brain gone bad!

"We shut him up for the safety of the public, and for the safety of the race we burned his notebooks and destroyed the serums with which he had injected the human babes to turn them into apes."

"Impossible!" I exclaimed.

"Incredible, yes," de Grandin admitted, "but not, unfortunately, impossible—for him. His secret entered the madhouse with him; but in the

turbulent days of war when the *Boche* thundered at the gates of Paris, he escaped."

"Good God!" I cried. "You mean to say, de Grandin, this mad fiend, this maker of monsters, is loose on the world?"

He shrugged his shoulders with Gallic fatalism. "Perhaps. All trace of him has vanished, though there are reports he was later seen in the Congo Belgique."

"But—"

"Ah, no, I ramble on like a fool. Of what connection is this remembrance of mine with the case of Sarah Humphries? *Pardieu*, none!

"One favor, Monsieur, if you please; let me accompany you once more when you attend the young Manly. I would have a one minute's talk with Madam Comstock. Perhaps—"

His voice trailed off into silence.

MRS. CORNELIA COMSTOCK was a lady of imposing physique and even more imposing manner. She was wont to receive respectful and ceremonious consideration from society reporters, her fellow club members, even from solicitors for "causes". But to de Grandin she was simply a woman who had information which he desired. Prefacing his inquiry with the sort of bow none but a Frenchman can achieve, he began directly:

"Madam Comstock, do you, or did you ever, know one Dr. Beneckendorff?"

Mrs. Comstock, who was used to dominating her husband, her daughter and all mankind in general, drew herself stiffly erect and directed a withering gaze at him.

"My good man—" she began, as though he were an overcharging taxi driver, but the Frenchman met her cold eyes with eyes equally cold and uncompromising.

"You will answer my questions, please," he told her. "Primarily I represent the Republic of France; but I also represent humanity. Once more, please, did you ever know a Dr. Beneckendorff?"

Mrs. Comstock's imperious glance lowered before de Grandin's unwinking stare, and her thin lips twitched slightly as she replied, "Yes."

"Ah. We make progress. When did you know him—in what circumstances? Believe me, you may speak in confidence before me and Dr. Trowbridge, but please to speak frankly. The importance is great."

"I knew Otto Beneckendorff many years ago," the lady answered in a low voice. "He had just come to this country from Europe, and was teaching science at the university near which I lived as a girl. We—we were engaged."

"Ah? So. And your betrothal, was broken? For what reason, please?"

Looking at her, I could scarcely recognize the community's social dictator in Mrs. Cornelia Comstock as she regarded de Grandin with wondering, frightened eyes. She shivered, as though she felt a sudden draft of chilled air, before answering. "He—he was impossible, sir. We had vivisectionists, even in those days—but this man seemed to torture poor, helpless animals for the love of it. I gave him back his ring when he boasted of one of his experiments to me. He seemed to enjoy telling how the poor beast suffered before it died."

"*Eh bien*," de Grandin shot me a meaning glance, as though I, too, followed the thread his examination unraveled, "we do progress. Good. Your betrothal, then, was broken. He left you, this so cruel experimenter. Did he leave in friendship?" He leaned forward, waxed cat-mustaches bristling, as he waited her reply in breathless eagerness.

Mrs. Comstock looked like one on the verge of fainting as she almost whispered: "No, no; he left me with a terrible threat. I remember his very words—can I ever forget them? He said, 'I go from you; but I shall return. Nothing but death can cheat me. I shall bring on you and yours a horror such as no man has known since the days before Adam.'"

De Grandin almost danced as she finished speaking. "Ah, ha," he exclaimed, "the explanation is ours! The mystery is almost solved. Thank you, Madam. If you will tell me one more little thing, I shall retire and trouble you no more:

"Your daughter, she is betrothed to one Monsieur Manly. Tell me, I beg, when and where did she meet this young man?"

"I introduced them," the lady replied with a return of something of her frigid manner. "Mr. Manly came to my husband with letters of introduction from an old schoolmate of his —a fellow student at the university—in Capetown."

"Eh?" de Grandin almost shrieked. "Capetown, do you say? Capetown, South Africa? *Nom d'un petit bonhomme!* From Capetown! When was this, Madam, please?"

"A year ago. Why—"

"And Monsieur Manly, he has lived with you how long?" the question shut off her offended protest half uttered.

"Mr. Manly is *stopping* with us," she answered icily. "He is to marry my daughter, Millicent, next month. Really, sir, I fail to see what interest the Republic of France, which you represent, and humanity, which you also claim to represent, can have in my private affairs. If—"

"And this Capetown friend," de Grandin interrupted feverishly. "Tell me, his name was what, and his business?"

"I—"

"Tell me!" he cried impatiently, extending his slender hands as though to choke the answer from her. *"Nom d'un fusil!* I must know. At once!"

"We do not know his street and number," Mrs. Comstock replied. "His name is Alexander Findlay, and he is a diamond factor."

"Ah, ah! *Bien.* Thank you, Madam. You have been most kind," said de Grandin, and he struck his heels together and bowed as though hinged at the hips.

IT WAS past midnight when the 'phone rang insistently. "Western Union speaking," a girl's voice announced over the wire. "Cablegram for Dr. de Grandin. Ready?"

"Yes," I answered, seizing the pencil and pad beside the instrument. "Read it, please."

"'No person by name Alexander Findlay diamond factor known here no record of such person in last five years. Signed, Burlingame, Inspector of Police.'

"The cable is from Capetown, South Africa," she added as I finished jotting down her dictation.

"Very good," I replied. "Forward a typed confirmation in the morning, please."

Then I went to de Grandin's room with the message.

"Mille tonnerres!" he shouted, flinging the covers back, as I read him the cablegram: de Grandin, he is a fool, *hein?* Listen—" he leaped from the bed and raced across the room to where his coat hung over a chair. Extracting a black-leather notebook, almost as large as a desk dictionary, he thumbed its pages rapidly, finally found the entry he sought. "Behold! This Monsieur Kalmar, whom no one knows about, he have lived here ten months and twenty-six days. I have it from that so stupid real estate broker who think I ask information for a directory of scientists.

"That young Monsieur Manly, he have known those Comstocks for 'about a year.' He bring them a letter of introduction from a schoolmate of Monsieur Comstock who are unknown to the Capetown police. *Pardieu!* Hereafter Jules de Grandin he sleep all day and prowl all night. Tomorrow, Monsieur, you shall introduce me to the gun merchant. I desire to possess one Winchester rifle."

THE time drifted by, de Grandin going, gun in hand, each night to his lonely vigil; but no developments in the mystery of the Humphries murder or the attack on Paul Maitland were reported.

The date for Millicent Comstock's wedding approached and the big mansion was filled to overflowing with boisterous young folks; still de Grandin continued to invert the time, sleeping by day, patrolling by night.

Two nights before the marriage day he accosted me as he came downstairs. "Trowbridge, my friend, you have been most patient with me. If you will come tonight, I think, perhaps, I can show you some result."

"All right," I agreed, "I haven't the slightest idea what all this folderol is about, but I'm willing to be convinced."

At his request I got out my car and drove to within a block of the Comstock house, parking the machine in a small copse of trees where it would be readily accessible, yet effectually concealed.

"My friend," de Grandin began as we skirted the Comstock lawn, keeping well hidden in the shadows, "I am not certain of what I do. I am like one who walks an unfamiliar path with a hoodwink on his eyes; yet my brain tell me I follow no false road. No man knows what part Tanit, the Moon Goddess, plays in the affairs of men, even today, when her name is forgotten by all but dusty-dry antiquaries. This we know, however; at the entrance of life our appearance is governed, in the matter of days, by the phase of the moon. You, as a physician with obstetrical knowledge, know that. Too, when the time to go approach, the crisis of disease is often governed by the moon's phase. Why this is we know not; that it is we know full well. Suppose, then, the cellular organization of a body be violently, unnaturally, changed, and nature's whole force be exerted toward a readjustment. Is it not reasonable to suppose that the moon, which affect childbirth and death, might have some force to apply in such a case?"

"I dare say," I conceded, "but I don't follow you. Just what is it you expect, or suspect, de Grandin?"

"Nothing," he answered. "I suspect nothing, I affirm nothing, I deny nothing. I am agnostic, but I am hopeful. If events prove me a doting fool, making a great, black *lutin* of my own shadow, no one will be happier than I. But he who prepares for the worst is most agreeably disappointed if the best occurs."

He touched my elbow. "Here we rest awhile," he murmured, squatting in the shadow of a small clump of dwarf pines. "That light, it is in the window of Mademoiselle Millicent's room, *n'est-ce-pas?*"

"Yes," I confirmed, wondering if I were on a fool's errand with a lunatic for company.

The merrymaking inside the house was wearing to a close as we took our station; within half an hour the mansion was shrouded in quiet darkness.

De Grandin fidgeted nervously, fussing with the lock of his gun, ejecting and reinserting cartridges, playing a devil's tattoo on the barrel with his long, tapering fingers.

Almost like a floodlight turned on the scene, the moon's radiance suddenly deluged the house, grounds and surroundings with silver as the wind swept aside a veil of clouds. "Ah,"

de Grandin muttered, "now we shall see what we shall see—perhaps."

As though his words had been a cue, there echoed from the house before us a scream of such wild, bewildered terror as few men have been unfortunate enough to hear. In the course of twenty years' active practise of medicine I had heard almost every sort of cry that physical anguish can wring from tortured flesh, but never anything like this. Fear—stark, hideous fear—played on the vocal cords of the screamer like a madman twanging a harp, bringing forth a symphony of terror that stopped the breath, hot and sulfurous, in my throat, and sent an itching tingle through my scalp.

"A-a-ah!" de Grandin exclaimed in a rising tone as he grasped his rifle and stared fixedly at the house. "*Grand Dieu,* grant he comes forth. Only that, and I shall be content."

Light flashed inside the house. The patter of terrified feet sounded among the babel of wondering, questioning voices, but the scream was not repeated.

"A-a-ah!" de Grandin breathed again, his voice razor-edged with excitement. "Look, my friend. *Le gorille!* Behold, he comes!"

Emerging from Millicent's window, horrible as a devil from lowest hell, was a great, hairy head set low upon a pair of shoulders which must have been four feet across. An arm which, somehow, reminded me of a giant snake, slipped forth, grasped the cast-iron downspout at the corner of the house, and drew a thickset, misshapen body after it. A leg, tipped with a prehensile, handlike foot, was thrown over the sill, and, like a spider from its lair, the monster leaped from the darkened window and hung a moment to the iron pipe with its sable body silhouetted against the white walls of the house.

But what was that, that white-robed form which hung pendent from the grasp of the beast's free arm? My staring eyes strained across the moonlit night and my mouth went dry with horror.

Like a beautiful, white moth inert in the grasp of the spider, her fair hair unbound and falling like a golden veil before her marble-white face, her night clothing rent into a motley of tatters, Millicent Comstock hung in the creature's grasp.

"Shoot, shoot, man; for God's sake, shoot!" I screamed, but only a whisper, inaudible ten feet away, came from my fear-thickened lips.

"Silence, fool!" de Grandin ground between his teeth, as he pressed his gunstock against his cheek and drew the muzzle in line with the descending brute's body.

Slowly, so slowly it seemed an hour was consumed in the process, the great primate descended the water-pipe, leaping the last fifteen feet of the trip and crouching on the moonlit lawn, its tiny, deepset eyes glaring malignantly, as though it challenged the world for possession of its prey.

I could hear de Grandin's breath rasping in his nostrils as he sighted his gun and drew the trigger.

A roar like a bursting shell sounded as the smokeless powder's flash burned a gash in the night and a bullet went screaming through the air.

Again de Grandin fired, throwing the magazine mechanism with feverish haste.

The monster staggered drunkenly against the house as the detonation of the first shot sounded. With the second, it dropped Millicent's body to the lawn and uttered a cry which was part roar, part snarl, and, trailing one of its hairy arms helplessly, leaped toward the woods, crossing the grass plot in great, awkward leaps which reminded me, absurdly, of the bouncing of a huge inflated ball.

"Attend Mademoiselle," de Grandin commanded sharply, throwing a fresh cartridge into his firing cham-

ber. "I will see to the hairy one. Have no fear, I have shot his brethren in Africa."

I BENT above the girl's huddled body, putting my ear to her breast. Faint but perceptible, I made out a heart-beat, and lifted her in my arms, carrying her toward the house.

"Dr. Trowbridge!" Mrs. Comstock, followed by a throng of frightened, half-clothed guests, met me at the front door. "What has happened? Good heavens, Millicent!" She rushed forward, seizing her daughter's flaccid hands in both her own trembling ones. "Oh, what is it; what is it?"

"Help me get Millicent to bed and get me some smelling salts and some brandy," I commanded, ignoring her questions.

A few minutes later, with restoratives applied and electric pads at her feet and back, the girl showed signs of returning consciousness. "Get out —all of you," I ordered curtly. Hysterical women, even patients' mothers, are no fit occupants for the room when consciousness is regained after profound shock.

Millicent stirred in her faint, rolling her head feebly from side to side and moaning. "Oh, oh, the ape-thing—the ape-thing!" she whimpered in a small, childish voice. It was not till several hours later I realized she used exactly the term Paul Maitland had employed when recovering from his faint.

"All right, dear," I comforted. "It's all right, now. You're safe in bed. Old Dr. Trowbridge is here; he won't let anything hurt you."

She half opened her lovely eyes, saw me sitting beside her, and smiled sleepily in reassurance. Next moment she was soundly and naturally asleep, both her hands clasping one of mine.

"DOCTOR, Dr. Trowbridge," Mrs. Comstock whispered from the bedroom door. "We've searched all over the place, and there's no sign of Mr. Manly. Do—do you suppose anything could have happened to him?"

"I think it quite likely something could—and did," I answered, turning from her to smooth her daughter's hair.

"PAR *la barbe d'un bouc noir!*" de Grandin exclaimed as, disheveled, but with a light of exhilaration in his direct blue eyes, he met me in the Comstock hall some two hours later. "*Chère* Madam Comstock, you are to be congratulated. But for my so brave colleague, Dr. Trowbridge, and my own lowly self, your charming daughter had shared the fate of that never-enough-to-be-pitied Sarah Humphries.

"Trowbridge, *mon vieux,* I have not been quite frank with you. I have not told you all. But this thing, it was so incredible, so seemingly impossible, that you would not have believed. Even now, knowing what you know, having seen with your two eyes what you have seen this night, you do not quite believe. *Eh bien,* perhaps it is better so.

"To begin: When this *sacré* Beneckendorff was in the madhouse, he raved continually about his confinement cheating him of his revenge—the revenge he had so long planned against one Madam Comstock of America.

"We French, we are logical, not like you English and Americans. We write down and keep for possible reference even what a madman say. Why not? It may be useful some day.

"Now, friend Trowbridge, I tell you some time ago this Beneckendorff were reported in the Congo Belgique. Yes? But I do not tell you he were reported in charge of a young, half-grown gorilla. No.

"When this *pauvre* Mademoiselle Humphries is killed in that so terrible manner I remember my own African days and I say to me, 'Ah, ha, it look as if *Monsieur le Gorille*—the gorilla—have been about this place. I ask to know if any such have escape from a circus or zoo from near by or far. All answers are no.

"Then that Sergeant Costello, he bring me to this so splendid savant, Dr. Trowbridge, and with him I go to interview that young Paul Maitland who have encountered much strangeness on the golf links where the young woman was killed.

"And what do he tell me? He relate of a thing that have hair, that jump up and down like an enraged ape and that act like a gorilla, *but wear man's evening clothes. Parbleu!* It is to think! No gorilla have escape, yet what *seems* one is here encountered, wearing the clothes of a man. I search my memory. I remember that madman and the poor infants he turn into monkey-things with his damnable serums.

"I say: 'If he can turn man-children into monkey-things, why not can he turn ape-things into men-things? Eh?'

"I find one Dr. Kalmar live here unknown. I search about, and learn a certain man here are seen coming from his place in secret. I also find in this certain man's discarded shirt the hair of a gorilla. *Morbleu!* I think some more, and the thoughts I think are not pleasant thoughts.

"I reason: 'Suppose this serum which make a man-thing of an ape are not permanent? What then? If it are not renewed at times, the man becomes an ape again.' You follow? *Bien.*

"Now, the other day, I learn something which make me think some more. This Beneckendorff, he rave against one Madam Comstock. You, Madam Comstock, admit you once knew this Beneckendorff. He have loved you, as he understand love; now he hate you as only he with his diseased, but great brain, can hate. Is it not against you he plan his devilish scheme? I think so.

"I send a cablegram—never mind who to; Dr. Trowbridge knows that—and I get the answer I expect, but fear. The man in whose shirt I find those gorilla hairs is no man at all, he is one terrible masquerade of a man. So. Now, I reason, 'Suppose this masquerading monkey-thing do not get his serum as expected, what will he do?' I fear to answer my own question, but I do answer it, just the same, and I buy a gun.

"This gun have bullets of soft lead, and I make them still more efficient by cutting a V-shaped notch in each of their heads. When they strike something they spread out for a space you could not cover with your hand.

"*Voilà!* I take my gun and wait. Tonight what I have expect come about. I am ready. I shoot, and each time my bullet strike, it tear a great hole in the body of the man-who-is-an-ape. He drop his prey and seek the shelter his little ape-brain tell him to fly to. He goes to the house of this so unknown Dr. Kalmar. I follow quick.

"The ape are tortured with my bullet wounds. When he reach the house of Kalmar, he is angry, and set upon this Kalmar and tear him to pieces, even as he have killed poor Sarah Humphries before. I, arriving with my gun, I kill the gorilla with one more shot.

"But before I come back here I recognize the dead corpse of that Dr. Kalmar. He are one and the same as that Beneckendorff who have escape from our Paris madhouse.

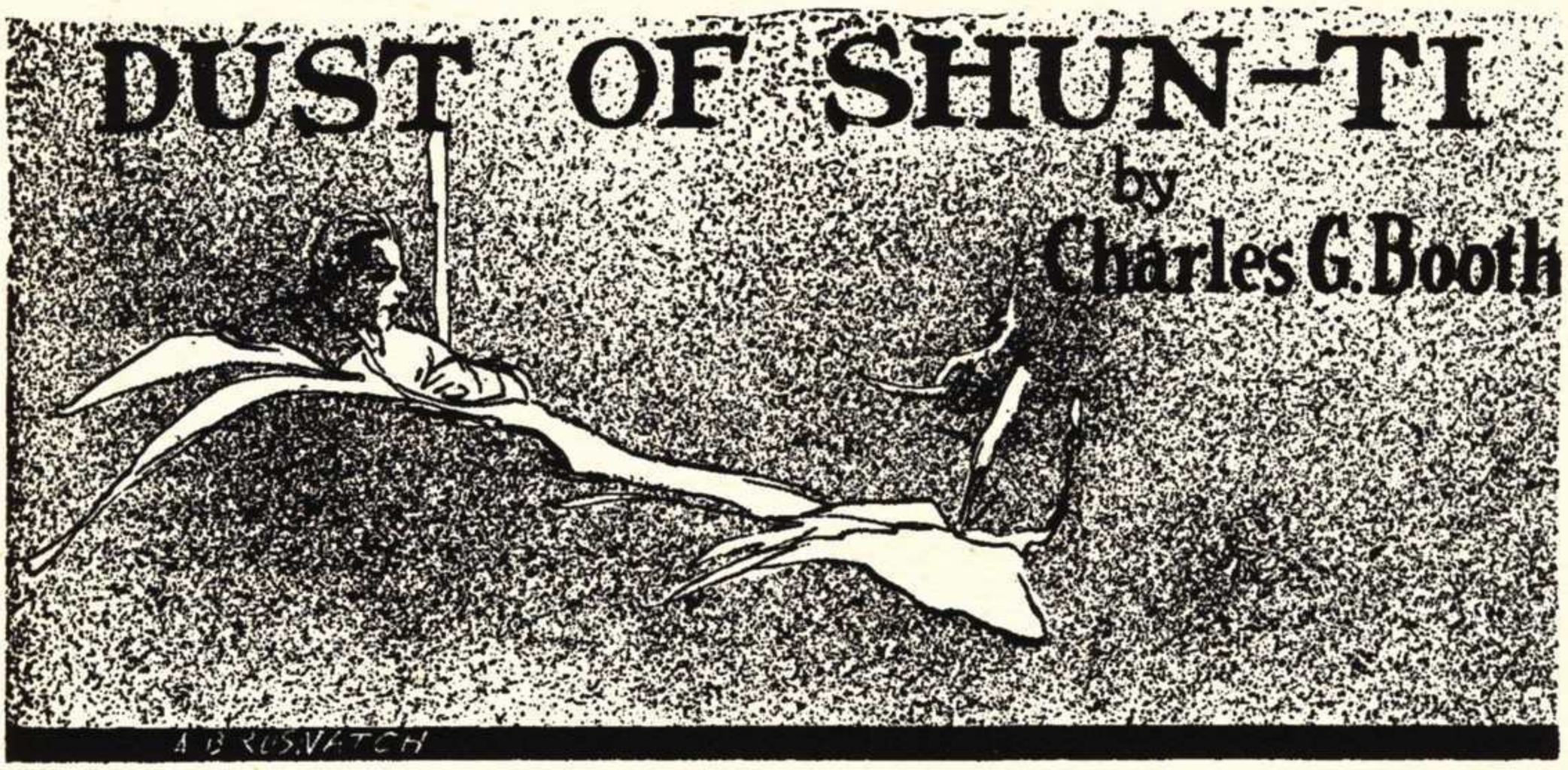
"I destroy his devil's brews with which he make monkeys of men and men of monkeys. It is better their secret be never known.

(Continued on page 574)

DUST OF SHUN-TI

by

Charles G. Booth



WILDE sat up in his bed and peered into the velvet blackness around him. Chills crawled up and down his spine; his skin tingled as if the tense pressing atmosphere of the room was electrically charged.

The scream was not repeated, and for several minutes he sat rigid, held so by his demoralizing uncertainty of its source, whether it had come from his own lips or from the room next door.

He was in a small, weather-scarred hotel on the precipitous shore of one of the purple inlets that fret the iron-bound British Columbia coast from Vancouver to Alaska, where he had come to report on a copper property for the Continental Company. His report — an unfavorable one — was ready; he intended to leave the next day.

Quite suddenly, and for no explainable reason, Wilde knew instinctively that he had *not* uttered the cry, and that it *had* come from the room next door. A flow of warmth poured through him; his sun-browned face, with its suggestiveness of high adventure eagerly sought and recklessly encountered, glowed again beneath its tan. He leaped out of bed and lit the lamp. Listening intently, with his head inclined toward the north wall, he heard a faint pattering in the next room, as if someone was moving softly and quickly upon the floor.

Wilde went into the corridor. A lamp set in a bracket at the end of the passage shed a fitful light upon the gaunt, shabby interior. There was no sound whatever, now. But the horrible cry still rang in his ears. It had been short and clear; then it had terminated abruptly. Wilde knew instinctively that the one who had uttered it would never utter another.

The door of the room next to his was shut; no light showed beneath it, and for several moments Wilde stood before it indecisively. Believing as he did that someone had been killed in the room, he yet hesitated to try the door. One has that feeling about breaking into another man's room at dead of night.

His indecision vanished, however, when a light shone suddenly from beneath the door, then flashed out again. He turned the handle. The door was locked as he had expected. He stepped back and flung his great body at it, shoulder first. The lock snapped and the door shivered, but held its place. A second and a third time he had to fling himself upon it before the

door, and the chair which had been placed against it, crashed into the room. As the door splintered he had glimpsed a man in the room—a lithe, compact man with his face toward the window. Then the light, which streamed from an electric torch, flashed out. When he got into the room he had to feel about on the bureau for matches before he could get a light.

The murderer had gone—through an open window, beneath which a small shed was built against the side of the hotel; on to this he had evidently dropped from the window-sill.

On the bed lay the man he had killed—a Chinaman. About his throat deepened a crimson smear. The crumpled bedding, red-blotted here and there as with the splashings of an unruly pen, suggested the terrific struggle that must have terminated only with that dreadful scream.

WILDE went to the window again and peered into the blackness, but a hundred murderers could have hidden within a dozen yards of him. The mountains, their presences felt rather than seen, seemed nearer; more than ever did they suggest black brooding personalities pondering the impertinence of this intrusion into their solitude.

On the floor was a traveling bag, and a satchel of the sort used for carrying legal documents. Both had been slashed with a knife as if the murderer suspected the existence of some secret compartment. Clothing, and papers covered with Chinese characters, were strewn around the room.

Wilde scrutinized the Chinaman intently, his big hands clasping and unclasping, a vast indignation boiling within him. The man's face must have been placid and smooth and expressionless before the dreadful realization of his danger had come upon him. But now it was contorted in the sharp agony of death. The narrow, dark eyes, forced wide open, stared upward appealingly. The man's hair was spare and gray, and Wilde estimated his age at sixty. His broad flat face was dignified, even in death. That he was no common coolie Wilde could see at a glance.

The man's head had sagged to one side and Wilde raised it and pillowed it. As he did so the man's pajama coat opened, the two top buttons having come out of their loops, and Wilde noticed that the breast of his undervest bulged slightly as if some object lay beneath it. Unbuttoning it gently, he found a pocket sewn on to the inner side of the vest, fastened with a tiny button, and filled with papers which he took out. It was fortunate that he did so, for they were blood-soaked and would soon have been indecipherable.

Wilde spread them on the dressing table so they could dry out. All of them but one were covered with Chinese characters and were as unintelligible as those scattered on the floor. This one he took up with an exclamation of surprize. It was a rough map of the inlet. But when he discovered a small cross upon it, his surprize deepened into amazement. The cross was marked squarely on the center of the waterfront of the copper property Wilde had come north to inspect!

At that moment he heard the patter of feet on the stairs, and thrusting the paper into the pocket of his pajama coat, he strode into the corridor, marveling at the variety of emotions one may experience in the space of three minutes; for no more than that space of time had elapsed since the Chinaman had screamed in his death agony.

Nolan, the proprietor of the hotel, a lanky, thin man in a very short gray flannel nightgown and dilapidated

slippers, topped the staircase and hurried toward him.

"What's wrong?" he grunted. "Seems like I heard something."

"Probably you did!" said Wilde, dryly. And he led the man into the Chinaman's room.

Nolan's jaw fell. "Murder!" he gasped. Then his face brightened. "Oh," he exclaimed, in relief. "It's only one of those Chinks!"

"Chink or white man," Wilde rapped out, "he's been killed in your house!"

"Sure, that's right," Nolan agreed, scratching his head and looking at the shattered door. "That was a good door, too," he said regretfully.

"Look here!" Wilde roared impatiently. "When did this man come in? What's his name?"

Nolan pondered. "Yes," he said. "He came on last night's boat. His name? Let me see, now." Nolan scratched his head again. "There was two of 'em came last night. This one, and another that came later on. Now this one'll be Sun Yet. The other one signed himself something like that, too."

"Who else is here?" Wilde demanded.

"Well, there's me and the missis and the Chinee cook. We does it all ourselves."

"But guests, man?" Wilde shouted. "Who's staying here?"

"Sure, I was a-comin' to that," Nolan rambled on. "There's you, this here Chink, and the other Chink that come after; and there's Bill Kelly, the miner, what lives here. He was dead drunk on red-eye last night. Then there's Frenchy Gaul; he came in yesterday for gas for his boat, and stayed. I guess that's about all. Nothin' less'n an earthquake would wake Bill, and Frenchy's deaf. We don't have many this time of the year," he went on apologetically.

"This other Chinaman," Wilde demanded. "What about him?"

"What has happened?" inquired a serene voice from behind them.

Wilde swung round sharply. In the doorway stood a Chinaman clad in silk pajamas, who regarded them mildly. His smooth bland face was as expressionless as a billiard ball, his eyes blinked a little, his attitude was that of a benevolent saint.

"One of your countrymen has been murdered," Wilde told him, and described what he knew.

The Chinaman came slowly into the room and Wilde stood back so that he might approach the bedside. For all his bland expressionlessness there was a certain quality about him that commanded respect. He was of medium height and had that admirable balance of body and limb that comes of physical perfection.

For nearly a full minute he looked at the figure on the bed, not a muscle of his face stirring. Then the man turned to Wilde.

"He is my brother," he said simply.

His undemonstrative grief affected Wilde deeply, infinitely more than the wildest protestations would have done.

"I'm sorry," he stammered. Wilde got the impression that he was standing in the presence of a tragedy with other, profounder aspects not yet revealed to him.

"If you will leave us?" the Chinaman suggested gently.

"But the murderer," Wilde protested. "We've got to do something—inform the police!"

"The police? Yes," the Chinaman agreed courteously. "No doubt you can telephone. But I'm afraid nothing can be done," he added sadly. His rather precise enunciation held no trace of accent.

Wilde nodded understandingly and followed the hotelkeeper downstairs. There was nothing he could do. A search in that wilderness at dead of night was unthinkable.

"You'd better 'phone Vancouver at once," Wilde told Nolan.

"Seems to take it badly," the man whispered mournfully, going to the instrument.

A minute passed during which there came no response from the exchange. Wilde examined the wires emanating from the instrument.

"Look!" he shouted. "They've been cut." And he held up the severed ends.

"So they have!" exclaimed the man. "Whoever done it must have come through here."

Wilde nodded. This seemed probable, for the door of this house of occasional patrons was never locked, and the office was left to itself during the night.

"I'll get Frenchy to run down to Round Bay in the morning," the man went on. "They've got a 'phone there."

SINCE there was nothing more that he could do, Wilde returned to his room, where he could hear the strange Chinaman moving quietly on the other side of the partition. Once he was on the point of joining him, but thought better of it, for the Chinaman had propped the smashed door into place as if he wished to be alone with his dead.

Remembering the map, Wilde spread it upon his bed and studied it closely; not without a sense of guilt, however, for he felt that he should have given it to the Chinaman. While he supposed that the murder had been committed for the map, Wilde felt sure that it had only a personal significance and in no way indicated unsuspected mineral wealth in the property he had come to investigate. Nevertheless, he decided that he would reinspect that part of the property indicated on the map by the cross. This much the interests of his company demanded. After that he would give the map to the Chinaman, or to the police when they arrived. The police, he rather thought.

It struck him as curious that the Chinaman had advanced no theory of the motive that had inspired the crime. No doubt he would, Wilde concluded, when the authorities arrived. This thought aroused in his mind a series of pertinent questions, none of which he could answer. Who were these Chinamen? What were they doing here? Why had they arrived at different times? Indeed, it occurred to Wilde that there were many questions he should have asked instead of falling so completely under the spell of this Oriental personality, questions which he determined to ask in the morning.

But when morning came the Chinaman was not to be seen, nor could the hotelkeeper enlighten Wilde as to his whereabouts.

"Oh, he's around somewhere," Nolan said.

"Did you see about telephoning Vancouver?" Wilde demanded.

"Sure. Frenchy's gone," the man went on.

A trail ran along the shore in the direction of the place indicated on the map, and Wilde set out on it at once. It was rough walking and he made slow progress. When he had gone about half-way he got the impression that he was being followed. He slowed down and presently turned around quickly once or twice in the hope of catching off guard whoever was behind him. But his strategy was unsuccessful, though once he thought he saw a man dodge back into the shad-

ow of a cedar. Nevertheless, the impression that somewhere behind him, in that confusion of brush and rock and sand, was someone bent on discovering his destination, became certainty.

He drew up sharply and reviewed the tragic circumstances of the previous night. It was known that he was the first to discover the dead man and that he had been alone with him for about two minutes; and as he was convinced now that the murderer had intended to get the map, it seemed reasonable to suppose the murderer had concluded that either he or the Chinaman had it.

It occurred to Wilde that this mystery was deeper than he had at first supposed and that since he had become involved in it, possibly to a greater extent than he suspected, he had better retain the advantage possession of the map gave him. So, instead of continuing along the trail, he struck off up the mountain and made a superficial reinspection of that part of the copper property which lay at some distance from the place indicated on the map.

When he had done this, Wilde returned to the hotel, confident that his shadower, whoever he was, had gained nothing for his pains.

TOWARD evening Wilde was in his room when there came a knock at the door. It was the Chinaman, the brother of the dead Sun Yet. In response to Wilde's invitation he advanced into the room. Advanced is the only word that describes the dignity of the man's approach to the chair Wilde indicated he should take. The sweep of his personality was immense; it gripped Wilde as it had done that morning.

The Chinaman was unobtrusively dressed, with the nicest possible sense of effect. No subtle, mystery-loving Oriental this, Wilde judged, but a man of culture, of refinement, who combined in his complex nature the decorous charm and ancient wisdom of his race, and the fresh virility of the western peoples.

"I feel that I owe you an explanation, Mr. Wilde," he began gravely. His words were soft and gentle, and Wilde thought of the uncounted centuries of which this man was the perfected product. His voice was low and even, a little musical, and unsuggestive of his nationality. A sublime example of the art of two civilizations, Wilde thought, as perfect in his ensemble as the painting of a master.

Wilde inclined his head in agreement; but so completely had he fallen under the spell of the man's personality that he would probably have agreed had the other said exactly the opposite.

"My brother's name," the Chinaman went on, "was Sun Yet; mine is Sun Wong. If it would not bore you too much I should like to tell you something of the duty that brought us to British Columbia."

He stopped, and Wilde murmured something quite inadequate to express his desire that he should continue.

"Mr. Wilde," the Chinaman resumed, fixing the other with his narrow dark eyes, which seemed a little less narrow, a little less slant than Chinese eyes usually are, "I think you have in your possession a map of this inlet which you found in my brother's room."

So astounded was Wilde at this unexpected turn that his hand went involuntarily half-way to the pocket in which he had placed the map, before he recovered himself.

"Ah, I see you have it," the Chinaman went on with the merest of smiles. "But I shall not ask you for it until you have heard my story."

Wilde felt that the decent and the courteous thing to do was to give him the map at once, and be done with it. But he remembered his decision and kept the map in his pocket, though not without an accusing sense of shame in doing so. Had the Chinaman demanded it he would have felt justified in keeping it; as it was, he felt as if he was robbing an heir of his rightful inheritance.

"What I have to say, Mr. Wilde," Sun went on, "is inseparably entangled with the varied history of my country and goes back to the days of Jenghis Khan. I can well imagine that it will sound unbelievable to one unaccustomed to the thoughts and habits and customs of the Orient, so I must ask you to set aside for a minute or two, if you can, your western conceptions of the fitness of things and listen with the ears of the East."

In the small silence that ensued, Wilde had no difficulty in adopting this frame of mind. His imagination responded easily to the influence of Sun's soothing voice, to the bland wisdom emanating from him like an aura.

"Seven hundred years ago," Sun continued, "Jenghis Khan came out of Mongolia and conquered the eastern world. Ruthless and cruel as he was, according to our modern standards, boasting as he did that his armies so utterly destroyed ninety cities that his horsemen could ride over their ruins, he nevertheless brought a rebirth of vigor and enterprize to the Chinese nation that reached a culmination of glory in the reign of Kublai Khan, the founder of the Yuen dynasty, of whom the poet Coleridge wrote immortally."

Sun's mellow tones ceased again, but their soothing music played in Wilde's ears. The pages of history turned back before his eyes; he rode the Mongol plains with the hosts of the great Khan.

"The last of the Yuen dynasty, Shun-ti," Sun went on, "who reigned scarcely less gloriously than Kublai Khan, in the Fourteenth Century was compelled to flee before Chu Yuen-chang, a Buddhist priest and the son of a laborer. He died, and with his death the great Yuen dynasty passed away. The Mongols were expelled from China. And until 1912 his body lay in its tomb."

Sun Wong's voice rose to a higher, stronger key, as if its swift ascent of the centuries had had on it the renascent effect the hordes of Jenghis Khan had had on China.

"Then came the republic," he rumbled on, "and the troubles that still beset my country. It was thought at that time by those who called themselves the children of the great Shun-ti that his tomb stood in danger of desecration at the hands of certain of the republicans. No crime is more revolting to the Chinese than this. It involves family and state and religion; it is the quintessence of human infamy. So, until order, respect, and virtue returned to China, it was thought that another country should harbor the remains of Shun-ti; and my brother (for we rejoice in our descent from the Mongol chiefs) was chosen to bring them to British Columbia, where they might rest until they could be taken back.

"But peace is a gem beyond price," the voice swept on, "and once it is lost, not easily found. Chaos prevailed in China, and the dust of Shun-ti remained far from the land of his birth. But recently a desire for peace has come upon my country. The dust of Shun-ti is to be returned to its tomb; and at a favorable moment, which is thought to be near at hand, the Yuen dynasty will be reestablished in the person of one of royal descent, when the fighting tradition of Jenghis Khan and the glory

of Kublai Khan and Shun-ti will return to China.''

Sun Wong regarded Wilde silently and gravely, his personality enhanced by the mantle of large affairs his unassuming words had cast about him. But only by a distinct effort of will could Wilde bring himself to break the peculiar silence of the room, peopled, as it seemed, by the ghosts of all the Khans.

''And the dust of Shun-ti?'' Wilde asked breathlessly.

''The place is indicated on the map in your possession,'' Sun said. ''Only my brother knew exactly where the casket is hidden.''

''But who killed your brother?'' Wilde demanded.

Sun Wong smiled faintly. ''There are men who for no good purpose desire to learn the hiding place of the casket,'' he said. ''It was for this reason that my brother and I did not come together. We were to meet here this morning, casually, as if the meeting had not been pre-arranged. But he was murdered in the night and I had to announce my relationship so that I could get his papers.''

''How did you know I had the map?'' Wilde asked, the thought having suddenly occurred to him.

''I merely considered the possibility of your having it, because you were the first to go into the room after the murder was committed,'' Sun explained. ''And to dispose of this possibility I did what would have been an unpardonable thing were it not for the urgency of the undertaking I am on. I followed you this morning. Apparently you suspected this. Nevertheless, I was convinced, much to my surprize, that you had the map and that my brother's assailant had not got it, for which I am inexpressibly thankful. Now that you have heard my story, Mr. Wilde,'' he finished, ''will you give me the map?''

If ever a man had truth and sincerity in his face, Sun Wong had at that moment; yet Wilde hesitated to grant his reasonable request. He did not doubt the truth of what this man had told him, for his manners, his breeding, his personality, convinced Wilde that he was dealing with a statesman, a leader of men, one passionately devoted to his country and who might yet cut an international figure in world politics.

But he recalled again his determination to keep the plan until the police came. It was the crux of the situation—murder had been done for it—and he felt justified in turning it over only to the authorities. He was the first to find the dead man; should the case take an unpleasant turn, it was his alibi.

As gently and as apologetically as he could, meeting Sun Wong's grave face with difficulty, Wilde explained his reasons for retaining the map.

''It's only another day,'' he said. ''The authorities will be here tomorrow, and if I keep it, unpleasantness may be saved for both of us.'' When Wilde had said this he waited the denunciation he expected, but it did not come.

''I understand your position,'' the other assured him. ''My anxiety led me to forget it. You will forgive me, I am sure?''

He had Wilde's forgiveness all right, and the map, too, pretty nearly. The man's charm of manner was almost irresistible; had Wilde not been moderately strong-willed, he would have surrendered then and there.

As SUN WONG passed through the door, after shaking Wilde's hand as if he was indebted to him, some quality that had come in with the man seemed to go out with him, leaving in the room only a faint mellowness, a richness, a savor of an accumulation of wisdom, which lingered like the elusive scent of a delicate perfume, then disappeared.

The thought that he had not treated this courtly gentleman as considerately as he deserved, haunted Wilde's mind throughout the evening. He felt that his excuses were paltry, and poor return for the other's frankness. Had he seen Sun Wong again that evening he would probably have given him the map.

When it was dark he went down to the pebbly beach that extended for a hundred yards or so in front of the hotel, and marched back and forth in the black solitude that enveloped the inlet. Presently, he sat on a cool rock that rose a dozen feet or so above the glassy surface of the water, and reviewed in his mind Sun Wong's astounding narrative. The romance of it held him and he surrendered himself to its mood. In his imagination the mountain-bound inlet became a vast arena in which the ghosts of the Mongol hordes wheeled and charged with silent shouts of triumph, and until the atmosphere seemed to vibrate with the impact of multitudinous ghostly hoofs and the clatter and rattle of uncounted ghostly weapons of war.

Soon afterward Wilde went to his room and to bed. For hours he tossed in the cool darkness, his thoughts continually turning upon Sun Wong, and what he had told him, until, deciding suddenly that he would give Sun the map in the morning, he fell asleep.

WILDE woke abruptly from a dream in which the roar and clatter and agony of war were a background for marching hordes, charging hordes, of disciplined barbarians that passed unendingly over a prostrate land. The room was silent. Nothing moved. Yet he had the impression that he was not alone, though it took him a minute to be sure that whatever was in the room lived and breathed and was no creature of his dreams.

His body stiffened and grew cold; he held his breath until he could hold it no longer. His eyes, prodding the darkness, found nothing more tangible than a shadow, a scarcely imaginable shade denser than the others, at the foot of his bed; but suddenly he *felt* that the shadow was a man whose eyes hung upon his slightest movement.

A new moon had risen and a thin slice of white light lay upon the window-sill. There came a scarcely perceptible movement of the dark shadow at the foot of the bed. A glimmer of cold light twinkled in the darkness, and with a shiver of horror Wilde knew that the moonlight had touched the blade of a knife.

The shadow moved again and the twinkle brightened. Wilde distinguished the hand that gripped the knife, and behind it the vague outline of a man's form moving toward him with a menacing slowness that froze his blood and numbed his tongue. His muscles refused to respond to the frantic urging of his nerves; he lay inert, waiting the inevitable.

Then an unforeseen incident occurred. Wilde had left his boots at the side of the bed and the man tripped over them. He recovered himself instantly, but this break in the slow continuity of his approach released Wilde's stiffened limbs, and as the man lunged at him, he thrust the bedclothes above his head and against the sweep of the weapon. The hiss of the slitting fabric sang in his ears.

Wilde dropped the bedclothes, and as the knife swept back, caught the man's wrist and held it so that the blade, curved and ugly and Oriental, gleamed wickedly against his neck. He was still on his back and at a tremendous disadvantage, but he improved his position by turning on to his side, at the same time bending the

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THE THING IN THE PYRAMID

by John Dwight

IT IS now ten months since my old friend Stephen Grayton, the eminent archeologist, sailed for Belize. It is ten months since I have heard from him. An expedition, composed of scientists and friends of Grayton, has been organized and sails from Boston June 26th, on the Scotia. *The purpose is to rescue Grayton, if he is still alive, and to destroy the Thing in the Pyramid. It is in the interests of science and archeology that I am publishing this. I have the manuscript as proof. Anyone interested in this expedition and desiring to aid either financially or in person, please communicate with me at 19 Tremont Street, Boston, before June 15th.*

[Signed] Michael Wentworth,
Prof. Engineering M. I. T.,
Boston, Mass.

THE *story follows, word for word as told to me by Stephen Grayton the night before he sailed:*

Of course you know that ever since my days at Harvard I have been interested in archeology, particularly in that of Central America. Fifteen years ago, five years after we left college, I inherited a sufficient amount of money to allow me to devote my entire time to research and expeditions. At first it was the Aztec and Toltec ruins which fascinated me; but gradually I turned to the Mayan civilization, which is even more mysterious and more unknown. Two years ago I spent several months on the Yucatan peninsula, most profitable and interesting months. I began to devote more and more of my time in the attempt to decipher the undecipherable Mayan hieroglyphics. After some study I decided that these inscriptions at Chi-Chien were written in a bastard dialect, a corrupted and degenerated form. The pure Mayan inscriptions must be elsewhere. I had not succeeded in really deciphering, understand, and so I could not be sure; but that feeling persisted. The architecture, what remained of it, also conveyed this impression; it seemed a weak copy of some far loftier conception. This fever, to read these inscriptions, took firm hold on me; I have not lost it. But I had no idea where I could find what I sought.

When I first went into Yucatan I had picked up and attached as my personal servant an Indian boy with just enough mixture of blood to make him more intelligent than the average. I taught him English and gradually

won his confidence, though that took some time.

One night I was working in my tent. I was almost in despair, because I could make so little headway in what I had come to regard as my life work. I was hampered still farther because so much of the city and inscriptions were overgrown and defaced; and my expedition was too small to undertake any serious excavations. I was alone, you understand, with the natives I had hired. I prefer to work alone. Monty, the Indian boy, came in. His native name was unpronounceable, so I had renamed him Montezuma, which speedily shortened to Monty. An idle thought came to me; Monty was an Indian, perhaps a diluted descendant of these very Mayas; he might know something about another Mayan city, some ancient tradition almost lost sight of, the superstitious reverence gone in the rush of years. I leaned back in my camp chair.

"Monty," I began, "this is quite a city we're studying, isn't it?"

His stolid brown face barely moved. "Yes, sir." He went placidly on straightening the tent.

"But I've decided it isn't so very good after all. It isn't very big. These people who built it weren't so much; it isn't worth wasting time on."

His beady eyes flashed a bit. "But if you could see the real city, sir."

I tried to make my voice very casual. "There isn't any other city. This is the only real Mayan city and it's pretty poor. Everyone says it's the only city."

"They lie, sir; this isn't the biggest city."

"Oh, come now; how can I believe that?"

"My father said so, and he had it from his father. The real city is south."

"Oh, south? How far south?"

"A long way."

That wasn't much help. The electric torch lighted the tent only in patches. I could not see Monty's face distinctly. He might be lying; but why should he lie?

"Well, I don't believe it."

"I could show you. I could find the way from my father, though we have never been there. It is big, much bigger than this." He was talking with unusual animation.

"You could take me there?" I tried to sound bored.

He had sunk back into almost his accustomed apathy. "My father might know. I know nothing," he muttered.

"Listen, Monty." I leaned forward. "If you will take me to this city of yours I'll give you a watch, a real watch, and your father one, too."

Monty was moved but cautious. "I'll go see my father," he compromised.

We packed up the next day and returned to Campeche. Monty disappeared into the brush and I waited for three days, the longest three days I have spent. It hardly seemed credible that such luck was mine; to find the greatest city of the Mayas! There must be some catch somewhere.

When Monty returned he was willing enough to show me the city, not particularly interested one way or another; and he did want the watch. His directions were vague: to follow the coast to a certain point with islands, then go up a river. That was all he would say, but he persisted that he could find it. I left Monty to hire the natives and sailed for New Orleans to charter a steamer and buy new equipment. Perhaps you wonder why I believed Monty; at times I do myself. It must have been intuition. There are times when I wish I never had questioned him or followed him; but at other times—well.

At New Orleans I chartered a single screw steamer named the *Laughing Sally*. I bought the brush hooks, tents, whatever I would need; but I had no captain or crew. I found my captain one night lying drunk on my doorstep. He was quite young, about twenty-five, with light brown hair and blue eyes. I liked his looks from the first, which is why I took the trouble to sober him up. He was obviously of a good middle-class family and said he had had two years at a state university before he had been expelled. His papers were in order and I hired him. He would have no chance to drink on my expedition. His name was Dan Chipman. He got together a crew and we returned to Campeche.

Monty had collected fifteen Indians and we started down the coast, waiting for him to say when to stop. The steamer was not fast. Dan and I became very good friends. I had made few new friends in the recent years, I had had so little time and been away so long, and now for the first time I began to realize what I had missed. Dan was not an overstrong character; but he was intelligent, cheerful, and very good company. We became more and more attached. Gradually I told him the purpose of our expedition. It fired his imagination and he became even more enthusiastic than I. Finally I consented to allow him to accompany me into the interior.

The third day Monty became excited. We were coasting along British Honduras and had reached the mouth of the Belize river when he came to me. His guttural voice was two pitches higher than usual.

"Here," he said.

We put in at Belize, docked the *Laughing Sally*, discharged the crew, hired river canoes, and started up the river.

IT WAS rather hard going up the Belize. Whenever we landed and encountered natives I instructed Monty to ask about the city; but either he did not ask or they refused to tell, for we never had word of it. We must have gone sixty miles up the river when Monty suddenly led us off through the forest. That was harder going than the river, for we had to hack our way through the thick growth. We were heading due south.

The sixth day we reached it. All day we had climbed upward until finally we mounted above the woods and came out on an arid stony hillside. I do not yet understand how Monty found his way; though, as I said, he was probably of Mayan descent. He led us along the hillside for some miles to the west until he reached a narrow cleft. Unhesitatingly he turned in. Dan and I were so excited we fairly tiptoed as we followed him. The passage was deep, the sides smooth. It widened, and we stood on the top of a little path running down into the valley. The path was made of slabs of stone cemented together.

In the center of the valley lay the city I sought. Even now its size, its grandeur, its age overwhelm me. A stream flowed down one side of the valley; below us was a grassy plain; on the other side of the city we could barely discern a forest. A low wall surrounded the city. Most of the houses and temples were still standing. It looked as if it was still occupied, and at the same time as if it had never been occupied. This was partly because it was not overgrown; there were no bushes or trees in the entire city. In the center was an open place, a square, and in this square rose a pyramid. So far as I could see, it rather resembled the ones at Uxal and Chi-Chien in Yucatan; but somehow it was different.

I don't know how long I had been looking at this wonder that I, Stephen Grayton, had discovered, when Dan touched me. "Look at Monty," he whispered.

Monty was standing a little in front of us, on the stone path, facing the pyramid. He was holding one hand before his eyes, the other was stretched outward, palm up. He looked immovable, and suddenly seemed to have acquired a new dignity. There was something about the whole attitude I did not like.

"Monty," I called sharply. He seemed to come out of a half-dream and turned obediently to me. His face was more animated than I had ever seen it before.

"Look," he pointed to the city, "I told you; and I have brought you." He beamed in a self-satisfied way. All traces of dignity were gone. I patted him on the back.

"I'm sorry I said I didn't believe you. You've done very well. I'll give you a gun, too."

He grinned, then ordered the bearers to follow him. They were as stolid as ever; the discovery of a new city was nothing to them. They led the way down the path. Dan and I followed. That path cut straight through the grasses as cleanly as if it had been laid the week before.

An archway in the wall introduced us to the city. It was the typical Mayan pointed arch; but executed with a new grace, a new poise. Then I saw why the city was not overgrown. It was paved; the whole city was paved with slabs cemented together. There was no possible foothold even for grass. It looked swept and garnished and uncannily bare. There were no streets as we know them, and the houses were placed irregularly. Twisting between them we made our way to the central square. It was almost an eighth of a mile on a side and empty except for the pyramid in the center. This stood to the four points of the compass and was at least four hundred feet high. It was flat on the top like those of Yucatan, but its base resembled the pyramids of Egypt, only the blocks were not so large and were highly carved. On the west side was a stairway mounting to the platform.

It was nearly sunset. I ordered Monty to occupy one of the temples on the west side of the square and prepare supper and sleeping quarters. The whole square was in gray shadow, but the top of the pyramid was golden when Dan and I finally climbed the 499 steps to the platform. It was square, about sixty by sixty. In the center was a temple. The walls were about twelve feet high and were made of huge stones carved in high relief. The one door was toward the west. Suddenly I wanted to go in that door more than I had ever wanted to do anything else. One part of my brain urged me in, another, a larger part, held me back.

"You get an awfully good view," said Dan, casually glancing over the city, "but I want to see what's inside."

So did I. I put my hand on his arm and we entered together. It was quite plain inside, no carving of any kind. Something urged me forward. We took a step. Then I looked down.

"Look out," I yelled and jumped back, dragging Dan. At our feet yawned a black hole. It was octagonal in shape and at least fifteen feet across. The floor sloped down a trifle and was worn very smooth.

"How funny!" Dan was interested but not alarmed. "Let's look down." He lay on his face and crawled forward. I held on to his feet and he put his face over the edge.

"Can't see a thing." His voice was muffled, then thrown back and forth from the sides of the well until it became a chorus of hoarse unintelligible boomings. "Pull me back!"

I jerked him away. He rose. His face was quite pale.

"It's too black; but I bet it's deep. Funny thing, just for a second I wanted to throw myself in. Wasn't that dumb? Wonder how deep it really is. Let's throw something in."

He began to hunt around the room. The light had faded and the gray was changing to black, the same heavy black as the black of the hole. In one corner he found something.

"Here," he showed it to me, "I'll throw this."

I had barely time to see it; it was a stone cut into the form of a cross-asada topping the Mayan symbol, which resembles the crossed I. I tried to stop him; but he had thrown it. We strained our ears to hear. There was no sound over the whole valley, the stillness was waiting for something which never came. We waited two minutes; but there was no indication that the carved stone had reached the bottom. We turned, left the temple, and descended the steps hurriedly. A bottomless well on top of a pyramid did not seem quite right.

The Indians had brought in wood from the forest and Monty had supper almost all cooked in the courtyard of the west temple. Dan and I talked volubly; but we avoided all mention of that black hole.

AFTER supper the Indians went to sleep. Dan and I sat smoking by the fire. The flames lit one corner of the wall, bringing out the carvings in sharp distinctness. I strolled over to look at them. They were rather like those at Chi-Chien; but different in that they seemed oddly familiar, as if I had seen them in some other place. One central figure, constantly repeated, drew my attention. It was a pyramid, but covered with a veil; a tiny figure of a man mounted one side and on the top stood a cross-asada. That was why the inscriptions looked familiar; they looked Egyptian, not decisively so, you understand, but vaguely, in features, head-dress, postures. I returned to Dan. That veiled pyramid and the man mounting the side troubled me.

Dan was still cheerful. "How do you feel now, sir? We've reached here at last. What do you make of it?"

"Well, it is obviously the Mayan city and antedates those of Yucatan by many centuries. That they had an extraordinarily high civilization is very evident. I don't believe we'll find anything in the buildings; they have been deserted, and probably plundered, for so many thousands of years. We will explore in the morning. But, Dan, I want you to promise me you won't go up the pyramid, or allow anyone else to, unless I am along."

"All right, sir." He did not seem surprized. "But I do wish we had some rope: I'd like to see what's at the bottom of that hole. There must be something pretty good to make me want to go in after it. Good-night, sir."

THAT night one of the Indian bearers disappeared. No one knew anything about it. Monty seemed particularly surprized, but not alarmed. I could not stop to be bothered by such things.

We devoted the next day to exploration. Those houses were marvelous; why, those people had even known enough to—but I haven't time to go into all that; I must get on with what happened.

I had ordered all away from the pyramid. We tried to find the missing bearer, at least Dan did; but there was no trace. I could think of no reason why he should leave.

The next morning it was found another bearer had disappeared. The men seemed a trifle uneasy; but not

actively so. Monty said he had probably gone to join the other, perhaps in the forest. They might return. I became immersed in the study of the hieroglyphics. I acknowledge the fault; but how was I to know?

The third morning Dan proposed we study the pyramid by light. I had wanted to, myself, at least a part of my mind had been wanting to. We examined the base carefully; there was no entrance. We climbed to the platform. The view was even more marvelous by daylight. The hills, the forest, and that great dead city all stood out with unusual distinctness. It made me feel very small and very young to think of all those buildings with no life in any of them, and the number of years that had passed since there had been people there. Then we went into the temple. I began to study the structure. In a moment I noticed the smell; it was very faint and very pleasant; too pleasant, rather like incense but not pungent, and slightly stupefying to the senses. Something made me look for Dan. He was on his hands and knees crawling slowly, very slowly and almost unwillingly, toward that dark hole. His eyes were intent and staring, he seemed not to breathe. I dragged him back and hauled him to his feet. It was almost a minute before his brain cleared.

"What's the matter? What was I doing?" He seemed vaguely to remember something, then he looked with loathing horror at the empty blackness. "Ugh—take me away."

I did, quickly.

When we were back at the temple he asked me seriously, "Do you know what's in that hole, sir, what it is that makes me want to go into it?"

I answered even more seriously, "No, I don't, Dan. I've felt that same influence myself, a bit. When I get time I'll try to find out what it is. Until I do, Dan, don't go near the place."

He shuddered. "I certainly won't —if I can help myself."

Dan and I moved into another temple; the proximity of the Indians had not been enjoyable. For two days we worked together on the hieroglyphics, barely leaving the temple at all. He was a great help to me; his fresh mind, his interest and his energy were invaluable. As I said, he was not intellectual or keen-minded; but he was quick and cheerful.

On the fifth day of our stay he went into the next temple for a knife. He came back with a white, frightened face.

"There are only four Indians left, and Monty."

I could hardly believe him. The news astounded me; but in comparison with the advances I was making, slow but sure, in deciphering the undecipherable, all else was of little importance. Some vague notion that they were in the forest persisted. Again I admit the blame.

That night, however, I began to think of those Indians, stolid creatures but easily imposed upon and led. I could not sleep. I rose and went to the entrance of the temple. Dan rose and came beside me; and we stood looking out upon the great square. The moon was nearly full. The white light shone directly on the west side of the pyramid, so that it stood cut out from the massive blackness on its sides.

Dan clutched me. "Look!" he gasped.

I looked. Toiling slowly up the steps were two figures. The first one was mounting backward, steadily and surely, its hands outstretched toward the other, who followed passively. They were almost at the top. I rushed out into the square.

"Come here!" I shouted as loudly and forcefully as I could. As well call to the wind! The two figures

disappeared in the open doorway. I returned to Dan.

"You know," he confessed miserably, "I've been feeling the most awful urge to go up there again. Oh, I haven't gone! but how I want to! It gets stronger all the time, too. It's like someone drawing me."

I put an arm around his shoulder. "Dan, you're all right. Just hold out. I'm going to stop studying and see what I can do about this. I want you to stay with me, always, and I'll keep you in my mind, urge you to stay here, and so try to counteract that—Thing. I'm going to see if I can think what this is."

We turned to enter the temple, but halted. There on the steps of the pyramid a lone figure was descending, backward, with its hands raised toward the summit. Now I was sure. It was Monty. Probably unconsciously obeying the instincts of his ancestors dormant these thousand years he was sacrificing to his god. I drew Dan inside and sat beside him until he slept. Then I began to think.

IN THE morning I found that Monty alone was left. I was not surprized. He offered no explanation, acted perfectly natural. Oddly enough I did not anticipate a like fate for him. I was sure we three were safe; he was so natural and unconcerned.

Then I told Dan what I had decided. "You know something of Egyptian religions?" I asked.

He shook his head. "Very little."

"I will try to explain as simply as possible. The ancient Egyptian priests in some unknown way controlled the elements, fire and water, or rather the elementals, as these forces are called. Somehow this civilization here is derived from or related to that of Egypt, of Thebes, of Luxor. You know the force of human magnetism. My guess, and it can only be a guess, is that these Mayas got control of the elemental of the force of magnetism, personal magnetism, which works on and draws the minds of humans; that they worshiped it, sacrificed voluntary victims to it, and that it is enclosed in that pyramid. We leave here tomorrow. In the meantime, stay with me."

Monty came, stolid as ever. I told him we were leaving; no emotion crossed his face. Together he and Dan began to put the remaining food into three packs. I was convinced we could make our way to the coast somehow.

Just before lunch Monty brought me something. "Found it there," he said, indicating the temple on the eastern side of the square, one I had not carefully explored. I was too busy and hungry to look at it and laid it aside.

It was very hot that afternoon, almost stifling, though the temple was as cool as any place would have been. Unconsciously I found myself thinking how cool that dark well would be —deep, dark, damp. I jerked my thoughts away. Dan was looking out of the door with that intent, far-off expression. I called to him, with no effect. I went over and sat beside him and began to discuss how we would reach the coast and then New Orleans. But I was beginning to be afraid; I no longer had the steadying support of my work.

Monty had gone to bring back the last load of equipment to store with the rest; for even then I was determined to return, sometime. The afternoon wore on—no Monty. Dan proposed to look for him. We went together. There was no sign of Monty to be found. In spite of the day-time he was gone. After leading the Indian bearers to their death he had found that same influence too strong for him and he had been drawn to it. The force he had not known of before, the force he had worshiped for the last five days, had destroyed even its devotee.

Dan and I looked at each other. The bands of suspense grew tighter. I could almost sense that Thing in the pyramid; and if I could do so, how much more could Dan who had not the bulwark of a strong will? It was late afternoon, almost dusk, or I think I might have left the city then. But I didn't; and I liked Dan as much as I have liked any man in the past ten years.

We talked quite a bit at supper, about other things. Very early Dan said he was sleepy and lay down. I was determined to sit up all night. I turned on our last electric battery. It showed Monty's present to me, a brass cylinder full of papers. I settled myself on one side of the entrance and began to read.

THE papers were written by one John Culver, Gent., who had sailed from Biddeford April 17, 1531, on the *Golden Girl* to seek for the Golden City of the Incas, or Aztecs, it mattered little. I skipped the first part. I wanted to know how it had reached this place. It seems (I'll tell it very briefly) that the adventurers had landed, wandered around the cape finding nothing but fever and hostile natives, until finally five survivors reached this city. Their food was almost gone, there was no prospect of more. They explored the city, the pyramid; and there one, crazed by privation and fever, had thrown himself into the hole before their eyes. Shaken, the others had descended. They wanted to leave; but they had no place to go; and something held them here. Each night one disappeared. The last entry was at night. Culver was alone, the food was gone. His last words were, roughly, these: "And I would rather die of starvation by myself than join the others in that fearsome hole; but my will is weakened, I fear I cannot hold out against the Thing. I fear that I am going. May the Lord have mercy on my soul!"

I looked up. The battery was flickering wanly, struggling feebly with the encroaching darkness. For the first time I noticed the stillness—the heavy, menacing stillness. I felt very much alone. I looked over to Dan; at least I had one companion left. For one moment I sat numbed. Dan was gone! Then I rushed to the door. The moonlight was even brighter than it was the night before, bright with a hard, laughing brightness as it shone on the west face of the pyramid. There, on the steps, almost at the top, was a figure mounting slowly. What could I do? Before I could cross the square and climb the four hundred odd steps Dan would be inside, gone forever, gone into that abominable hole. There was only one thing to do. I still think it was the only thing. I went for my rifle. I was back in a moment; but the figure was almost to the platform. I took very careful aim and fired, and fired again. He was killed instantly. The figure swayed and rolled with dull thuds down the side of the pyramid to the square below.

It must have been fully an hour that I sat with my face in my hands. I knew I had been right in what I had done. I know so still. I couldn't let Dan, my friend, pitch headlong into that black hole, headlong into—what? And I think when the Last Reckoning comes I shall be told that I was right.

I brought one of the canvas tents and rolled Dan in it. I dragged him into one of the inner rooms and left him. There was nothing else I could do. I reloaded my gun and started to mount the pyramid, filled with rage that was all the greater because it was impotent. I had some crazy notion of emptying my gun into those depths, though it could have no effect. I had ascended some hundred steps when a wandering breeze brought that sweet, numbing odor down to me. It must have gained in strength from

(Continued on page 566)

A Moro Legend to Explain Why
No Moslem Will Eat Pork

The Prophet's Grandchildren*

By E. HOFFMANN PRICE

Author of "The Stranger From Kurdistan," "The Sultan's Jest," etc.

SULU, or Jolo, as it is often called, is a tiny hotbed of Moslem fanaticism just across the straits from Borneo, in the Philippines; it is a small, blood-soaked island inhabited by followers of the Prophet, fierce Moros who with kris and kampilan carve their way to eternal glory through the ranks of the unbeliever. The road to Paradise, they say, is paved with the heads of the infidel; and whoever dies slaying Christians is assured of a seat at the Prophet's right hand.

Like all devout Moslems, the Moros will not eat pork, nor any food contaminated with the fat of a pig. To account for this aversion, common to all Islam, they tell a strange tale, fantastic in its anachronism, and naive in its quaint conceits. And it is this tale which I shall relate, as nearly as possible, in the words of him who told it to me one night as we sailed up the China Sea, beneath star-dusted, blue-black Asian skies.

THERE are two Christs who reign and hold sway over the world: Isa the Nazarene, the White Christ, whose mother the infidels adore, and Mahomet, the Black Christ whom the dark men of Islam revere as the prophet of Allah, the one true God. Both of these prophets have long since passed from the earth; but in the old days they were great rivals, and hated each other with exceeding bitterness.

The world was divided into two parts, one of which was allotted to Isa the Nazarene, the other to Mahomet, upon whom be peace and prayer! But at times each would encroach upon the territory of the other; and each sought to discredit the other, and to cause dissension among his rival's followers. Neither prophet neglected an opportunity to cast ridicule upon the other, for their enmity was fierce beyond description.

Now it so happened that Mahomet decreed a great feast for all of his followers, who came from far and wide to attend the festivities. And then there came to Mahomet an inspiration, the brilliant idea of inviting his rival, Isa the Nazarene, to attend the banquet, so that all true believers could see what manner of man was this false prophet who preached against the true prophet of Allah.

This White Christ of the infidel, being a cunning and subtle man, knew well that he was invited to his rival's banquet, not to be honored, but rather to be ridiculed before the followers of Mahomet; yet he never-

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** This tale, current in Sulu, to the best of our knowledge has not heretofore found its way to the States. It presents the novel anachronism of Christ's and Mahomet's being contemporaries and rivals. "Since this story is a simple folk tale, and not at all my original conception," writes the author, "I present it to you ungarnished and unadorned, as close to the original as I can recollect."*

theless accepted the invitation, and on the day of the banquet made his appearance. All courtesy was shown him; but at the height of the festivity, Mahomet revealed himself and his intentions.

"Nazarene," he began, "it is said that in your own land you are a prophet. Tell me, is that true? And is it true that you have performed miracles?"

At these words a hush fell over the riotous assembly, for each reveler knew that the Nazarene was to be ridiculed and confounded.

"You are right," replied Isa; "I am indeed a prophet, and the son of the one true God; and it is also true that I have performed miracles."

"So you say. But what have we to confirm your claim? If indeed you are what you profess to be, assert yourself and perform some miracle for us, so that we may believe," challenged Mahomet.

"That I will not do," retorted the White Christ. "It is not permitted to work wonders for vain display."

"Just as I thought," sneered Mahomet, "you are an impostor who dares not risk a trial. Doubtless you are some pretender, and not the Nazarene you claim to be. Come now, and prove to my guests that you are no idle boaster."

"For the glory of God, I have worked miracles, and in His name I can work them; but not for display, nor out of vanity."

And thus they disputed, Mahomet calling for some wonder, some sign of the Nazarene's power, and Isa stedfastly refusing each demand.

"Well, then," persisted Mahomet, "since you will give us no miracle, exhibit the lesser gift of prophecy."

But the Nazarene likewise refused, saying that he would not abuse his power by prophesying for the amusement of the crowd. And Mahomet taunted him, calling him an impostor, urging him to reveal himself by some sign or wonder.

"Since you insist, well and good!" exclaimed Isa, quite out of patience; "I will submit to a test. But I warn you that you will regret it to your last day. You have forced my hand; so beware, and do not blame me if the result is not at all to your taste."

"Nazarene, you can not frighten me, nor seek to evade the issue. I will abide by the result, whatever it may be."

"Very well; and what will you have me do to prove my worth?"

"My wishes are simple. I shall but ask you to look at that door at the farther end of this hall, and then to prophesy unto us what is concealed in the room behind it."

And Mahomet laughed triumphantly, for in anticipation of the test he had secretly placed his two grandchildren in the room whose door opened into the banquet hall, and had sealed the door, so that none other than himself could possibly know of their presence.

"You wish me to prophesy? And you still disregard my warning?"

"Even so. Speak!" commanded Mahomet, impatiently, exultantly.

And at these words the White Christ declared himself: "Hear then this prophecy! When you open that door, you will release two beasts the like of which there are none in the entire world."

Mahomet, who knew well what the room contained, laughed again, and commanded that the door be opened. But to his dismay and great astonishment, there came forth from the room, not his grandchildren, but two strange, uncouth beasts: for the Nazarene had in his resentment at the Prophet's persistence transformed the children into pigs, creatures that had never before existed. And thus it is that no Moslem, even to this day, will eat pork.

Author of "When the Green Star Waned"

APOLOGY

I AM a member of a great and secret Occult Order, despite the fact that I am—or was—a businessman dwelling in New York City, and living in the midst of this practical Twentieth Century.

We hold, as do many, that the universe is ruled by a Supreme Power whose name no man knows, and whose attributes can be but dimly surmised.

We hold that the Presence is served by many beings throughout the universe—Archangels; Angels; Planetary Rulers; a Celestial Host.

We hold that, among these, and not the least, is One, feminine rather than masculine in appearance and attributes, whom we consider to be the goddess of Love, Beauty, Light, and Truth.

To her is our Temple dedicated; and to her we give reverence. We are not idolators in any sense of that word, for we know that she is but one of those who serve the Presence.

After all, is the idea so *outré?*

This universe is a "going concern", as we would say of a huge industrial plant. Such a plant has its general manager; assistant managers; superintendents; foremen, etc. Why not the universe, which is the greatest plant of all?

We hold that our Order is but incorporated into her department—that is all. So, if in the following narration of the stupendous events and adventures through which I have just recently passed (and which would never have been written without her permission) I refer to her as a *goddess,* it is not that I seek to impose my views upon anyone. I do but ask from others that privilege I myself am overjoyed to extend—tolerance of viewpoint and respect for divergent opinions.

One statement more I would like to add. It is useless for anyone to search for our address in any directory. We publish no periodical. We seek no converts nor members. I say this lest anyone should think this story is put forth as a new and subtile form of propaganda—for it is not so intended.

Likewise, where I have spoken plainly of the powers and forces of nature; the vibrations of the ether; the transmuting of latent energy into active dynamism; and of the multiplicity of the realms, regions, and planes of greater space; believe as

much, or as little, as you please. It matters not.

Yet bear this in mind: The mystery of today is the common experience of tomorrow—as the mystery of yesterday is the common knowledge of today. Science advances by degrees, nor is there any limit placed upon its progress.

So, to my tale.

I ENTERED the outer hall of the Temple, went direct to one of the little dressing rooms, undressed, bathed, and donned the robes of my rank. Thence I went on into the great room of the Temple proper; and made my way direct to the Black Shrine. So long as I was outside its walls, there were faint, dim lights shining all about; sufficient at least to see my way.

But once inside the Shrine, not even a cat could have seen—anything; for the place was so arranged as to exclude all reflected and latent light. Also, it was constructed entirely of black marble, unpolished, so that no reflections could by any possibility occur.

But I know the mystic chants, for I am a high initiate—so, raising my arms, in a whisper I intoned the mighty words.

Slowly the blackness lessened, and I ceased. I knew what was coming, and waited. There grew a faint, dim, all-pervading luminosity too vague to be styled "light"; but this gradually strengthened until it became clearly perceptible, although it was more of a glow than genuine light.

Suddenly as though ripped apart, it divided, brightened, formed into four columns in the four quarters of the Shrine—to north, east, south and west. That to the north assumed a white hue; the eastern one turned as blue as the noonday skies; that to the south glowed ruby red; and that to the west became a soft, warm yellow.

Yet in the center of the Shrine was still only blackness absolute. But it was a blackness wherein one could see—although all that could be seen was the square, black stone altar; bare of everything, not ornamented or carven in any manner.

The altar was nine feet high, and before it at foot of the eastern face stood the "couch of dreams", which was a stone slab seven feet long and a fraction over three feet in width. This was raised above the floor about two feet by small, square blocks of black stone placed under the four corners.

Crouched on the floor before the altar was one of the "Doves" of the Temple—a girl of surpassing loveliness. She had fallen asleep, and, as I stood above her, looking down, the intensity of my gaze penetrated to her dormant mind.

Her eyes opened. Hastily yet gracefully she rose to her feet, her perfect form reflecting shimmeringly through her sheer draperies the lights of the Shrine. Crossing her hands on her breast, she bent her head in acknowledgment of my rank and status; then raised her eyes to mine, half timid and half bold.

"Fortunate me!" she murmured. "It is but seldom that *you* come alone to the empty shrine. Never before has it been my lot to be here on such an occasion. I have seen you when the full chapter was convened—"

"Nor did I come here now to be with you," I reproved quietly. "Keep your allurements for those of lesser status. You know your task—perform that!"

I stretched myself full length on the stone slab, lying on my back with my hands crossed on my breast in the position of a corpse. The "Dove", rebuked, flitted about her task; lighted the burners of incense, and commenced singing softly the "Dream Chant". And I knew, although my eyes, fixed upon the ceiling above me, could not see her, that she was weav-

ing about me with twinkling, gliding feet and waving hands, the Dance of Sleep.

I do not mean the ordinary sleep of the material world—but the mystic Temple-sleep wherein the bodily faculties are all in abeyance and the self is free—free to go, but, perchance, never to return—free to reach to whatever plane it merits, be that plane one of the many hells of the universe, or—to the very Presence itself.

Softly, sweetly, the voice of the singer came to my ears, and, highly attuned as I was, I could sense in every nerve-fiber the vibrations which were fast filling the place; due to the mystic geometrical patterns and figures formed in the ether by her words, her tones, and her motions.

To me came the sensations one would experience were that one reclining full length in a boat on a gently heaving sea. It was a slow, easy, inexpressibly soothing lift and sway and rise and fall. I was drifting, half-conscious. The light of the shrine, even through my closed lids, became softer than moonshine yet surpassing vivid sunlight . . . an even greater rise and fall . . . a *lift*, with no after-feeling of sinking back—and I was free!

If an arrow from a powerful bow has sensation, it must feel as I felt in that moment. I was shooting through space—at first the ordinary atmosphere of this gray old earth which the ancients very truly styled *Myalba*, the "Abode of Trouble."

Thence I passed out into interplanetary space; through the blue-blackness of night wherein stars, planets and suns shone as bright spots of different colored lights, yet gave forth no illumination.

On and on I sped until a vague fear assailed me and several very definite questions took form within my consciousness—for I had not counted on any such extended trip as this!

"Whither was I bound? What lay before me? Should I ever return to earth, my home-planet? Or had the merit I had acquired during life been of such evil nature that I was to be expelled out of the known universe into some unknown and probably very dreadful realm outside all finite concept?"

I tried to check my progress, but to no avail. I tried to slow down my speed at least. Utterly futile! In fact, the effort seemed to accelerate it.

I noted, as I shot past it, a constellation to my left very near, and my astronomical knowledge informed me that it was one of the remotest in our solar system. And at that, the fear became anything but vague; for I became certain that ahead of me lay the Unknown—and what effect would *that* have upon me?

I thought of the Temple; of my brethren in the Occult Order; I thought of the couch whereon lay my earth-body. I thought of the Black Shrine; of the cubical stone altar; and finally I bethought me of that awful, beautiful and terrible, supernal goddess to whom that shrine was dedicated, to whom that altar had been raised, and who—if the whispered word spake truth—sometimes descended and rested thereon for a few moments; manifest as a tongue of flame of dazzling silvery brilliancy.

Would she let one of her followers come to grief—to an eternal wo? True, I knew that great though she was, she still was subordinate to the Presence Itself—although she was one of Its ministers—and might not be able to aid, despite her known powers.

I knew that to utter her secret name unworthily meant death on earth and punishment thereafter. But it seemed to me that never again could my need be so desperate—and I pronounced (not vocally, for my body was lacking, but shall I say "telepathically"?) her awful word.

Nothing happened! Yet, everything happened. I still continued that awful flight through space; but all fear left me. I was serenely conscious that all was well; that for all she had in nowise made herself manifest, I was under her direct protection. I felt certain that in some way as yet uncomprehended, my entire recent actions had been inspired by her will.

And once that certitude became fixed in my consciousness, I surrendered myself completely to that now delightful sensation of terrific momentum.

EVENTUALLY, far ahead of me I saw a faint, nebulous glow. Somehow I became convinced that it was my destination. And even as before I had experienced a vague, unnamable fear; so now I felt a very definite desire to reach that slowly increasing brightness. For I was fully convinced that there I should find and know the hitherto unknowable.

Brighter and yet more bright it shone, and I realized that it was neither planet, star nor sun; and for a little space I was lost in speculation as to what it could actually be.

The color changed, as I drew nearer, changed from an indeterminate tinge to a wondrous ruby red—inexpressibly *soul-comforting,* if I may use such a word. But, as I drew still closer, it shifted to a tender azure blue. No! It was clear topaz! Why, it was emerald — violet — orange — cerise—it had no color—it was of all colors—it was *color!* Color well-nigh celestial; and over me crept a strange reverence and awe.

I was in the luminescence itself. It did not burn, nor even warm, but oh, how it did invigorate! There was something spiritually magnetic about it, and I reveled in the radiance.

That wondrous effulgence streamed and scintillated from tower and temple and buildings. It sparkled and shimmered in the very "air" itself. It shone and gleamed from the streets and the ground.

Oh! I know that I am using the phraseology of Earth. Yet, if I do not, how may I make my meaning plain to dwellers of Earth? So if I say "air," "ground," and other familiar words; find for me in your minds pardon and allowance, and eke out with your imaginations my poor descriptive attempts.

But to return to my narration. I was in a city of some sort. That was certain. But where? And why? How, I already knew.

Constantly I am confronted by the impossible, for how shall I describe the beings I saw? They were formed even as we of earth are shaped; but far more radiant, brilliant, seeming to glow with an internal light which shone through what looked to be translucent flesh that was not flesh. Yet of raiment, they wore none. But their chiefest glory lay not in beauty of forms and color; although no two shone with quite the same tints of light. Rather, their beauty lay in their faces and their eyes.

Had I reached to the great Central Heaven? I wondered. But even as I thought it, I received from all those shining beings a reply in a very definite yet calm negative.

As I say, it was a city, but not on any planet. Of that I felt assured. There was nothing to give the impression of planetary solidity—no gravitational pull, for example.

And these bright beings, although appearing to walk the streets, in truth, did but touch the surfaces of the walks and ways, nor did they move their feet as do we of earth, but rather glided along.

I noted that I, shooting high above their heads in contact with nothing, appeared conspicuous; so I deliberately willed myself to descend and progress as did they—and found to my delight that I could do so. Yet,

here and there, as I passed, I caught the thought flashing from one to another: "An earth-mortal whom She has summoned!"

I found myself before a vast building which shone with the combined light of all the lights, colored by the blending, or rather, the intermingling, of all the colors. And I knew that here was my actual destination.

I entered, and those whom I met, one and all, gave me salutation. It was but a gravely courteous bend of the head; yet it conveyed in some subtle manner a greater cordiality than any welcome I had ever known on earth.

Direct as if I had been long accustomed to tread that way, I went straight to a central sheen of light and passed within its effulgence.

"WELCOME, my servitor from Earth!"

The voice was that of all music. For one brief second I stared—and oh! here again, description baffles me!

It was a throne of ebony blackness, and seated thereon was that goddess to whom our Order upon Earth gives reverence. Had she stood, she had towered some thirty feet or more in height. Her form (for she like all others in that abode of light) was devoid of apparel, was of transcendent splendor. Yet there was about her majesty no suggestion of the nude—not even in the sense in which we speak of it in art and sculpture.

She was seated, and I came scarcely to her knee; yet I had already noted that my stature was half again that which it appears while inhabiting the house of clay.

But it was not her beauty of form or of face that stamped her with that awful yet gentle majesty. For she seemed formed of translucent silver light, rather than glowing super-flesh; and it was spirit, and spirit alone, that invested her with that supernal grandeur.

In deepest awe I knelt there on that night-black dais, before that shining silver foot above which I dared not raise my eyes.

"Nay," murmured that thrilling strain of music that, for want of a better word, I must call her "voice." "Kneel not, but rise and give attention. I have called you to my throne, for I have need of you!"

Did I hear aright? Could such as She, one of the Celestials, one of that shining host who serve the Presence, have need of *me,* an Earthman? It seemed absolute madness to think it. Yet she herself had just said it. In sincere humility I waited; rising and gazing straight into that glorious countenance, so calm, serene, so awe-inspiring.

"Will it please thee to make thy meaning clear?" I asked boldly. "My wits are but those of the dull Earth—I do not understand."

She smiled, and all the countless throng of those who stood to either side and back of the throne smiled likewise, much as drops of dew, sparkling, give back the sun-rays which touch them.

"I mean just this," she replied. "I have an enemy whom I may not reach; with whom as yet I cannot cope! Always has the balance of power between us been equal; although between us twain has always been war. Yet it has been—thou knowest what I am?" she broke off to query.

"Thou art Love itself—its Prototype," I responded as directly as she had asked. She nodded, well pleased, but amplified for my benefit the statement I had just made.

"Aye," she answered, "I am Love. But not alone am I that as it is understood upon thy world. For I am Love's Self. I am the love a man holds for a maid; the love the maid gives to the man of her heart's choice; yet I am the love the mother bears for her babe; the tigress for its

young; the serpent for its little snakes. I am even the love the miser knows for his treasure; that the warrior holds for strife; that the worshiper feels for his divinity—I am, as thou hast said, 'Love's Prototype'. Yet as abstract love touches each nature, that nature transmutes it into terms of its own desires—now hast thou begun to comprehend?"

"Very dimly," I replied, for my thought was racing, amplifying even beyond her revealing words, and I was amazed at the extent and ramifications of what I comprehended. For *that* love, carried to its extreme scope, includes desire for wisdom, and all that distinguishes man from beast—angel from demon!

"So," she approved; "I believe thou hast in truth grasped some faint idea as to my Self—ah, well! let that pass for the present. Yet, on every planet, on each world, in all the illimitable, immeasurable regions of space; wheresoever in all the universe the conscious egos have abode, there am I to be found in one ideal or another.

"So, too, this enemy of whom but now I spoke! He is Lord of Hate, even as I am Lady of Love. And even to him my power penetrates; for —strange words to go together!—*he loves to hate!* For it is in this wise that his nature transmutes! And so too, it is with me—for I, despite my nature, am touched by that power flowing from him; and my nature transmutes it all to hate of *Hate's* source.

"Learn, then, that these be natural laws! Nor can mere 'will', not even that of us Celestials, alter these, no matter how greatly we may desire to do so.

"And so, throughout all the universe the balance swings; the old, old patient contest of Love against Hate —the frenzied, virulent enmity of Hate against Love. But thus far, knowing what we know, there has been no overt strife. It has been rather a quiet, silent struggle ever working in the conscious coils of the egos inhabiting the various planes.

"But now I have sure tidings that he meditates actual aggression—his hate having overruled his judgment! Not here, against my city of love alone, does he plot, but everywhere that my influence reaches! And oh! but he is served by such fiends, such demons, such *things* of absolute, concrete malignancy, that I sicken at thought of what must befall the universe if he actually takes the field of war!

"And that he so intends, I know for sure, but what his plans may be, I know not; for I am not omniscient. *That* is the attribute of the Presence Itself, and not that of us who do but serve.

"So, I have picked thee out and drawn thee to me. I need a spy! None of these who serve me can approach him; for if they did, terrible indeed would be their sufferings. For they carry about them always the vibrations of love; and even in the realms of hate, still would their presences be recognized.

"But thou art of Earth—as capable of hate as of love; and he, the Terrible, is served and followed and even adored by egos from all the worlds. An Earthman more or less would scarce be noted among his subject throngs. Now, dost thou realize my need of thee?"

I understood! And knew, as only the Self can know, the wild, thrilling allure of anticipated adventure! Say as they will; Mars may or may not be the planet of war; Jupiter may or may not preside over the plane of judicial intellect; and Mercury may or may not rule the selves of mechanics and inventors and those of excitable, volatile natures—but this is certain: Earth, that gray old planet that shines with the strange green radiance in the night skies, is unquestion-

ably the abode of the true adventurers.

No other planet in the universe is inhabited by so bold, daring, and hardy a race of egos. To them, space is merely a little-understood ocean; to be charted, mapped, traveled if possible in safety, but traveled anyway. Why, that courageous creature, "Man," has even the temerity to attempt to measure the measureless; to find, if possible, the limits of the illimitable!

Nay, let him but once dream its possibility, and he will devise methods of transportation and storm the walls of the Highest Heaven! And this he will do in no spirit of blasphemy, but simply from the sheer love of achieving the hitherto unaccomplished—the joy of the adventure itself! For thus is "Man" constituted!

And because he is thus, he has the right to style himself the "Apex of Creation." It is not arrogance, but simple truth. On all the other planets, in all the other realms of space, the dwellers are either content to obey the "Law" or to exist in sulky rebellion against it. But Man, the investigator, confronted with "laws", rests never content until he has explored their workings, fully comprehended them and recorded his observations for the benefit of others to be born in the years to come. And then, if in any way it may be achieved, he harnesses their energies and bends them to his will, and makes them do his work!

Knowing this, and proud of my heritage, I raised my head and smiled full into those glowing pools of light —her eyes.

"Great honor is mine," I replied; "that to me, of all Earthmen, has been given this mission. Let me go, O Shining One! I may fail or I may succeed—but this I promise: you shall have no shame from your messenger, nor regret because of your choice."

"There spake the true Earthman," she smiled. "Proud, confident, arrogant! Yet I would not have thee otherwise. I am well pleased with my choice. *Go!*"

I had no time in which to ask questions, receive directions, or even think. *I was gone!* To all intents and purposes, the glowing city of light, the shining inhabitants, the goddess herself, might as well never have existed! For I was once again hurtling through space at a hundred times my previous rate of speed.

I MAY have passed some few swarms of planets or suns or asteroids. But if I did I never knew it. True, several times I was aware of a flicker of light, but so transitory that each time it might mean anything or nothing.

Once more the blackness lessened, glowing faintly with a lurid, angry, deep crimson light shot through by streaks of sullen black and jagged lines of glaring, venomous scarlet. I had touched the borders of the regions of Hate! I knew it, felt it; through every atom of my disembodied body I could sense that terrific emotional vibration.

It may be a matter of wonderment to some, that I had found my way so accurately through the uncharted and unknown voids of space; but a moment's reflection will clear this up.

A freed ego, released into space, is inevitably attracted by the "Law of Affinity" to whatsoever plane it is in greatest sympathy with. So it will be noted, that I, by the time the Silver One had made clear to me her requirements and fears, so thoroughly hated the cause of her apprehensions that there remained to me in all space no other destination possible.

Too abruptly for immediate realization, I found myself standing on what felt like solid ground. And, furthermore, I felt myself re-embodied. For a long minute my shocked mind re-

fused to grasp the stupendous fact. But then, applying all my long scientific training to the solution of the problem, I came to a full realization of what had happened to me.

Hate is one of the lowest of the emotions. And the lower phases are invariably denser than are the higher ones. So, where hate has surcharged the ether, density is a natural outcome.

And the ego, let it find itself wheresoever it may be borne—by fate or otherwise—throughout all the universe; by the "Law of Attraction" promptly is covered by an envelope commensurate to its needs and requirements for functioning in that environment.

And so I was once again an embodied ego, and I must say that I was in nowise proud of my appearance.

For after all, the Silver One was right. I am an Earthling; and as such I am as capable of hate as I am capable of love. Nay, within me are forever the two natures; as they are in all others. But in the shining city of light, I towered half as tall again as upon earth and shone with a clear brightness—while now I found myself, where the hate nature predominated, dwarfish, stunted, distorted, ugly in face and form and hue!

That I was strong in spirit goes without saying, and is no vanity on my part, because no spiritual weakling can ever hope to reach to the high status I held in our earthly Order. Our drastic tests and ordeals have sent many more aspirants to madhouses than have ever attained to the inner mysteries.

And so that strength of spirit was like to prove my undoing; for I sensed within me all the potentialities of a most malignant fiend! Worse, it was only by most strenuous efforts that I could remember clearly that Silver One and her mission upon which I had been sent.

And then I realized that I dared not *think* too strongly of her. No, the thought did not cause me to hate her; but was rather a comfort and a sort of stay whereto I might hold fast—but I feared that if I let my thoughts be too deeply tinged with her image, the fact would betray me to some of the inhabitants of this plane. And then the least that could ensue would be failure, and my ambitious spirit aspired to succeed.

It seemed a great, barren, rocky plain whereon I found myself. It was inexpressibly dreary and devoid of anything resembling towns or villages or even single habitations, so far as eye could reach. And of beings, either bipedal or quadrupedal, I could perceive none.

"When in doubt—take the initiative!"

That is an old maxim upon earth. Likewise it is sound philosophy. I did not know what to do nor where to go, so—I raised my voice in a shout! Rather, it was a most dismal *howl*—such a miserable, croaking bellow as I had never before thought I could emit!

But it did its work. Did it altogether too well! So well, in fact, that I came near to ending right there and then, before I had got fairly started.

Out from a gaping hole beneath a huge drab-colored boulder near by burst a monster. It was part lizard, part toad, part serpent; yet none of these words describes the repulsive outrage to the eyes! The *thing* was not so large in girth when it emerged—not much bigger round than a vat or large hogshead. But once it drew all its loathly length free, it developed an amazing power of expansion. It swelled, bloating until it was big enough to make a bulk equal to that of four or five elephants.

Straight at me it charged so swiftly that I could not hope to avoid it.

Wallowing, squirming, hopping, writhing, tumbling and rolling—its gait was a queer medley of all these compounded.

Swiftly I stooped, caught up a rock and noted that the rock grew hot even as I took it into my grasp, but at that moment I failed to get the significance of this. I dashed the stone fairly into the nightmare horror that must for want of better words be called the creature's "face".

Undoubtedly that hot rock must have hurt; for the thing made a mumbling, hissing, whistling outcry of pain and rage. But the puny missile only served to arouse its anger, and it accelerated its speed toward me. The awful, ghastly head darted suddenly and—in one gulp I was swallowed!

Urgh! Such sensations! Those blubber lips had no sooner closed over me than I went sick all through. It was in no wise "fear", only repugnance, disgust. The thing's mouth was filled with sharp corrugations much like the teeth of a rasp or a file. Its breath was a loathsome, putrescent exhalation. And as with a single contractile movement of its throat-muscles it shot me downward, I felt a viscous slime besmearing me from head to foot, sticky, clinging, clammy, repulsive as rubber cement!

Plup! I landed, fortunately, on my feet in its nearly empty stomach. It nearly strangled me to breathe, but I had to breathe, or choke—and either way, there was little to choose—merely the way of choking!

Well, I tried breathing! It was not pleasant, but I did it, some way. But my sole emotion was wrath. There was no fear about it. I was just plain *mad!* Mad all through! Frenzied with hate! To think that this confounded *thing* had dared—actually *dared*, swallow *me!*

I never even thought of the probable physical consequences to myself once the digestive processes within the beast commenced. My sole reaction was a demoniacal desire to wreak vengeance. I wanted to rend, tear, wrench and utterly destroy by torments unbelievable, this ugly monstrosity!

Apparently hate is a creative force, in its own plane. At least sufficiently so to enable the hater to supply himself with the means of destruction.

For no sooner had I formulated the wish than I found myself holding a fearful and wonderful weapon firmly grasped in both hands.

It had a short, thick, metal handle immensely strong; and at one end were half a dozen hooks, razor-sharp on the inner edges. Actually, the thing looked exactly like a metal hand and arm with sickle-shaped blades in place of fingers—and the intensity of my wrath turned the metal instrument and claws red-hot! Even in my extremity, I recall grinning with malevolent satisfaction as I contemplated the devilish contraption!

Whirling the thing above my head like a miner with a many-pointed pickax, I set to work. I have said enough! There are some things too repulsive to write down for human eyes to read. Suffice it to say that long before actual harm had occurred to myself, I was once more free. And the *thing,* with a great, gaping, ragged hole torn in its side, was tumbling about seeking me, to wreak vengeance in its turn. But I had disappeared from its sight, having fled into a thicket of bushes near by. They looked a safe hiding place enough!

Oh, yes! they looked innocuous, but every leaf and twig and branch and stalk and trunk were covered with an impalpable powder which rose in faint clouds about me and then settled again—mostly on me!

We've a little plant growing on Earth. It's called the "Nettle." We've another called "Ivy"—"poison-ivy" some name it. Take a good-sized wisp

of each and thrash your bare flesh with them until the tingling blood suffuses the surface skin. Let the effects *take* well—and you will have some dim idea as to what that dust did to me.

I burst from that thicket like a partridge from a covert! Not far from where I came out in such a hurry, I perceived a pool of water. I was too frenzied by that time to think ahead or exercise any caution, so I made straight for the pool and plunged in. I wanted to soothe my flesh from the agony of that burning dust as well as to cleanse it from the pollution of that beast-thing's interior, some of whose secretions still besmeared me in streaks and spots.

But I plunged out of that hole of water much more expeditiously than I had plunged into it! Had I stayed another instant, I had been *cooked;* for the fluid was scalding hot!

In agony I rushed from there as rapidly as my leg muscles could betake me, knowing that if I moved fast enough the passage of my body through air would equal a breeze blowing against me were I standing still. The idea was good, and I really derived a slight benefit from it. But it got me, after all, into fresh trouble.

For I had not run far when behind me I heard the soft *pad-pad-pad* of pursuing feet, and, glancing back over my shoulder, I perceived to my horror that a horde of creatures like earth-wolves, only twice as large, were chasing me!

I had laid my claw-club weapon on the brink of the scalding pool when I jumped in—and had not waited to pick it up and take it with me when I jumped out again, being in too great haste to depart; so I had nothing wherewith to fight.

I thought longingly of the guns of earth. But that failed to work like my desire while I was in the beast-thing's inwards. For this time, I was afraid! And fear is seldom positively destructive. But, run as I would, the brutes were fast overtaking me!

I tripped, fell forward, and became the center of a worrying, snapping, snarling pack of four-legged demons; and every one of them had the rabies, to judge from the foam-froth flying and slavering from their mouths!

In one brief, lightninglike flash, I saw a vision of myself lying there—a badly torn, lacerated, mangled thing; writhing in all the anguish of hydrophobia, yet unable to die. The goddess? How could she aid, let alone rescue me, here on this plane, where, she herself had stated it, she dared not let her servitors come? At the least, I had failed her—and as a failure, I knew that I deserved anything that might happen to me.

SUDDENLY, cutting through my terror and despair, I heard a volcanic eruption of crashing, searing oaths, spoken in good plain English! And accompanying the tirade of blasphemy, I heard the *thud* and the unmistakable *chuck* of edged weapons chopping into flesh and bone. I caught the snarls and yelps of fear and pain; the howls of rage and the dying whines and whimpers of the wolves that had harried me—

Powerful hands seized me and yanked me to my feet. I was in agony, bitten all over, yet still able to stand, albeit shakily. Dazedly I stared, and well I might!

Before me stood a man clad in the armor of the period of the First Crusade! He was tall, broad-shouldered, huge of body and thick of arms and thighs; and repugnantly brutal in features, although he was grinning at me from out the opening of his helmet. Yet that grin was not all goodfellowship. Partly it was malicious.

"Why!" he roared in a bull's voice. "Art an Earthling, man; e'en as I be myself?"

I nodded assent, noting as I strove to control my trembling limbs that the beasts were either all sorely wounded or fled; and that his followers were crowding about, staring at me quite as curiously as I was gazing at them.

Evidently they were from all planets and of all periods and races. None of them was at all prepossessing to look upon. Every countenance bore either ferocity or malignancy or both writ largely. I admit that as I looked at them I experienced greater fear than I had so far felt—their horrific weapons were enough to frighten anyone — swords, barbed spears, war-axes, clubs and things I can not name, not knowing the arms of the different planets.

But I strove to brazen the matter out. Turning to the huge leader, I held out my hand in the age-old gesture of our race, intending to clasp hands with him; the while I began expressing my thanks, my gratitude for this timely rescue.

"Well for me that you came when you did," I began, and got no farther. He stared down at my hand outstretched in amity; then with a snarl he caught my wrist, turned my hand palm upward, and deliberately, insultingly, spat into it; while a look of utter venom disfigured his bestial countenance still farther than nature had done.

"Well for thee?" he roared mockingly. "Little we cared for thee, thou oaf, thou fool! 'Twas but the hate we bear for the beasts! It did please us to cheat them of their sport!"

Utterly taken aback, I knew not what to say. Before I could formulate anything my arms were pinned from behind and bound thus; a noosed cord was thrown about my neck, the other end being held fast by the most bestial-faced, apelike, lumpish-looking lout it has ever been my bad luck to behold—and we started for where I knew not.

What ghastly tortures did they intend inflicting? I wondered. The mail-clad leader caught my thought, read it accurately, and sneered in my face.

"Fear not," he jibed. "The dainty Earthling shall come to no harm at the hands of my sweet babes"—by which he meant his villainous crew of followers, I supposed—"not but that we would enjoy dalliance with thee," he went on vindictively; "but all who come to this realm must be brought before our lord intact!" I shuddered at the sinister implication of that last word, and noting it, he burst into a hoarse, braying laughter.

But in truth they did me no actual harm; although they did heap upon me every insult, contumely and indignity their depraved intelligences could devise. So that it was in anything but a spirit of pleasurable anticipation that I wended along with that crew, my pace accelerated every so often by a vicious yank from the ugly specimen holding the other end of the noosed cord about my neck.

Very evidently, when I volunteered for the service I was now engaged in carrying out, I had let myself in for something. And just as obviously, I was getting it, full measure and running over!

The sole gain that I could see lay in the fact that I was being taken directly to the presence of the one personage I most greatly desired to meet—albeit that promised to prove as detrimental as anything that could possibly happen. For there was little doubt as to the reception I might expect. Something unpleasant, unquestionably. No chance of its being otherwise. So, as I have said, my mood was the reverse of happy.

EVENTUALLY I found myself standing surrounded by the ugly-natured crew just outside the lofty

walls of a great city. The mail-clad leader was holding parley with the guards who apparently kept watch and ward at a small, narrow, arched doorway.

What passed of countersign and password between them I know not, but in another moment we were admitted. I had braced myself in anticipation of a renewal of petty annoyances from the inhabitants once we were within the city, but nothing of the sort happened.

Obviously, they were too accustomed to seeing captive arrivals from the various planets to pay attention to such, except to glower, malignant, as we passed. But by that time I had been fully impregnated with the all-pervading aura, so returned glare for glare; hate for hate; nor felt shame that I should feel so.

It was a mighty city, I must say that. It seemed, in a way, much as the cities of the Middle Ages in Europe appeared; and that type anyone can imagine for himself, so I shall not bother to describe farther.

Finally after marching through dismal streets we entered a lofty, gloomy building, which, I judged aright, was the palace of the Archfiend. And a few minutes later, I was standing in his very presence. I had prepared myself to confront a demon—and I found myself facing a gentleman, a prince!

He wore a darkly vivid red robe; and about his head, in place of crown or other insignia of his rank, there played a faint but clearly perceptible nimbus of scintillant flame of lurid crimson, garish purple, and somber sinister blue.

He was seated on a wondrously hideous yet highly ornamented throne of bronze which glimmered and gleamed with all the tints and shades of all the metalline oxides. His finely shaped head rested negligently on his hand, his elbow propped on the broad arm of his throne-seat; and his deep, lustrous eyes swept me from head to foot in one all-inclusive, penetrating glance.

A single wave of his hand was sufficient. No spoken command, yet that hateful gang who had made me prisoner departed, hastily, as though glad to get away.

Those behind his throne and to either side barely glanced at me, for to them I was but an Earthling; and they, one and all, were nobles and dignitaries of the court of a terrible regnant prince of the powers of evil. And they were too great, in a way, to descend to petty levels.

"What sent thee to my realm, Earthman?"

His voice was quiet, low, pleasantly modulated. He gazed at me with no manifestation of aught save such mild curiosity as might be expected from a ruler granting audience to any newcomer in his territory.

For a fraction of a second I was at a loss for the right words in which to reply without arousing suspicions that might result awkwardly for me—then I remembered a bit of advice I had once received long ago: "When wishing to deceive—tell the truth. No one will believe it!"

"It was a women sent me," I replied sulkily, playing my part, and noted an expression of wearied disdain flicker momentarily over his almost classically regular countenance.

"Only that?" he murmured, contemptuous. "So many Earthmen—" and a wave of his hand finished the remark for him. Then, as though having decided to get what poor sport from me might be had, he probed farther.

"But what did she do to thee?"

"Let me love her," I growled as if envenomed by bitter memories.

"Ah," he commented, gravely courteous. "I see! She let thee love her; then—refused thy love?"

"No!" I retorted savagely. "She accepted it!" Which was all true enough, but might be interpreted two ways.

"Then, since, because of her, thou hast suffered?" One, hearing, would have deemed him pitying, sympathetic.

"I have recently suffered very greatly," I replied, sulkily, as at first. Then I added, deliberately, insolently, moved thereto by one of those bursts of inspiration which at times come to even the dullest—"And now, O Prince of Hate, I have said all I will!"

He stared, as did his courtiers thronging the dais! Very probably, not in ages had any ego dared defy him thus, show such independence. It seemed, strangely enough, to please even while it apparently angered him. An enigmatic light glittered in his eyes, and he nodded reflectively.

I braced myself, expecting some terrific outburst; but again I was disappointed. He made no reply to my insolence, nor did he comment thereon. Merely he caught the eye of one standing near; and that one hastily bent the knee before him.

"Take this Earthman and find for him quarters here in the palace;" he commanded. "Let him have such comforts as may please him. He has my favor. I will make him my personal attendant! Depart!"

As this last evidently meant me as well, we left the throne room together; and as we went, I fancied I heard a quickly suppressed, low-pitched murmur of amazement from the assembled courtiers. My guide's first remark to me fully confirmed this idea.

"Never before has our Master showed such treatment to any who have stood before him, let alone an Earthman; for above all others he hates thy world the worst!"

"Why?" I queried.

"Nay," he responded, grumpily, "I know not. Nor," he added, as afterthought, "do I care! Nor is it any affair of thine!"

I returned his ugly stare with interest, and in mutual animosity we reached the rooms that were, for so brief a time, to be my abode. And here with no word of farewell nor other courtesy, my guide left me to shift for myself.

There was a comfortable couch, and a table spread with viands, and wine stood in a tall beaker.

Food and drink! I had not thought of them since I had left my physical body lying at foot of the black cubical altar away back there on earth. They had not since then been necessities; nor were they so here, but they were luxuries; and as such I appreciated them. And, of their sort, they were good. Then I reclined upon the couch, and for a time I slept.

FOR quite a long while I dwelt an inmate of the palace pleasantly enough—speaking strictly in a negative sense—for I was in nowise annoyed nor molested by anything or anyone.

My quarters were comfortable; I had all the luxuries which an honored guest might have expected placed at his disposal; the raiment furnished me was little short of sumptuous. And I was puzzled by it all.

Had I made such an impression upon him, the Lord of Hate, that I had won his actual regard? Or was it all but a prelude to some particularly and peculiarly devilish form of torment he had devised for me as reward of my temerity in replying so insolently during that one brief interview? I could not figure it out, so decided that the only sensible course was to accept the situation as I found it and await developments.

I even had the hardihood to leave the palace and wander about the infernal city at will, on several occasions. It was a chancy thing to do; but aside from several minor disagree-

able adventures, too trivial to set down in this relation of more important events, nothing happened to me during these rambles.

Then finally, when I was becoming so bored that once I caught myself seriously contemplating participating in the vice and depravity so prevalent in the city, a messenger came to summon me to the throne room. Fortunately, I was in my quarters at the time.

THE mighty Prince surveyed me with somewhat of approval in his gaze—or so I imagined.

"Earthman," he greeted me; "thou art improved in appearance since thine arrival. Henceforward thy place is here at my side."

I expressed my appreciation as best I might, but he waved the matter aside, as courteous as ever, treating the favor he showed me as a merest nothing.

I noted from time to time that messengers came and went—all of them apparently of some importance. They naturally varied greatly in appearance and types, as among them were representatives from practically all the realms and regions of space.

Not being wholly a fool, I judged them for precisely what they were—emissaries from the princes and rulers of evil, bearing tidings from their fiendish masters — who, doubtless, were his allies and who intended joining him in his projected war of aggression when all plans were complete.

I was right. For later, as I stood beside the prince, he turned to me.

"It is my will that thou goest with me," he commanded; and I coolly queried: "Where?"

"There is, in a great hall in this, my city, a council now assembled. It is formed by the Lords and Princes of the Powers of Wrong from all the many hells," he replied, smiling a trifle indulgently at my obvious interest.

"I shall preside," he went on; "and as thou art high in my estimation, Earthman of mine, I shall have need of thee immediately our deliberations are ended."

"It is thine to command—mine be it to obey," I responded, outwardly servile, but inwardly delighted at my luck.

"Come then," he said quietly, rising from his throne of bronze.

I was a bit puzzled at his going forth to such an important gathering unattended by any retinue; and he read my thought.

"It is of too great moment for any but the highest to be allowed to attend," he stated, "but thou art my personal attendant, and as such, I shall need thee presently. Moreover," he added graciously, "I have no fear thou wilt ever betray me, no matter what thou mayest there learn."

He had paced slowly to the entrance while he had been talking, and now we stood upon a balcony overlooking that side of the city. He raised a hand and pointed out a huge, square, dark building.

"There," he said, "is the great council hall, where, at my command, convene the Lords of Wrong whenever I have need of them."

"Do they all yield obedience to *thee?*" I questioned.

An expression so utterly damnable came upon his usually controlled features that I shrank back a pace in stark terror—and I am not easily affrighted.

"They do well to obey," he snarled. Then, turning upon me the full strength of that awful hell-glare suffusing his eyes, he demanded in a chill voice:

"Who dost thou think *I* am—some subordinate, petty princeling? Nay, thou blind earthworm—*I am the Ad-*

versary himself! Knowest thou *now* whom thou dost serve?"

"*Lucifer!*" I gasped. This was more than I had calculated upon! Lucifer, the Archfiend; the Fallen Angel; the Rebellious One—he who was formerly the chiefest and fairest of all the Seraphim; and was now but a banished rebel against the Supreme Will.

And he it was who was planning—and the bare idea of what those plans must be made my spirit shudder, appalled. He had been watching my face intently, and now he nodded as if well pleased.

"Come," he said simply, mastering the momentary rage which had dominated him. I must say that, despite my knowing him now for what he was, he forced from me an unwilling admiration by his display of will dominating inherent nature.

Suddenly as an earthly rocket, he shot into air, and with no effort of my own, I was drawn after him precisely as a bit of steel might be drawn by a rapidly moving electro-magnet.

As we approached the great council building, I recognized it. I had seen it from every possible angle during my wanderings about the city; and I knew it for an immense, hollow cube, with no visible entrance on any face.

Never had I traveled at such high speed before! I had barely time for the fleeting thought that the tangible envelope I was wearing as a body would be splattered against that massive stone structure in a single smear as soon as we struck the nearest wall! But we passed through it—dense, solid as it was—with our forms intact!

I caught my breath and blinked in amazement. That proud prince, Lucifer, was already seated upon a richly jeweled throne, far and away more gorgeous than the one of bronze in the throne room of his royal palace. And I found myself standing in my regular place close to his left elbow.

But what caused me to actually gasp was the semicircle of seated forms, occupying each a throne scarcely less splendid than the one wherefrom Lucifer faced them. Yet theirs were reared not quite so high as was his; as was but fitting, for they were, after all, his tributary vassals, high though their rank might be in their own realms.

Away back in the medieval days upon Earth, someone with an imagination approximating that of a little child's tried to describe the different Lords of Wrong. And the best he could do was to endow them with the physical appearances of a horde of beasts and monsters, actual and mythological. And such has been the accepted idea ever since!

What puerile folly—merest piffle! They were, and are, masters of powers and forces such as Earth even yet knows nothing of. And is it to be supposed that, with such at their command, they could not weave for themselves whatever forms and semblances were pleasing to their notions?

I say emphatically that never in all my universal experiences have I looked upon a grander, statelier, or more beautiful assemblage.

True, there was one thing they, for all their powers, could not do. They could not wholly disguise their true characters. I saw infernal pride stamped on every countenance there; besides which, each face wore an expression of strange, wearied *patience* as of those immortals whose lots are fixed, unchangeable, immutable, for all eternity.

But there common resemblance to type ended. Just as on Earth every man has one besetting sin or vice or dominant desire, so was it with these. Only, precisely as their natures are more intense than are those of Earth-mortals, so too, their predominant evil

was stronger and marked them each with his own peculiar expression.

I shall not describe them farther. Let each one imagine them as he or she may please. We all know the look of avarice; of hate; of envy—but why amplify? This is enough for illustration.

That Infernal Council opened as formally as any lodge on Earth. And, long before it was ended, my soul was sick within me. Yet, oddly enough, I sincerely believe that despite the fact that these were archfiends and I a mere mortal, I was the one who, in all that vast hall, felt the greatest wrath!

But it was against them, one and all, that my hate burned. I had listened to the unbelievable—the unspeakable—the unthinkable! In truth, I know not how the very soul of me—the spirit itself—escaped shriveling to nothingness from horror—or kept from becoming even as they were from venomous rage in presence of such damnability!

I dare not write what I heard and learned!

I have made report to the Shining One who sent me. I have been commanded by an authority to which even she yields implicit obedience, to remain silent forever on this matter. And I certainly will not disobey the clear injunction I received before I was permitted to set down these events for my fellow mortals to read. Were those things written out, the very pages would burst into flames as the penpoint traced the horrific phrases! And mortals, reading, were I to grave them in stone, or scrawl them on asbestos, would pray in vain for annihilation!

Finally the deliberations ended. Ensued a brief pause. And over me swept such aghast fear as never before had I known. I realized that *I* was the focus of attention!

The fallen Archangel turned to me with jeering, softly sardonic words on his lips and a mocking smile in his eyes.

"O Earthman of such great courage—and even greater folly; well and faithfully hast thou played thy part! Doubt not that she who beguiled thee into attempting to match thy feeble wits against mine own, will be much beholden to thee—*when thou dost make to her thy report!*"

I knew what he meant by that last sentence! Only too well I understood! He meant that my report would be made sometime after eternity itself had ceased to be!

If I had hated before, I now was like a dog suddenly gone mad. I had no weapons! I had nothing wherewith to smite! Emitting something between a snarl, a howl, and a shriek, I hurled myself straight at that evilly, luridly beautiful countenance!

The distance was less than arm's reach, yet ere I could overpass it, without the slightest gesture on his part, not even pointing a finger, I was stricken into immobility; smitten with a paralysis that was anguish untellable!

I had less power of motion left me than a stone image. Yet I was anything but stone. That is insensate. But I—I was a mass of little else save sensory nerves and perception. And what play those fiends made with me can be imagined; but never can I bear to describe it!

It was too agonizing, too awful for words. And the terrible part lay in the fact that not one of them left his seat. They did but *think*—and I suffered! It was humiliation unbelievable to realize that they were not even enjoying themselves but held me as being too trivial a subject to afford them amusement. Why, they were scarcely interested! Yet every one of them was as fully aware of my torments and excruciating anguish as was I myself!

As a final refinement of cruelty, the Arch-Enemy removed from me the

paralysis; left me free to wince and writhe and shudder—to moan, shriek, groan, and howl. And I, with all pride and strength sapped, in frenzy availed myself to the fullest of the capacity!

SUDDENLY all pain departed and was followed by the most exquisite sensations. I felt my tormented nerves and tissues tingle with a life and vigor such as are undreamable. The relief was so great that at first I could not believe it. But then I realized that it was real, and in the conscious thrill of that power of life flowing through me, I smiled! But that smile was a trifle premature!

Why, what was this? I was no longer standing on the floor, but was suspended above the center of the hall, about equidistant from all the seated members of the Infernal Group. I could feel no cruelty emanating from them—there was not either curiosity or anticipation. What was coming next? I found out!

About me was gathering a faint mist of a grayish hue. It was more like a cloud of dust-particles very finely sifted. It did me no harm. I did not even notice the dust as I breathed.

Then it commenced to *swirl;* apparently in all three dimensions at once. The motion became faster; the particles became more plentiful—I could no longer see clearly, although still I could see.

Faster yet the swirling became—friction soon set up—the density increased—centripetal and centrifugal forces came into play—attraction and repulsion balanced each other—there commenced to grow about me a dim light—I understood suddenly!

I was ensphered in a ball or globe of etheric particles. The fiends were sealing me up in the hollow center of what might, centuries or eons later, become a world, a planet in space!

But just then it was more like a comet or a sun—incandescent. Being burned alive is one thing, and being *baked* alive is another matter; the more especially when to it is added the certitude that by no possibility could death intervene to put an end to suffering. No matter how long I might roast, I knew I could not die!

Apparently, I was accounted for and there was no use wasting farther efforts upon me. The hollow sphere suddenly shot upward through the roof and departed forever from that plane.

Whirling and spinning, it tore on its way into outer, remotest space, where was never a gleam of light from planet or sun, and where the terrific absence of temperature was so great that presently the incandescence of my vehicle perceptibly lessened. And over me swept the nightmare conviction that it was cooling, would soon grow cold! Then contraction would ensue and—

It did! It contracted until it was pressing upon me in all directions at once. It grew colder than any iceberg ever was or will be—and still it contracted in that unimaginable chill of outer space.

The worst thing of all the Arch-Adversary had done to me was in endowing me with that terrible power of life. It had affected that body I was wearing until, no matter how great the pressure, I did not crush. But how it did hurt!

By then I was some milliards of miles from his realm; but suddenly, through the solid walls pressing so awfully upon me, I saw him still seated in full council; and I knew that for a fleeting moment he had allowed himself to think of me.

I knew, too, as soon as I caught his thought, that he was aware of that, also. And I saw a faint, mocking smile shine ever so briefly in his eyes. Then darkness and horror for what seemed eons untold.

I remember that at times I shrieked, raved, whined, and implored—begging mercy from the Merciless! Then again I would strive to reassert myself, trying to endure, to keep stedfast, and not give the proud Archfiend the satisfaction of knowing how deeply I suffered.

A TERRIFIC shock, the impact of which well-nigh stunned me! My whirling prison stopped, hung suspended. Some new form of torture, and I would have to endure it as best I might, I thought with a queer, resigned apathy.

Another shocking, jarring impact, worse than the first one. Another and yet again. The blows came faster and faster until there was no distinguishing one from another. Faster and harder still—and my prison-globe was commencing to give out a strangely musical humming note. Suddenly comprehension dawned upon me.

"Power is not great in proportion to weight of impact, but to number and regularity of impact." Undoubtedly, some new vibratory force or energy was assaulting my shell—but why? Did it mean what I had first thought—fresh torment? Or could it—*could* it mean that—

The globe burst! Burst in all directions, simultaneously, as if from internal explosion. *And I burst apart also!* Flew asunder, outwardly, from a common center. Disintegrated with an instantaneous thoroughness that left nothing to be desired in its finality.

Why not? The pressure upon that body I had been wearing had been of tons and tons. And it had been too suddenly released. Expansion was but a natural consequence. Too much expansion—pressure too suddenly withdrawn!

Of course it will be understood that that self which is the real "me" did not burst. It was, as I have said, but the acquired body alone. But at last, after experiences as hideous as though I were in truth one of the eternally damned, I was once again *free*.

The crowning joy came when I found myself surrounded by a throng of dazzling, shining beings—beings whose type I instantly recognized. And, at once, I saw *her*, the Silver One!

She had not forgotten, had not abandoned the Earthling whose chiefest wish had been to serve her. Through space uncharted, where never before had light gleamed; where never before had even the exploring Archangels passed, she had traced my prison-cell in its appalling flight; had finally overtaken it, for all its amazing speed and—

Despite the Arch-Adversary himself, I would, after all, make to her my report! And I did, then and there. At first, she bade me wait until we were once more in her shining city. But I boldly insisted that she hear me immediately. She graciously yielded the point in recognition of what she was pleased to term my claims upon her for meritorious service.

Well that I did report at once. When I had finished, she was, for all her supernal nature, plainly disturbed; aghast at the awful menace threatening the universe.

I thought I knew the laws of etheric vibration fairly well. And, for earthly requirements, I do. But all I had ever known put together was but the prattle of an infant, compared to the wisdom of the Silver One.

How far-reaching, how all-comprehending, how all-inclusive must have been that power of sight she controlled, to enable her to keep track of my arrival on the plane of Hate; and to know when I departed therefrom, and the manner of my going. How accurate, too, that she could follow that shell so closely. And how stupendous her ability; that she could and did disrupt it so promptly!

And that Lucifer, the fallen Archangel, was likewise one of the masters of the ether, is understood almost without saying. Already I had had more than one demonstration of his abilities; and I was to receive others very shortly.

IT WAS a joyous throng that swept in a brilliant, gleaming cortège through that black vault of Tartarus. And after my lengthy exposure to the vibrations of Hate, I fairly *soaked* up all the loving pity and sympathy that they so generously bestowed. I felt that I needed it to cleanse me from the pollution of that realm where I had dared venture like a spy into an enemy's chiefest citadel.

There was not even a preliminary glow of lurid light to warn us! One instant, ahead of us, still the void of outer space—and the next instant, hordes and legions of fiends, demons, imps, and goblins; swarming all about us, above us, below us. Everywhere, save in our very midst!

Once again—as while imprisoned in the shell—to me there came that far-reaching clairvoyance, and I could see the Great Adversary himself sitting on his brazen throne in his palace dwelling. He was guiding, controlling, directing, from that incalculable distance, his infernal host he had sent to intercept us. Why, I could even sense his thought waves—not directed to me, but to the Silver One herself.

"What I once have held is mine throughout all eternity! Yield to me that Earthling's spirit, and go thy ways in peace—for this time!"

I was in for it! That I could see plainly. I had incurred the personal animosity of one who never forgave; one who forever remained relentless; one who would not be deprived of his vengeance, once begun! He wanted me—and there was no hope. I knew my doom. Yet it was I who would finally triumph, of that I was assured, for I would yield myself to him, give myself over to his tender care—and what that might be I could easily guess.

But in defying him, mocking him, flouting him even in the midst of his worst torments, *I* would be the tormentor—his tormentor—even while he tortured me! I could not, would not let harm come to her I served because of me. Why, who was I—?

Before I could demand of her that she give me up to him; I caught her answer.

"Lucifer, I yield not one of those who cleave to me. If he be thine—come take him! Cease malingering there on thy brazen seat; come in person—thou who wast formerly of our Celestial Host—*thou,* Fallen Seraph; Arch-Rebel; *Supreme Coward of the Universe!*"

That supernal defiance rang through space that heard with bated breath! The very atoms of the ether shuddered and wavered in their eon-old steadiness of flow; shocked and aghast at that most stupendous final insult! And I—I gazed spellbound at her whom, previously, I had deemed a gentle spirit!

Where now was that softly shimmering, silvery tint of living light that had composed her matchless form? It shone now with a vivid corruscating radiance far more like white-hot iron superheated; yet had all the hardness of appearance characterizing highly polished, chilled steel!

The soft gentle roseate flushes—color of love—which had faintly tinged her entire aura, had changed to the clear bright scarlet of wrath celestial. The serene brow was still calm, but bore an expression of awful sternness, lofty, implacable, unyielding. The great pools of light—her eyes—now blazed with indignation. And the smiling, tender mouth which had been so mobile, quivering with loving, yearning wistfulness, had

subtly hardened—the lips were curled with scorn and contempt—

A shriek burst from the regnant figure seated on its brazen throne! That hellish ululation rang through all the illimitable Etheric Ocean till the wave of Life itself well-nigh changed and became a tide of Death instead!

That supreme taunt had stung the Lord of Hate beyond all his demoniac endurance. It had cut straight to the very well-springs of his being! It could be replied to in but one manner.

In a blinding, dazzling, lurid flash of crimson and hectic purple he sped straight from his throne-seat to the very forefront of his hellish host which swarmed and swirled all about us; as yet not daring to attack.

His arrival and the opening of the war were simultaneous. His first act was to launch direct at me a streak of greenish-white luminescence that barely missed me, and would have taken me full, had not one of those who followed the Silver One interposed herself.

The shining being shrank, shriveled, seemed to wither; grow smaller, deformed; the splendid beauty of her aura turned dull gray and leaden in hue—she writhed and quivered in an agony excruciating to behold. Had that streak of Infernal Energy smitten *me*—I doubt if my supposedly indestructible self could have survived it!

I shame to confess it! I shrink from the admission as never have I cringed in self-loathing before, but I must tell it! There is that within me that compels me and will not be denied. Before that terrific battle was over, fifteen of those beauteous ones, male and female both, had interposed their unselfish selves; had been my preservation; rather than let me fall victim to the wrath of the Archfiend!

And I could not fight him back! Why, I was but a helpless babe in this most stupendous strife! The worst—or best—powers I knew how to utilize failed to affect the most puerile and impotent of the least of the goblins in the Arch-Enemy's array!

But now, if I seem to digress, in truth it is not so. I find that I must shift from one thing to another, keeping as best I may to the thread of my narration; yet covering certain points of grave importance, in order to make some matters clear.

The self is indestructible, was never born, can never die. But it can know suffering, can be hurt, not permanently, yet terribly while the hurt endures. It may not be affected thus by any means known to Earth. But, as I have said once and again—in the Etheric Ocean of Space, which is the Storehouse of Universal Energy, there are strange powers and forces latent which may be set into activity by that chiefest and greatest dynamic energy, "Will."

All the universe is but ions and electrons—atoms. The solid rock, the yielding flesh, the intangible smoke, or the impalpable gas—atoms, all of these! Atoms, too, are electricity, chemistry, radium—

All that differentiates one thing from other things throughout all the universe is—vibratory rate! Certain vibrations are pleasant, soothing, gratifying, because they are harmonious, in attunement.

Then, given a vibratory wave of sufficient intensity, *out* of attainment with its objective—and injury is quite possible! And of such nature were the weapons used in that spatial warfare!

Again to revert—when she, the Silver One, turned from her gentle attitude, realizing that thus only could she maintain her integrity and insure the safety of her followers; they too, had promptly altered. Not so high, so potent as she, perhaps; still, in their ways, they were anything but weaklings!

So, indescribable as was that strife, and banal though the strongest words are for purposes of description, I still will try in my poor way to tell what I may of its progress.

THE lesser host, that of the Silver One's array, held closely together, despite the most determined assaults against them. At her command, they had assumed a strange geometrical formation, and from this they hurled forth flickering rays of clear lights, scintillant sparklings, corruscating whorls and spirting puffs and jets of gases and vapors, faintly luminous, but devastating in effect.

Incessantly, from the forefront of that gleaming cohort where blazed the Silver One herself, there burst sheets and flares of blinding white, violet-tinted light which was almost solid in its atomic intensity of impact! It was shot through with sparks and bursting points and darting tongues of super-iridescence. And wherever that awful vibration smote, the unlucky fiends howled and yelled, and some even wept in their anguish—so terrible was the result of her wrath!

And ever as she smote, clear as a strain of music heard amidst the turmoil of an Earthly tempest, her challenge rang above all the hellish riot from that Infernal Army.

"Come and face *me*, Lucifer! Thou, who didst swear once, eons ago, to drag me down lower than the lowest goblin damned of all thy far-flung outposts! Leave off assailing my followers, and face *my* power, thou Scum of the Nethermost Pit!"

But he came not. Rather, he kept carefully on the farther side of her cohort; and in this one matter he had her at a disadvantage. For she, with those terrible sheets of celestial flame, was blasting for her attendants a path in a fixed direction—back toward her shining city, while to him and his demoniacal legion, one direction was as good as any other.

And he and his hellish hordes were anything but passive! Their weapons were, in a way, more dreadful than were those they were facing. For they were using the vibrations of their kind. And between the two hosts played such display as no earthly pyrotechnics could ever hope to approximate.

Against us they launched whirling spirals and vortices of scarlet and crimson fires; flares of sulfurous blues and yellows; jets and gouts and splashes of flames of all colors, but all shaded with dark impurity; foul with wrath and malice and all indecency.

There came, ever and again, gusts of fetid odors; blasts of stifling, mephitic vapors of green and leaden and purple; and thick, black clouds, filthy, revolting to touch and smell; shot through with jagged sizzling darts and streaks of hell's own essence—which is a vibration indescribable to earthly concept.

Had I to choose, I had far rather have faced the worst that the Shining Band could do to me—for their weapons were clean, at least, however dreadful the effects might be. But the noxious, virulent emanations from the enemy array were pollution itself. They well-nigh choked the souls of us who faced them!

Again I shame to say it, but so far as possible, I had been kept in the middle of that geometrical figure. Yet, it was against me, as much as he could, that the Great Adversary directed his most determined efforts.

But following close on a particularly biting taunt from the Silver One—a taunt which held more than a hint of mocking merriment—he shifted his position enough so that he could launch straight at her one of those virulent greenish-white streaks of phosphorescence—a streak far more intense than any he had so far condescended to waste upon me!

Straight at her noble breast it sped —and for a brief second I grew sick

with apprehension. A faint, soft, rose-colored glow shone on her bosom for a mere moment—but the awful vibration, touching it, lost its power! Again he hurled one of those frightful darts; but again the soft, rosy glow foiled him. Again and yet again he smote, and ever as they struck, impotent, her jeering challenge retorted, maddening him.

I know not how it happened. It was all too quickly done for me to follow; but I found myself suddenly before her—and the baleful glance of the Adversary was quick to perceive his opportunity!

But because of his position, her form partially intervened. He changed location still farther and shot at me one terrific streak! I saw it start—and saw, streaming from the fingers of her left hand which she swiftly interposed before me, a shield, oval in shape, of that wondrous rosy glow. The hell-dart fairly *crackled* as it impinged upon that defense, but harmed me not at all.

I sensed the wild, thrilling exultation of her triumph—and realized that she had deliberately used me as a lure to entrap him!

Her magnificent, shapely right arm shot straight upward, full length, swept downward again in a superb gesture, her strong, slender tapering fingers pointing full at him; and from their tips there leaped a single flash of Black Light transcending all *Light!*

Concentrated to a spot no larger than an Earth-child's hand, it smote him full on his wrathful brow! And at its stabbing impact he screamed as never fiend nor imp nor lost soul ever screamed in direst tortures of his devising!

That ghastly yell of anguish rings yet in my memory! The coronal of lurid flames about his head went out. He turned a livid, sickly hue, suddenly grew limp, weaker than the weakest member of all his hideous host—

He turned and fled! Fled, slowly, painfully, moaning and wailing in futile misery and humiliation! And, fleeing, was overtaken and passed by his entire army who broke and scattered when they witnessed their leader's defeat! But he could not flee fast enough to escape from her derisive mockery.

"Go, proud prince! Go, without this Earthling whom thou didst demand from my hands! Go, without taking me prisoner—me whom thou didst threaten to degrade! *Lucifer, thou hast my pity!*"

I think that last hurt him worse than all else!

WE WERE annoyed no farther. Space was but empty space until we reached the shining city. There were many of that bright band sorely hurt, and even in that Abode of Light it was some time ere they wholly recovered.

I was unhurt, but the very self of me was inexpressibly wearied, almost to exhaustion. Despite this, I would have returned to Earth, for I feared for that mortal body I had left so long lying in the Temple—asleep in the Black Shrine, but the Silver One forbade.

"Thy brethren care for thy body by my express command," she assured me, adding: "And as for that futility thou dost name thy 'business affairs' upon earth—fear not thou! Bide here yet awhile. It is my wish."

Now, who was I to refuse?

It was pleasant enough there, and finally I asked her outright to grant me permission to remain, permanently, forever. Over her serene features—now once more gentle—hovering on her lips there crept an enigmatic smile.

"Wait!" was all her reply.

I was wondering what that might mean when a blaze of sapphire and

gold filled all the place about her throne. Momentarily dazzled, I then became aware of a Radiant Being by contrast with whom even *she* appeared obviously of lesser rank. Nothing and no one told me, yet I knew it for one of the great Archangels who abide in the immediate light of the Presence Itself. He surveyed me a trifle curiously.

"Earthman," he stated bluntly, "thou art the greatest fool who ever left thy world."

I bowed my head abashed. Yet I was aware that the Silver One was smiling approvingly on me.

"But," continued the Seraph, "it is such daring fools as thou who serve the Inscrutable Purpose."

I felt even more abashed, for this was praise. From an Archangel!

"Wouldst thou dare alone face the Great Adversary once again, there on his dais in the heart of his realm?" he queried as if desirous of finding out just how bold a fool I really was.

I raised my head, looked at him, despite his blazing splendor, straight in eye.

"If it serves," I replied humbly.

"Give heed, then," he commanded. "It is thy right to hear and judge if thou wilt go or not. Ages ago, this Lucifer sought to corrupt thy world. Thou knowest that it is far from perfect now! It was because of that that he was reduced to his present estate. Wherefore it is that he hates thy world, the Green Star, the worst.

"Now he has dared transgress again; has been prevented for a time; but still he meditates rebellion. And so, I have a message for him! But because he hates thy world so viciously, it is fitting that thou shouldst bear him that message—thou, an Earthman from the star he hates; thou, the one Earthman whom above all Earthmen he has greatest cause to hate! Well?"

"I serve," I replied simply.

Oh, the stupendous powers under the control of those Celestials! There was no message given me; no command to 'go'; there was not even perceptible transition—it was instantaneous transposition!

I was standing on the dais facing the Archfiend on his brazen throne! The very sight of me seemed to madden him, giving him the spur he evidently needed; for the jaded look faded from his worn-appearing countenance, being replaced by a wild ferocity.

"Thou?" he snarled, half incredulous. I suppose I should have quailed before that frightful rage, but somehow I did not do so.

"I have a message for thee," I stated bluntly.

In sheer mockery he assumed the manners at once of a gravely courteous, suave prince receiving an envoy.

"I listen," he replied, with but the faintest hint of irony in his tones.

"Lucifer," I commenced sternly, "once thou didst rebel against the Presence. As punishment, this is thy estate! Thou, too, dost serve the Purpose; as does the eternal conflict! But lately thou didst o'erpass the boundaries of thy province; and what that brought thee, thou knowest! O'erpass thy boundaries once again, and thou wilt o'erpass the limits of the Patience! And then—no worm squirming beneath the dust of the Green Star from whence I came can be so low as thou shalt be abased. *Heed ye the warning!*"

It was not of myself that I had spoken. That *I* knew. But the Archfiend was blinded by his hate, or he, too, would have known it. He leaped to his feet. In his eyes the hell-glare blazed as never before.

"Thou presumptuous—" he yelled, but never finished his remark, whatever it was. Facing him from the center of the throne room stood the Archangel who had sent me. Never

a word he spoke; his eyes looked—but did not even seem to notice the Prince of Hate. Had he gazed at nothingness, his eyes had held that same expression—serene, aloof, indifferent. Yet Lucifer sank back upon his throne, cowed, beaten once again.

"I hear—and—and—" he wellnigh choked on the final words—"I —obey!"

THERE was no throne before me; no fallen Seraph promising abject submission! Again that Celestial's supernal power! We were hovering just above the "couch of dreams" whereon still lay my earthly body.

"Man of Earth," said my companion, "we have need of such as thee in Space. There is a planet of which thou hast never heard, where things are far from what they were ordained to be. We can use thee there. Well?"

"Still I serve," I replied gladly.

"Re-enter thy body," he commanded. "Thy brethren will not attempt to question thee. Arrange thy earthly affairs as may please thee, but in such wise that if the call comes, it will find thee waiting in readiness—for when *I* come for thee, thou wilt 'die' as do all thy race."

"I will be ready at any moment," I promised.

Everything grew dark, I felt a strange strangling sensation — I gasped, opened my eyes wearily. I heard a startled exclamation. I turned my head slowly, for my neck felt queerly stiff and moved with difficulty.

That same "Temple Dove" who had woven for me the spell of the Temple-sleep was kneeling beside me.

"Oh," she exclaimed softly. "You have come to life again. I am so glad!"

"You have not been here all this time, I hope," I said.

"No, no," she replied, shaking her head emphatically. "Why, you have been gone more than five weeks! But always someone has watched over you, waiting for your awakening. It has been done by command of the Hierophant of the Order."

"Help me up," I said, for I felt unable to rise by my own unaided efforts.

I got to my feet and stood swaying unsteadily. In fact, had not the girl placed her arm about me and supported me I should probably have fallen. But after a bit, as the circulation improved, I grew stronger.

"I'm all right now," I said.

"I'm so glad," she repeated, her eyes shining joyously. "I—I—prayed —for—you," she whispered diffidently.

I stared! *She!* Prayed—for *me! I who*—! Then comprehension dawned in my arrogant mind! After all, within her limits, she, too, served! Very gently I bent and kissed her on her smooth brow.

"Thank you, Little Sister," I said humbly.

Then I left the Black Shrine, and, a few minutes later, dressed for the street, I passed out of the Temple building.

AFTERWORD

I RETIRED from business. I have money enough and more than I shall ever use. I made a will, leaving everything to that kindly little maid who also serves. No one else had ever manifested any regard for me. Yet—she had "prayed".

A week ago I awoke from out a sound slumber. The room was so black that there might as well have been no room. There came a soft gleam of radiance! Clearly against the blackness, I saw the Silver One herself. A question passed from my mind to hers.

"Not yet," came her gentle, pitying reply. "It is another than I who will come—even as he said."

"Tell me," I implored. "May I write these matters out for the dwellers of earth to read?"

"You may—if it be your wish," she consented.

"When shall I—" I recommenced, but she shook her head in negation, and I did not finish that query. She smiled and was gone! But I lay awake awhile, staring into the darkness; and as I stared, a vision formed.

I saw a small, barren-looking planet, as yet scarcely cooled, whereon dwarfish, distorted creatures, low in the scale of evolution, yet strangely *aspiring;* strove ever with a race of giants, malignant, brutish, stolid, stupid.

But what it was they strove for; or what part I was to take in their affairs—I saw not then, nor do I know as yet.

Only, I wait. Wait, that I may once again *serve*—

And, somehow, I do not think my waiting will be very long!

Song of the Hound*

By SIDNEY LANIER

(Reprint)

The hound was cuffed, the hound was kicked,
O' the ears was cropped, o' the tail was nicked,
Oo-hoo-o, howled the hound.
The hound into his kennel crept;
He rarely wept, he never slept.
His mouth he always open kept
Licking his bitter wound,
The hound;
U-lu-lo, howled the hound.

A star upon his kennel shone
That showed the hound a meat-bare bone.
O, hungry was the hound!
The hound had but a churlish wit.
He seized the bone, he crunched, he bit.
"An thou were Master, I had slit
Thy throat with a huge wound!"
Quo' hound.
O, angry was the hound!

The star in castle-window shone,
The master lay abed, alone.
O ho, why not? quo' hound.
He leapt, he seized the throat, he tore
The Master, head from neck, to floor,
And rolled the head i' the kennel door,
And fled and salved his wound,
Good hound!
U-lu-lo, howled the hound.

** This song of revolution was written by Sidney Lanier for inclusion in a long poem, called "The Jacquerie", which was never completed.*

A Droll Little Tale Is

THE FADING GHOST

By WILLIS KNAPP JONES

Author of "The Green Scarab" and "Bright Eyes of Adventure"

THE stranger entered my office and dropped wearily into a chair, covering his face with his hands. "I'm dead, doctor," he groaned.

I agreed that it was quite a climb from the street to my office. "But soon—a month or so—I expect to move to the ground floor."

"That will be too late. It won't do me any good, then."

"No? What's your trouble?"

He stared straight at me as he answered. "Trouble? I have none. Dead people have no troubles, and I've been dead for half an hour. I committed suicide."

I looked at him, startled. He was rather pale, I noticed, and the brilliant red necktie which he was wearing gave the impression of a deep and bleeding wound. He seemed very nervous, his hands continually stroking the creased trousers of the light gray suit he was wearing.

"I committed suicide," he repeated. "I shot myself through my heart." He indicated the spot with a long, slender finger, on one knuckle of which I saw just such a stain as dried blood makes. I thought he meant for me to examine him, so I arose, and took a step toward him. He motioned me back. "Don't touch me," he commanded. "It's no use. You couldn't feel me. I wonder whether you can even see me plainly. I'm getting more ethereal all the time. I—what was I saying?"

"That I couldn't see you. But I can, plainly."

"Oh, my clothes, perhaps, my coat, my necktie—"

Yes, that red necktie was very much in evidence. I agreed, wondering whether he were insane.

He seemed to read my mind. "You think I'm crazy, don't you, doctor? But I'm not. My nerves are frazzled, and I thought I would go insane when Polly turned me down; but I didn't. I know I didn't. I've had my knee tapped and have had all sorts of tests. Finally, I couldn't stand the agony and made an end of myself this afternoon." He looked up at the clock. "Just twenty-eight minutes ago my soul left my body."

I studied him carefully. His eyes had none of that stare peculiar to the insane. I was near enough to be sure that he was not intoxicated; yet I could not determine just what ailed him. Perhaps, if he talked longer, he would help me to diagnose his condition. "Tell me about it," I urged.

"I knew you'd be interested. The day I read your book, *Do the Dead Survive?* I said to myself, 'I wonder whether he ever saw a ghost.' Then, just before I snatched up my revolver, I looked up your office in the telephone book so that if I did live after death I could come to call on you and tell you how correct your assumptions were. And after the shot, and I felt myself growing more aerial and ghostlike, I left my body lying dead on the floor and hurried here to

speak to you before I became entirely invisible. Your book, page 147, speaks of the process. You called it 'fading', if you will remember.''

I was becoming more and more confused. He sounded far from rational. I knew that I was not dreaming and that this could not be a practical joke. I had never seen the fellow before. Yet there was no apparent solution. As hackwork, I had written a book on spiritualism, voicing my belief that death was not the end of everything; but I had never expected to have a ghost come to my consulting room in the middle of the afternoon to prove it to me.

''You are sure you were dead?'' I asked inanely.

I had to repeat my question before he came out of the sort of stupor into which he had fallen. Then he jerked himself together. ''Absolutely sure. I stood before a mirror like that one.'' He pointed to a full-length mirror beside my instrument cabinet. ''Oh, those knives are so glittering! Do you think I made a mistake in using a revolver? Would poison have been easier?''

''Well, I'm not an authority on suicide,'' I had to confess.

''Still, the shot did not hurt. I didn't feel any pain at all, just the explosion and a momentary vibration. I—where was I?''

''Standing before a mirror,'' I prompted.

''Yes, I'd been having worries—love, you know; couldn't sleep at night, and all. When the thought of suicide came, I took my revolver from my bureau drawer, pressed it close to my heart, and without waiting a second, pulled the trigger and fell dead on the floor. Then I left myself lying there, and came here. Nobody seemed to notice me along the street. Perhaps they couldn't see me. Can you?''

I nodded. ''But you said you were lying on the floor?''

''Yes. I looked back to make sure just before I closed the door. Remembering your warning on page 343 against retention of psychic visions, I tested myself carefully. But I know my body is there. This is my astral self. It was a terrifying sight, blood trickling from the wound.'' He suddenly became conscious of the stain on his knuckle. He raised his right hand as if to wipe the mark away, thought better of it, and dropped his hand. ''Terrifying sight,'' he repeated.

''It must have been. You're the first astral body I've ever seen. Is there anything unusual about your earthly body?''

''I didn't stop to see. But would you care to go and look?''

''Yes, indeed.''

''I had hoped you would.'' He gave me the address. But he refused to accompany me. ''I'll stay here,'' he promised. ''I may not last till you get back. I'm fading fast. But if I'm entirely a ghost when you return, I'll—I'll move that paper.'' He pointed to a temperaturegraph hanging partly over the edge of my desk. ''But hurry.''

''I'll be back in an hour,'' I promised.

IT WAS better than my word. Forty minutes later I puffed up the stairs. He was still there, lost in thought.

''Did you find me?'' he asked immediately.

''Yes, just as you said, lying beside the bureau with a bullet in your heart. But I don't understand one thing.''

''How I came here? That was because I was materialized, embodied. Chapter seven of your book was entirely right in its assertions.''

''No, that's not it. I'm interested in that, of course, and I'd appreciate it if you would take off your shirt and let me see whether materialized

ghosts have the wounds of the original body. I'll confess I'm confused. I've just realized something that completely upsets my theory."

He had been about to remove his coat, but he stopped. "What is that, doctor?" he asked.

"The fact that, although you are wearing a red necktie, your earthly body, exactly like you in every other respect, wears a modest black one."

He gave a shriek of agony, and jumped up, horror depicted on his countenance.

"No, doctor, don't tell me that the body was wearing black!"

"Yes, indeed. Same color gray suit, and shirt, but a black necktie."

He sank his face in his hands and I heard a heartbroken moan. "Oh, I see it all. What a villain I am! It's all the fault of this nervous trouble I've been having. I'm not a suicide, then; I'm a fratricide. I lived with my twin brother, and we dressed exactly alike except that he did not share my love for pretty ties. I've shot my brother instead of myself!"

It Was a Subtle Crime That Crawley Planned, But Unexpected Was Its Result

The Death Shower

By TOM FREEMAN

CRAWLEY knelt on the floor of his bathroom, in each hand a wire leading from the electric light socket over his head. He had spent a long time preparing for this moment, and there must be no slip now.

Tall, slim and dark, with a face like a saint's, which only his flaming eyes betrayed in the dull haze of the February dawn, he waited until the cascading shower in the room below should tell him that his victim, the man he hated as much as he loved that man's wife, should be in his control.

His ear pressed to the pipe, he heard the water splashing. The gay whistle that usually accompanied the running stream was absent, and for a moment Crawley wondered. Then he roused himself. He must act quickly. He could hear the man below moving about under the shower.

Removing his head from danger, Crawley firmly wrapped the naked wires around the pipe. Quickly he pressed his ear to the floor. He heard a moan, followed by a duller noise, as if the bather, slipping on a cake of soap, had fallen into the tub. Then silence, except for the sound of steadily flowing water.

Crawley jerked the wire from the pipe and replaced the light bulb in its socket. Taking the cord into his living room, he restored it to the electric floor lamp from which he had removed it, and placidly sat down to wait.

It would not be long until Margaret Brinslow would note the tardiness of her husband and would go to call him. She would find the door locked, would

become alarmed at the water seeping under the door, and would call neighbors, who would break down the door.

Then Margaret would find the body; would grieve appropriately; and in due time she and Crawley would wed. It was a pleasant outlook, and Crawley smiled as he settled himself more comfortably.

CRAWLEY did not regard Brinslow's death as a crime. From childhood his only definition of crime had been "blunder", and he viewed as criminals only those who got caught.

He had fallen in love with Margaret Brinslow fourteen months before. Never had woman appealed to him as did she, and for the strangest reason in the world. She was a Puritan, from the sole of her highly arched foot to the top of her pretty little head.

She loved him—she had admitted as much at a moment of tense importuning; but she would not bend herself to his moral code. She refused to run away with him, although confessing that she did not love her husband. She asserted that it was her duty to stick by the man she had married.

She would not think of divorce. Only one thing could so separate them that she would marry Crawley, and that was her husband's death. She had caught the little gleam that flickered in Crawley's eyes at this, although he had long thought himself able to conceal his emotions.

"It would have to be natural death, too," she had added. "If you should kill him, I would hate you forever, and we could never be happy together, either here or hereafter."

Crawley's ideas of the hereafter being highly nebulous, he told himself what he did not tell her, that he must have her as soon as it could be arranged. He must not only outwit the police (dumb-bells in uniform, he characterized them), but he must also outwit Margaret.

He knew Brinslow was in such good physical condition that his death in the natural course of events would be a matter of years, and Crawley was unwilling to wait so long. Besides, in the meantime Margaret would be growing old, and, to his mind, less attractive.

Consequently, much to the neglect of several of the other dubious enterprizes in which he was engaged, Crawley had pondered over a method of slaying Brinslow so none would ever know except himself. With that in view, he had framed his plans, and, unknown to the Brinslows, had rented this apartment above theirs. He had been compelled to wait for several months before the rooms were vacant. He had been afraid to offer to buy out the former tenant's lease, for fear the offer would create curiosity.

If Margaret ever went back on him, he could tell her how her first husband met his death. He grinned as he thought of the shock that would convey to her Puritanical soul. How kind the gods were to men who only dared!

Crawley yielded himself to thoughts of the woman who would soon be his. At last he would be able to comb that tawny cascade of hair with his fingers; he would bruise her lips with his—her lips for which he thirsted greatly. He would be able to hold her close, and none could deny him. And all the time he would be able to smile in the back of his head, over the thing he knew that she would never know—so long as she was good to him.

The coroner would say that Brinslow had died from heart disease. Well, it would be that, except that the disease had been in Crawley's heart. But soon he hoped to mend it, for Margaret would be his.

He had waited more than a year for this day; it would not be hard to wait

a little longer. To wait until the body was found, until after the funeral, until after Margaret's period of mourning, and then—to marry her!

Picking up a copy of a magazine to while away the time that would pass before the body would be discovered, Crawley smiled again. He could flee, to return later, but there was no need. He wanted to hear Margaret weeping; to see if there would not be an undertone of relief in her outcries at her husband's death.

He read one brief story through, and yet there was no stir from below. Twenty minutes passed. Crawley became restless. After five more minutes he strode into the bathroom and placed his ear to the water pipe. The water was still running.

Misgiving struck him, then he knew himself for a fool. Evidently Margaret was sleeping late, as she usually did, and likely would not be stirring about for half an hour or so longer. Crawley went back to his living room and resumed his vigil.

This time he had not long to wait. In a few minutes he heard scurrying feet below. Someone was pounding violently on the door. Margaret, no doubt. Probably she was calling in a low voice to her husband. Perhaps she was hoping that something had occurred.

Someone else came along the hall and the pounding was redoubled. In two minutes there was a crash as the door fell in.

A woman's cry followed. Crawley grinned. At last Margaret was free. A clamor of voices filled the hallway, and there was the tramp of several feet.

He heard a man call out: "Into that room. I'll get a doctor!"

SUDDENLY Crawley became bold. He wanted to see the man whose life he had taken; to gloat over his deed, and, if possible, to steal a glance at Margaret. He knew she would be too distracted to notice him, especially if he kept in the background. She was probably in her bedroom by this time, likely in a dead faint.

Putting on a big coat, the collar of which he pulled up around his face, and pulling his hat low over his eyes, Crawley started downstairs. He ran into a man in the hall. Crawley seized the stranger's arm.

"What's the noise about?" Crawley asked. "Is something wrong?"

The man's answer was to point down the hall. Crawley wheeled, planning to feign surprize when he saw Brinslow's body. In the darkened hall he could observe nothing but a shadowy form on a blanket. Simulating concern, he strode forward.

The body on the blanket was that of Margaret! The tawny hair he had so loved was wet and stringy, and the eyes were stiff in death.

The man was made of steel. He gave no sign that he had met the shock of his life, except for a dilation of his eyes that went unnoticed in the half-light.

"We found her in the bathtub," said the stranger, his voice low, as if not to awaken the dead woman. "Evidently she died of heart failure. That's strange, though, in one so young."

Crawley turned around. He wished the blithering idiot would go; that he could be left alone with Margaret.

There was a scurry at the door. Another man came bustling through the hall. He did not see the blanket and its burden.

"Where's Mrs. Brinslow?" he asked.

Crawley pointed to the body.

"Is she dead?"

He read the answer in Crawley's eyes.

"I'm almost glad!" the newcomer cried hoarsely. "I came to tell her that her husband was killed in an auto wreck this morning!"

BAD MEDICINE

by Alanson Skinner

MICHAEL ANGELO stood behind the agency building shining shoes for the agent's wife. Whatever resentment he might have felt at being assigned so menial a task, and one certainly not within the scope of his duties as agency clerk, he concealed behind a mask of stolid indifference. His parents had not given him the name of Michael Angelo. To them, and to his people, the Folles Avoines, he was He-comes-rumbling, a man of the Thunder clan. But, to ears accustomed to the English language alone, the native name seemed hard, and so the good missionaries at the Friends' School, having run out of William Penns, George Washingtons, and Abraham Lincolns for that school generation, had renamed him Michael Angelo, and the name had stuck to him through their school, followed him through Carlisle, and was now his official cognomen on the Indian reservation. One of his brothers, with utter disregard to family ties, even as the white man knows them, was named, at the same time, Henry Clay, and another Robert E. Lee. However, Mike did not care; most of his people labored under two titles, one for government purposes, and one for home consumption, and they found it handy, rather than otherwise.

A shadow fell across the bench where Michael Angelo sat, and he looked up to see an elderly Indian, partly clad in the native garb of his tribe; leggings of deerskin, moccasins, a calico shirt, and a Stetson hat that crowned his shock of dark hair, bobbed at his shoulders. The older man sat down on the end of the bench, and produced a pipe with a carved redstone bowl and a short wooden stem. From a beaded buckskin pouch he extracted some tobacco, mixed with kinnikinic, loaded his pipe, with great deliberateness, tamped down the tobacco with a little carved stick, lighted it, and smoked a while in silence. Then he began to speak in their ancient tongue. In a rich, clear, bell-like voice he spoke, and a white bystander, hearing the sonorous cadence of his words, the gentle rise and fall of their pitch, after the custom of the Folles Avoines, would have imagined that the old man was addressing words of encouragement or sympathy to the other, but he would have been grossly mistaken. The voice of the elder was, indeed, warm and sympathetic, but the words were bitter and sarcastic.

"So, nephew, my sister's son, you are cleaning moccasins for the agent's woman! It is good! Your great-grandfather, Fierce-for-his-country, was a man the very mention of whose name made the mountains tremble. It is even said that he killed five Yellow Earth warriors at one time. They attacked him from ambush, it is said, but he slew them all with his wife's corn pounder. Then there was your mother's father, Scares-them-all. He too was of the nature of a warrior. He joined the Sioux and went on the warpath with them far up the Upper Missouri, and came home covered with scars and with his shirt and leggings fringed with the scalps of enemies. Then there was your father, who fought in the Black Hawk war. They relate that he swam out into the Mississippi and upset a canoe loaded with Yellow Earths, warriors all, in the dark, and drowned three of them and escaped alive. They say truly, too, for I was there also, and drowned two more myself. I speak not of your father's family, but they too were never known to wear skirts. They were of the Thunder clan like yourself, of course, but, until now, who ever heard of a bearer of the Feathered Name [a member of the Thunder Clan] doing a woman's work? And you call yourself a *man!*"

Michael Angelo swept the brush back and forth over the shoe that he held in his hand. To all appearances he might not have heard a word of what his uncle had said. His pulse had not quickened, his face was as immobile as ever. Only his eyes betrayed any inward emotion. They had narrowed to slits, and from them shot a venomous gleam that, in a small way, reminded one of the crooked lightnings that flash from the eyes of his distant relatives the Thunder Birds, when they sweep the earth with their rains and loose their bolts of fire and destruction. Still Mike did not speak.

"It would not be so bad," continued the elder Indian, "if"—(he gave the agent's wife her name in the vernacular, and though descriptive, and keenly apt, it was not complimentary enough to bear translation) —"she were a friend to our people. One may do much for a friend, with honor. But she is not. She hates us. When she was employed at the agency, before the agent's real wife died, she treated us like dogs when we came in on business. Yes, she was too good for anything Indian, except our money. She was glad to take that. But the agent's old wife, she was a real woman. She had sympathy for the distressed, and help for the sick and poor. But this one treats us all, and you especially, like dirt under her feet. And, now that she has married the agent, she has her chance to do us harm every day. I don't see how he came to marry her—unless she worked magic on him. They say she believes in Indian magic. And He-comes-rumbling, of the Thunder clan, does a woman's work for that old Stinking Turtle!"

Michael Angelo continued with his task, and his uncle, having vented his spleen, went on about his business. But every bitter word that he had uttered had sunk deep in the breast of He-comes-rumbling. The wicked glint had left his eyes, and outwardly he was calm, but his blood boiled. It is no light thing among Indians to take a scolding from one's uncle, and he was roused to action. The shoes shone as never before, and still he worked on them. It was a long time before he carried them in to the agent's wife, but their fine polish brought him no thanks.

A large, arrogant woman, built like a draft horse, with coarse iron-gray hair and a red-streaked complexion, she curled back her lips contemptuously and switched back her skirt as if she feared contamination from the Indian as he entered the room.

"Put them there, Mike," she said, with a scorn that seemed to add "You dog" to the spoken words.

"Certainly, Mrs. Dachs," said Michael Angelo, with all due courtesy, and he withdrew, quietly, as he had entered. As he passed from the room his eyes fell upon a book handsomely bound in limp leather, and bearing the name of a famous work on religion and health. "That's so," he thought in English; "she is a Christian cultist. My ideas of that faith are hazy, to say the least, but it seems to me that they believe that mind can be made to triumph over matter. Now the corollary to that is that they believe that unless they have sufficient faith, matter will triumph over mind. Not so very different from Bad Medicine among us, is it?" A smile crossed his dark features. "*Eh, anamekut!*" His thoughts reverted to his own language. "*Kenabutch gagun!*—Dog-gone it, I think I have it! Pagan Science!" With a chuckle the Indian passed out of the hall and into the world of his people.

OLD Owl Man stared into the glowing embers of his wigwam fire and smoked. His hard, wrinkled features held something sinister about them. His hooked nose, long and sharp, his high forehead, with its crown of scanty hair that rose in two peaks over his forehead, and his strange, fascinating eyes, large and dark, attracted the attention of all who saw them, red or white, and gave him at times the look of the owl his namesake. At other times he resembled more a giant spider, and then, again, if one touched his clammy skin, there was the cold smooth feeling of a snake. Among red men and white he bore an evil reputation. The Indians, who loathed and dreaded him the most, would have slain him long ago, save for the fear that they held of his dread magic. It was whispered that he had the power to take from his sacred bundle the skin of a bear, sing a certain song, don the skin, and become a bear. Others said that he derived his powers from the owl, and could become an owl at will. Still others claimed that he was in league with the serpents, and that the master of all snakes, the greatest power for evil on "This Island", the earth, the Great Horned Serpent, came out of the Bear River, or from a dismal swale not far from his lodge, and held mysterious communion with him. To pacify the Snake, his master, it was necessary for him to take a human life a year. These and other tales of gruesome rites gave him a reputation that caused people to avoid him. But tonight he had company—Michael Angelo.

"Eh, grandson," said the old wizard, "what you ask me is very hard. It is well known that Indian medicines have no effect on most white people."

"But it is already whispered among us that she really believes in some of our magic. The women say that she married the agent by means of a love medicine that she got from old Betsey, the medicine-woman."

"About old Betsey I know nothing. It may well be true. That white woman and her family have always lived on the Indians, and among them. It is certain that they despise us, and have done us all the harm in their power, but yet they may believe in some of our ways. Yes, grandson, it can be done, it can be done. But it can not be done for nothing. Four times I must try before I can be successful and that calls for a four-legged animal—a leg to pay for each attempt."

"*Hau, Nimaso!* It is well, my grandfather! There is a four-legged animal hitched to yonder sapling. It is yours. Moreover, that day that you are successful, on that very day, I say, I will ride over and leave another pony hitched to the same sapling."

IT WAS a warm spring night, and rain was drizzling down the valley of the Bear, enveloping the agency buildings in mist and moisture. Mrs. Dachs, crossing the agency yard, was surprized to see what appeared to be a ball of fire passing through the air, waist-high, and not far distant. That she saw it in truth, and was not resting under any illusion, she was quickly convinced, for her house servant, an Indian girl called Mani, who was following her, screamed aloud. "Oh, Mrs. Dachs, it's a witch!"

"Nonsense, you little fool, there are no such things as witches!"

"Yes, ma'am, all my people believe it! But mebbe it ain't to bother us, they say that when an Indian witch begins to witch you to death he comes first like a ball of fire, and then he changes into a fox and barks at you and—"

"Yap!" A single shrill bark cut the air, and before the two women stood a small red foxling.

"Scat, you devil!" cried Mrs. Dachs, and there was a shrillness in her voice betokening a fear she would not admit. The foxling vanished.

"JOHN," said Mrs. Dachs to her husband that night, "I wish you would forbid old Owl Man to come to the agency. The dirty old scoundrel was in today when I was using the telephone. He didn't speak to me, but he fixed those terrible eyes on me with such a look! They seemed to burn me, and I can't help it, he gets on my nerves."

"Now, Flora, he's a harmless old codger, and he was down on business. I haven't any excuse to drive him away. He can't help it if he looks unattractive."

"You don't need any excuse to drive any Indian away. You are the agent, and you have authority over them. A dirty Indian hasn't any rights like white people anyway. I hate the whole boiling of them; they're no better than beasts! What the government had to give them this good valuable land for, anyway, is more than I can see. Why didn't they just take the land and let the Indians starve?"

"Well, Flora, if you say so, I will order the Indian police to chase old Owl Man back home. He isn't educated enough to complain if he gets unfair treatment, and even if he were, we'd find a way to hush him. We always have hushed the others."

MIDNIGHT, and a full moon, but a cloudy sky. When the drifting cloud-banks passed by, the agency was lit up with a clear white light, with inky shadows here and there, and the jetty forest shades beyond. Agent Dachs slept soundly, but Flora, his wife, tossed and turned. Her usually florid face was haggard, and she muttered aloud. The door opened softly, and a strange hunched figure slipped noiselessly into the room. Like one of the black moon-shadows outside it seemed to drift across the floor, making no sound as it slithered over the Navaho blankets that served as rugs. It paused by the bed a moment, and then raised itself erect. It seemed to be a bear—an ugly bald-faced black bear, that stood there swaying backward and forward. It bent over the twisting form of Flora Dachs, and spread out its paws. A moonbeam, darting across the room, fell upon a white patch on the animal's chest, and was reflected from a slit in the dried hide whence peered the terrible eyes of Owl Man. Softly the wizard swayed there, then he bent over, placing his very lips on the mouth of his victim. Ensued a horrible gurgling sound like a death-rattle, and for a moment the coarse figure of the woman writhed hideously. Then the bear dropped on all fours and was gone. Scarcely had it vanished from the room when the

woman's voice rose in a terrified scream: "John! John! Wake up! Those —— —— Injuns have witched me, John!"

"Nonsense, Flora! Wake up yourself, you're having a nightmare! There is no one here!"

"But there was, John! A bear was just in this room, sucking my breath away!"

"That's impossible, Flora, the doors are all locked and—" The agent's voice trailed away and ended in a choking gasp. On the floor, shining as if with phosphorescence, were plainly outlined the pad prints of a giant bear. Flora was in shrieking hysterics.

A PLEASANT spring day, and, with a party of white friends, Flora Dachs was gathering trailing arbutus along the banks of the Bear River. There was nothing to suggest evil. It was not a country frequented by uncanny creatures; and witches, among Indians as well as other races, prefer the dark for the practise of their craft. Yet, as the nerve-racked woman placed her hand among the ferns to seize a flower, there was a swift stroke, and a vicious triangular head shot past her hand, the rough scaled skin of the snake grazing her flesh like sandpaper. A rattlesnake had struck without the usual warning, and missed. From the gloomy depths of the pines across the river an owl hooted mournfully, and somewhere in the distance came a demoniac cackle of laughter from a loon. The woman, first livid with fear, fainted in the ferns.

A thousand memories troubled Flora Dachs. A bold, unscrupulous woman, she had spared no means to attain her ambitions. Again and again dead faces rose from the grave, pallid and cold, to torment her with the glare of set and gelid eyes, as she tossed on her bed. A woman of some education and pretensions to a mentality which she did not possess, a coarse-fibered creature, who believed she had no nerves, who tried to view the world and her associates with a cold austerity and skepticism, she was beginning to find out strange things about herself. And one was that fear, which she believed she had banished from among her emotions as a fraud, was beginning to dominate her. Among her troubled visions was Owl Man, the old sorcerer. Driven from the agency at her behest, somehow, and in the most unexpected places, he contrived to meet her, and always she felt her eyes drawn by his —those strange, fascinating eyes, so terrible, and yet so irresistible, which held the gaze and seemed to sear the flesh. She knew, and was ashamed to say, that he seemed to terrorize her. And somewhere, subconsciously, she felt that there was a purpose behind it that she could sense but not understand. It was as if the old man sought vengeance for some forgotten wrong. And whenever they met there was a terrible vision that night for the tormented woman, or an untoward and nearly fatal accident. It seemed as if she were being drawn, by an inexorable power, into a tragic trap. Yet, while her primal self cried out in terror, her veneer of education laughed hollowly and said there was no such thing, and no white man would accept the evidence she had to offer as proof.

IT WAS two hours past midnight. Her husband away, Flora was trying to sleep alone. Racked by her apprehensions, haggard and worn by memories and recent experiences, she tossed and rolled. There were memories that would not down, things she could not forget—things that no one living could know. There was the sick Indian girl whom she had cared for, and who died, leaving a great fortune in timber holdings to her. It was not murder—no, not *that!* A little

neglect, that was all! But the memory tortured. As she buried her head under the covers, it seemed as if her head was on fire and her heart burned in her body. Something, like a bright ray, pierced her, searching out her soul.

"I didn't! You d——, I didn't!" she screamed, sitting bolt upright, and throwing back the bedclothes. Her fascinated stare through the open window was held by a huge hunched-up object on the limb of a tree that nearly touched the wall—a giant owl, with luminous eyes that fixed a hideous gaze upon her. With a scream both of fear and rage, the doomed woman sprang from her bed and hurled herself at the monster bird. But there was no impact of bodies; instead she hurtled through space, through the form of the owl itself, which dissolved in shadows, and crashed through the light branches to the rocky ground below. In the distance a barred owl hooted three times, exultantly.

"N'HAU, grandfather! It is I, He-comes-rumbling, of the Feathered Name, and I come riding another four-legged animal as a gift to you, according to my promise! *Hau, n'dabokinan,* I give it to you."

"*Kanwinna!* No indeed, grandson! I cannot take it! Instead there are four horses tied behind the lodge waiting as a gift for you! Yes, take them, you have indeed earned them! It is true that I have a little mysterious power, but, when I had my sacred dream of the Horned Serpent, as a young man, it was vouchsafed to me that I might never use it on my own behalf, no, not unless someone else asked me to use it for him would I loose the evil things I hold. Four winters I have waited for this! Yes, perhaps you did not know, but Flows-swiftly, the girl who died and left all her property to the one who fell from the window, was my grandchild!

"Listen, grandson of mine, you did well to come to me. But it was by my will that you came. I called you in spirit. That I can do easily. You are a modern young man, you have had the benefits of a white man's education, and you and I are together in this, so I will tell you something about how it was done. But some of it I can not explain. That part is mysterious, and comes from the Horned Snake, my dream guardian. I have power to make people—yes, even you—see things that do not exist. I made that woman see a ball of fire and a fox. Oh, yes, the Indian girl who was with her saw them too. It was easy. I stared them both in the face at the agency, and I thought, hard: you will see thus and so, tonight! I made her see a snake that struck without warning. I made her see an owl (ha ha! an owl that looked like me!) in the tree, and when she tried to throttle it, it was not there, and she fell to the rocks! But I was the bear that came into her room. Yes, even I, Owl Man, dressed in an old black bear skin, came in and stood over her, and she cried out aloud in her sleep and told me that she had done away with my granddaughter. She had tormented and neglected her to death. Yes, and all the wrongs she had ever done to my people and hers came out that night, and never again did she forget them, even for a single moment. She could only remember a vision of a bear who sucked her breath, and she and her husband saw only fiery tracks across the floor. But I *knew,* ho ho! Listen, grandson, I am the last sorcerer among the tribe, and I am an old man. Yet I have power! When you hear from Indians again about the things that they have seen, do not believe what you hear they saw, but believe that back of it all there is a mysterious power, such as I have from the Horned Snake, that makes them think they have seen things that do not exist!"

A Touching Tale of Child Psychology

A MIND *in* SHADOW

By TESSIDA SWINGES

I CAN'T keep it any longer, doctor. I must tell. It's too much for a boy to keep to himself.

I can't tell my mother 'cause it's so terrible and I haven't any dad any more and you know me since I'm born.

I—I—oh, doctor, please come nearer; I don't want to say it out loud, I guess I—I'm a murderer! Yes, don't be frightened, but I killed my —my baby brother! I killed Freddy not once, but—twice! So you see I'm —what I said and I'm only fifteen years old.

No, no, doctor, I'm not feverish any more. I know what I'm talking about. I'm almost well; you said so yourself.

It's five weeks, isn't it, that I've had this brain fever? I guess, doctor, it's because I had this all on my mind; and telling it will help me, truly and honest. Just let me hold your hand and tell you, and please, listen and listen hard 'cause I'm going to tell you just how everything happened.

You know how I loved my little brother, and he was crazy about me. I honestly liked to take him out in his carriage and show him off to the other kids on the block 'cause Freddy was the cutest and smartest and brightest —say, doctor, you ought to know; you helped when he was born—wasn't he a wonderful kid? Oh, doctor, I didn't mean any harm! You know that, and I guess He—He up there knows, too.

Where was I? Oh, yes. Well, I used to take him in his carriage up that little hill; then I'd run down ahead and be ready to catch him with my arms open like this—see—and Freddy'd clap his hands and make such cute, funny little noises 'cause he was having such a bully time. He'd kick his fat legs like he always wanted some more of that game, and his blue eyes'd be big and happy and shining and then—please hold my hand tight, now comes the hard part to tell.

Well, one day the carriage came down the hill and there—was a stone —and I didn't see it—and the carriage bumped up sharp and—and Freddy fell out—sideways.

Oh, doctor, you don't know how scared I was—scared so stiff I couldn't move for maybe two hours—only I suppose it wasn't so long anyhow, but honestly it seemed so 'cause I just couldn't make my legs go and I got most awful cold and I could only look at baby on the ground.

At last I saw Freddy's arm move; then the ice in my legs melted like, and I could go to little Freddy and pick him up, but his eyes were closed just like he was asleep and I waited for him to wake up. Well, he did wake up. Oh, yes, he woke up, and I thought everything was all right.

Next day I licked a guy who did that carriage-catching stunt with his baby sister and I told him he might kill her. You see, doctor, some of us kids don't think until something happens, and that was me too.

No, doctor, that isn't all. I was just thinking. Now, please, will you listen some more?

Well, when I came home from school next day Freddy didn't smile at me and stretch out his arms. He

didn't make those cunning little noises like goo-goo. He—he didn't know me. Mamma said he didn't seem to be sick. She couldn't make it out and she got awful worried 'cause, you see, he didn't even know mamma.

We waited another day and watched and then she sent for you.

You remember you examined him and you felt him all over and you kept shaking your head. Then you felt his head all over again and you looked sad and asked if he'd had a fall.

Oh, doctor, I was terribly scared. I was hiding on the stairs and shaking something awful—no, please, doctor, I won't work myself into a fever again. It does me good to tell it—honest it does; if you'll only let me get it all off my mind and please listen. Yes, I'll take it easy.

Let me see, what was I saying? Oh, yes, mamma told you how careful and trustworthy I was and that nothing could happen to baby in my care.

That made me feel worse yet and I started to tell and cried out only it was a funny thing that no sound came from my throat 'cause it felt so tight like I'd swallowed something too big and it stuck there.

Well, I couldn't eat any more and I couldn't play and I couldn't study and felt awful sick and mise'ble. I hardly talked any more. All I could do was just watch Freddy and wait for him to notice things, but his blue eyes were always like—like a candle was blown out behind them.

You was coming all the time and looked awful sad and sorry and shook your head a lot and talked more about Freddy's head and one day you put your hand on my mother's shoulder and said something low about being afraid for baby's mind. You remember how excited mamma got and she looked terrible white and yelled out:

"It can't be! I won't believe it! God couldn't let the bright little spirit of this child be killed!"

That's what mamma said. I remember it, you see, 'cause the way she said it made me get cold all over and I shivered 'specially about the killing 'cause—'cause, you see, I k—killed Freddy's b—b—bright little spirit and you know how I lo—loved him.

No, I'm not crying, only it's awful sad for Freddy and p—poor little mamma and me, too. Yes, I'll take the medicine now, doctor . . . Ugh! Now, can I go on? No, it won't hurt me.

What was I saying? Let me think a minute.

Oh, yes, I heard a neighbor say to another lady: "Isn't it awful for that bright child to be an idiot?"

They said he should have been killed outright rather than be an idiot and they said it was God's blessing my mother had me to comfort her.

When I heard that I locked myself into my room and I told God I wasn't a blessing. I was a murderer of a bright little spirit and that He ought to let me die 'cause I was wicked. I got thinking and thinking terrible things until my head ached something awful and I guess I was very weak from not eating and next thing I knew you was saying I had diphtheria.

The worst of it was I couldn't have Freddy with me any more. I couldn't kiss him good night. You wouldn't even let me see him 'cause you said my sickness was very catching and if Freddy got my breath he'd die.

Then I thought maybe now I'd soon be dead, like I told God I ought to be for punishment, and I wanted to help myself die so I didn't take the medicine and didn't mind you and so I got worse—you remember? Well, that's why.

You see, doctor, I thought then mamma'd feel so bad about Freddy when I told her about the fall it was better I should help myself to die, don't you see?

WHERE was I again? Do you remember, doctor? Oh, yes. Well, once I woke up and mamma was kneeling by my bed, and I guess she was praying, 'cause she said:

"Oh, dear God, have mercy! Spare this one of sound mind. Don't take this one, not this one, not this one!" She kept saying that over and over, like she wanted the other one taken.

Well, doctor, I had to do a whole lot more thinking after that until my head ached, but I was too tired out to talk anyway, only sometimes when I came back from far away-like I knew I must try to get better 'cause mamma wanted it.

But I heard things. I heard nurse say one day that it would be a blessing if the other child—Freddy, you know—could die on a bed of sickness instead of me.

You said to her something about that you wished you could be brave enough to let the other child catch it and die on a bed of sickness and put it out of its misery, but you shook your head sorry-like and said that not many men were brave enough for that.

Ouch, doctor, you're pressing my hand too hard now and please, don't look so angry. Was it wrong for me to listen that time? You see I couldn't help listening. Don't you want me to tell this part? I'm only telling you—All right.

After that I guess I was feverish a whole lot 'cause I had terrible dreams about putting Freddy out of his misery; and even when I could think, it was always that if I killed Freddy's bright little spirit maybe I should be that person brave enough to put him out of his misery and maybe then I'd be forgiven and everybody'd know that it was 'cause I loved mamma and Freddy so much. I did an awful lot of thinking about the blessing if he could die on a bed of sickness and about my catching disease, and little by little I had it all thought out.

Yes, doctor, I know you said I was in high fever, but I tell you all the same I thought it out just as plain as plain can be. Now, please wait, doctor, there's more coming. I'm feeling all right—truly I am, just feel my pulse. See! Oh, all right, I'll rest a minute . . . Now can I go on?

One night mamma took nurse's place, and 'cause I guess she was so tired worrying about everything, she fell tight asleep. So no one was watching and something in my head kep' saying, 'Now is the time, be brave; put him out of his misery;' so I got up and went to Freddy's room. I told him to forgive me but it would be better for him to die on a bed of sickness and I was going to help him do it 'cause I was brave.

I put my arms around him and held him tight and kissed him and kissed him on the mouth and breathed my catching sickness into his face so he could catch it quick and then I said good-bye and put him back in his crib. I was awful weak and I guess I almost fainted and I dropped him back on the bed so hard that I'm afraid I bumped him too hard, but I guess it didn't matter 'cause I'd fixed it so he'd be out of his misery soon anyhow.

Oh, look, doctor—you dropped a tear on my hand. Are you feeling so sorry? Please hold my hand yet a while. It makes it easier for me.

Well, next day I heard he caught it and no one knew how he got it and than I don't remember much 'cause everything was sort of confused in my head. Only once I remember hearing some one say it was a miracle and a blessing so I guess he—he died soon 'cause you see I gave him the blessing and then I don't remember anything until I woke up here and you said I had brain fever and now you know why.

All the same I wish I was dead 'cause now I'm not feverish and I can see I was wicked and not brave and

I'm a murderer and all because I wanted to play a nice game with Freddy in the carriage.

Yes, I'm listening to you, doctor. I'm paying attention. What, doctor? I told you in my fever that I let him fall, and you knew before that? You guessed it by my actions? But then why are you proud that I told you everything? Oh, I see. Yes, doctor, I'll rest until you come back with the medicine.

You back already? Listen, someone's knocking. There's my mamma coming. And—and doctor, am I feverish? Listen, I think I hear Freddy—Freddy! What's the matter? Oh, look, look, there's Freddy! Then he didn't die; he didn't catch it! And he knows me! Look, doctor—mamma, he knows me! Listen, he's making those cute funny noises. Goo, goo, Freddy! He knows me; he knows everything again! Maybe I'm dreaming. Are you sure he's all right? . . . How? . . . I did it when I bumped him back into his bed? I can't understand. What bone, doctor? Oh, never mind, I don't understand all those big doctor words anyhow and I don't care. Freddy's got his bright little spirit again and everything's all right.

I guess I'm some happy guy right now.

THE GARGOYLE

A TALE OF DEVIL WORSHIP

by

Greye La Spina

Author of "Invaders From the Dark," "The Tortoise-Shell Cat," etc.

THE STORY SO FAR

LUKE PORTER, a young painter, joins Herbert Binney, alias Cagliostro Moderno, in a visit to Fanewold Castle, where live Guy Fane and his mother and a beautiful girl called Sybil. Cagliostro is an occultist and pseudo-magician, and has come in response to Guy Fane's request for his aid in an important experiment in magic, assisted by a young man of fine and handsome physique (Luke).

Guy Fane proves to be a monstrosity so hideous that he appears to no one in the light, and wears a thick black veil at all times, so that even his own mother will be spared the sight of his frightful countenance. Luke learns through Alden (Sybil's old nurse) that Guy Fane is planning some terrible attack upon Sybil's immortal soul. She takes him behind the curtains, and from his hiding place he hears Guy Fane and his mother plotting, and learns that the monstrosity plans to free himself from his hideous body by black magic and attain a new and beautiful body for himself. To Luke this seems a madcap, preposterous idea.

Luke and Cagliostro are held virtually prisoners in the castle. The drawbridge is up, and the moat is full of venomous snakes. Luke finds that Guy Fane is sacrificing doves and lambs to Lucifer in preparation for his great work of black magic. Meantime, Luke is falling in love with Sybil.

CHAPTER 6

MEPHISTOPHELES

MASON, appearing at Luke's door in the morning, brought another message from the Master, who sent word that he would like a few words with Mr. Porter, if possible, directly after breakfast.

"He has arranged to receive you in his study, sir. You may find it more agreeable, sir, as it is fairly well lighted. I may say, sir, that this is most unusual on Mr. Fane's part; he rarely receives visitors except in complete darkness," beamed Mason.

"Where is Mr. Moderno this morning?" Luke inquired. He was anxious to get in touch with Herbert Binney at the earliest occasion, to see how much the little man knew of Guy Fane's plans.

"I believe he is in the chapel, sir, busy with something for the Master."

With this Luke had to content himself, and immediately after breakfast, at which Sybil did not appear, he followed Mason again down winding stairs and through mazes of corridors.

The room into which he was finally ushered was a spacious apartment, fairly well lighted by carefully shaded candles in sconces on the walls. To a height of four feet from the floor, the walls were lined with solidly packed bookcases. Padded armchairs invited. At the farther end of the room, in a niche in the wall, a great crystal globe, hanging on a hardly discernible, silvery chain, caught, reflected, and broke into shimmering rainbow colors the soft radiance of the shaded candles. The light, however, was not the honest golden glow of the average candle, but a sickly

reddish light, augmented by the shades, which were dull red. At the side of the room, far back, a delicate lattice extending to eight feet in height, carried with its presence the inference that the Master was there.

"Pray forgive me if I startle you," begged Guy Fane's voice with plaintive intonation. "I know it must seem strange to converse with a man who remains hidden from sight, but alas, my infliction has laid this heavy cross upon me. You will note that I have done my poor best to light the room better, Mr. Porter. Please try to do me the justice of believing that I am not a mummer who attempts to mystify by such cheap methods as darkness and an unseen speaker. *My* magic is of an entirely different type, I assure you. . . . Won't you draw up a chair near this screen? Thank you so much! Ah, I feel sure that we shall get along famously, and that your presence here will be fraught with much satisfaction to me."

Luke sensed the undertone of something not in accord with the words. Guy Fane was amusing himself by conveying one meaning to the artist, while he laughed inwardly at a significance in his words intelligible only to himself. Instinctively, Luke was on guard. But in settling the chair, he seated himself in such a way that his face was partly in shadow; he did not intend that the unseen watcher should startle him and read that astonishment on his face.

"When you came here as Cagliostro Moderno's assistant, it was understood that you were heart-whole and unmarried. I must reassure myself on this point. It is the basis of a plan that furnishes the reason for Sybil's existence. I cannot explain fully now, but you shall understand all within a comparatively short time, when I have every reason to hope you will be furnished with the key to the mystery. The first important thing you are here for is to become the suitor of my cousin Sybil. And I shall not frown upon your addresses."

Luke sprang from his chair in some heat.

"That is too much! What do you take me for, that you make such a cold-blooded proposal? I am not the man to fall in love at your behest, I assure you—to say nothing of the implied disrespect toward the young lady."

"Calm yourself, my hot-blooded and enthusiastic young friend," soothed the Master's voice, reaching out after him as he paced the floor, with almost tangible forcefulness. "I take you for a gentleman. But consider . . . . I know Sybil's prospects. I have her interests at heart. Her own father desired that she be immured within these walls until I considered it wise for her to emerge; he did not wish her to fall victim to some fortune-hunter who might rob her of all and leave her broken-hearted. Her private fortune, Mr. Porter, is immense."

"Which doesn't interest me in the slightest," cried Luke angrily.

"Ah, but consider! I have thought long and gravely how to provide a suitable husband for my pretty little innocent cousin. Through my occult relationships, I tried to find a man—young, handsome, healthy, heart-free—who might find it easy to love such a girl as Sybil, and save her from the suffering she might otherwise experience in less worthy hands. Be honest, Mr. Porter. If you could gain the love and respect of Sybil Fane, would you—granted that you grew to love her—feel it a wrong done the girl, to provide her with a good man who loved her first of all for herself?"

Luke stopped him abruptly.

"I cannot deny that your words are couched in a sophistry that carries reluctant conviction to my intellect. But something tells me—"

"Oh, how you weary me, you cautious and particular man! With your

'somethings' that tell you quite nothing! Forgive me if I point out that you are meeting honest frankness on my part with intellectual distrust on yours. Can sincerity be so rare to your experience, that you cannot recognize it when you meet it face to face?''

The speaker's voice was so earnest with deep feeling that Luke almost discredited his own intuitional misgivings and his knowledge of the speaker's nefarious schemes.

''On the surface you may be right in what you propose, Mr. Fane, but there is something despicably small in discussing Miss Fane in such a way.''

''There you are again!'' the voice reproached him. ''You know that the thing is innately right, but you hold that to discuss it is indelicate. What strange reasoning! Perhaps—perhaps you are not the man I thought you to be, sir? Would you like to retire from this indelicate situation?'' Fine irony in the intonation. ''If so, you have only to ring for Mason; he will get your belongings; you can shake off the dust of Fanewold Castle from your too-delicate person.''

LUKE sat down abruptly. This would not be what he wanted. Not now. . . . The die was cast. He knew that he could not leave the castle leaving Sybil to the tender mercies of this strange monomaniac. He spoke quickly, abruptly, and with sincerity.

''I admire your cousin heartily, Mr. Fane. She is a most unusual girl for these modern, flapper days. I can hardly say that my admiration will ripen into something warmer—but—I ardently wish to remain.''

''Mr. Porter, I cannot find words to thank you for your decision, with all that it implies,'' significantly. ''For it, I believe I shall owe you a lifelong debt. Credit me with not being as lacking in delicacy as you may have been led to believe by this brief conversation. You will, I am sure, entertain other and stronger feelings toward me as our acquaintance progresses to its destined end.''

Luke sensed again some subtle significance in the words that as yet he could not understand.

''It is to be hoped I will,'' he retorted pointedly.

The unseen laughed softly as if to himself, and that thrill of strange distrust shot through Luke's mind again.

''Look, young man, and say if such an innocent and legitimate temptation was ever offered you before in your life?''

The wall above one bookcase seemed to become misty. It faded more and more. In its place there grew the soft light of an autumn morning. And as the picture grew clearer, Luke realized that by some legerdemain or hypnotic trick he was looking directly at Sybil Fane, as she stood among her doves in the roof garden.

''Is it not easy to love such a woman?'' whispered the voice of the unseen. ''And easy to win her regard? Could you find a fairer woman in the world? Or one more easily molded to your ideal? I warn you, sir, to make haste with your wooing. In two weeks that girl comes of age, with the right to go out into the world she longs to see. Will you let her fall into unscrupulous hands? Save her, if you are a true man, from those unknown perils that otherwise await her!''

Luke replied from his heart:

''Mr. Fane, what you are and what your designs and motives may be, I do not know. But I warn you, if I fall in love with your cousin, nobody, not you yourself, shall ever lay a finger on her to harm or even to startle her.''

''Ah! There speaks the kind of man to whom I can gladly give my cousin's hand,'' applauded Guy Fane approvingly. ''I know you will protect her from everyone but yourself,'' ambiguously. Before Luke could re-

sent the delicate insinuation, the Master continued: "If you do not mind, I shall be excused now, as I have much to do. I hope to see you again within a few days, Mr. Porter, and I hope that then all my warm wishes shall have come to fruition."

CHAPTER 7

ALDEN'S SECRET

A CAREFREE day passed in Sybil's company. The portrait Luke had begun was growing into a vivid likeness of this charming, ingenuous girl, who in no way concealed the interest she felt for him, firmly believing the artist to be her accepted lover and future husband. As the picture came to completion, Luke realized that he was devoted to Sybil Fane's service, body and soul, no matter at what cost.

During the early evening he managed to get a minute's conversation with Herbert Binney. The little man, draped in a black mantle, was just emerging from his room as Luke happened to be passing. The occultist drew back with what seemed real resentment, when Luke almost collared him in his eagerness.

"Do not touch me!" he cried hastily. "I am engaged in work of such a lofty character that I dare not come in contact with souls as immersed in materialism as yours."

"You needn't shout so, my good Cagliostro," the artist protested. "I'm not deaf, really."

Without, however, lowering his voice, the adept continued, as he tried to slip past the young man:

"Purblind fool! Who are you, to accost one who has been favored by the great Lord Lucifer himself? Stand aside and let me pass!"

"Are you crazy?" Luke managed to ask, in astonishment.

"Stand aside!" shouted Cagliostro Moderno fiercely. "The Master waits."

"But I have something important to tell you, my good Binney."

"We shall meet again, Mr. Porter, I assure you," loudly declared the occultist. "Until then, beware how you approach me uninvited."

With that, he slid off down the corridor at a pace that closely resembled flight, leaving the artist staring after him with the conviction that magic, either black or white, had turned the little man's brain.

Thoughtful, Luke returned to Sybil's boudoir.

"Don't know what's come over Cagliostro," he confided, more to Alden than to the girl. "He's simply fed up to the neck with mystery and refuses even to shake hands with me!"

Alden's wrinkled face grew tense. She moved across the room so that she would pass close to Luke, and as she walked nearer, she murmured in low tones:

"Four o'clock this morning. The roof-garden. Don't fail me."

Luke nodded his head casually as if in time to the music Sybil was now bringing out of the harp, but Alden, catching his eyes, understood.

At dinner that evening Luke avoided with suspicion any food that might serve as a conveyance for an opiate, but the only thing that fell under his suspicion was a highly spiced pudding with wine sauce. He noticed that Madam Fane ate no sauce, but Sybil, fond of sweets, called for a second helping of it. His doubts were confirmed later that evening, as Sybil complained of drowziness, and retired early.

EXCITEMENT and anxiety served Luke in good stead. Sleep apparently had deserted him; he was wide awake and alert in every fiber of his being. Understanding that no locks could keep him from inspection by visitors, he decided to feign sleep. He therefore threw himself upon the bed as if overcome by drowziness. Un-

der his pillow he slipped his automatic and his electric flash. Well for him that he took this course, instead of going directly to the garden to wait there for his appointment with Alden! In less than half an hour after he had flung himself upon the bed, wholly dressed, the tapestry stirred vaguely in the light, which he had left on by the bedside, and the tall form of Madam Fane emerged and advanced to his side.

She bent over and regarded him keenly; he could feel that fixed gaze penetrating, even with his eyes closed. After a long moment, she sighed involuntarily, said, "Poor fellow!" and her muffled footfalls died away.

It was some time before he dared open his eyes, but when he did so, the room was quiet and he felt that he was alone once more. Evidently she had wished to make sure that he slept soundly. That meant there was something afoot.

Luke lay with relaxed muscles for what seemed ages before he very cautiously consulted his wrist-watch to find it close upon midnight, that mystic hour when tombs open and unhappy spirits leave their moldy beds for a brief space. An uncontrollable presentiment gripped his heart with intolerable foreboding. Luke was intuitive; just now he could have sworn, without knowing precisely what he meant, that Evil was stalking abroad. He could not stand it any longer to lie supinely on the bed—waiting.

He got up, deciding to slip out into the garden before something happened to detain him. If he chanced to be missed, was it likely that he would be sought out there? And if discovered there, what more natural than that the moon, the starry vault, and a sentimental temperament had combined to attract him to enjoy the romantic beauties of the night? Luke, with the electric flash and the pistol, searched his apartment as thoroughly as he could, to satisfy himself that at least his departure would go unnoticed. He then slipped the pistol into his pocket, retaining the torch, which was heavy enough to make a formidable weapon, at a pinch.

He unlocked the door and opened it cautiously. Not a sound did it make; evidently it had been well oiled by some interested person. Up and down the corridor he glanced; the flickering candles guttered in their sockets but disclosed no one in sight. But he was not a dozen paces from his door before he heard the unmistakable rustling of garments—from which direction he could not tell. He sprang back, regained the shelter of his room, and with the door ajar peered out into the corridor.

A figure draped in flowing, trailing garments of white glided into view. As it approached almost noiselessly save for the frou-frou of its robes, Luke's blood congealed with strange surmises. In this strange place, anything was possible. Was he indeed looking with starting eyes upon a visitant from another sphere? His flesh crept at the unearthly suggestion conveyed by the gliding movement of that white-robed creature, whatever it might be. He shrank back into the welcome shelter of his gloomy room, hoping that if this were a manifestation of life from beyond the grave it would pass on its uneasy way without stopping. His blood curdled in his veins. Heart-beats died into sluggish thuds.

Nearer glided the wraith. Breath almost failed the young man, cold sweat standing out in beads on his icy brow. It passed, still with that soft whispering sound of garments, and whipped around a corner of the corridor. Everything was still again.

Luke flung the cold perspiration from his forehead. Reaction set in. With a sudden revulsion of feeling, his blood ran hot in his veins again and he sprang out to make sure just what it was that he had seen. After

all, a spirit's robes would not have rustled as did this wraith's. He gained on the gliding specter, which approached the door of the Master's study, entering as the portal opened silently. As it turned, Luke drew back with a half-stifled groan, so severe was the shock which he received. The face that he saw was the face of Sybil Fane. The door closed upon her, the girl whom he now knew he loved, the girl who had stolen to visit her mysterious cousin in secret while the world slept. Ugly suspicions crowded upon him. Was it possible that she loved her cousin and secretly passed the nights in his company, this girl upon whose innate purity and innocence Luke would have staked his life a few minutes before? Why, then, was Guy Fane so anxious to secure for her a husband? To cover up his own derelictions toward this girl whom he had wronged?

The incredible fact remained. Luke had seen, with his own eyes, Sybil Fane creeping at midnight to her cousin's study. He turned back down the corridor, feeling his way along the wall in the half light almost stupidly. When another figure crept up behind him and laid a hand on his shoulder, he whirled, bringing the pistol out into position with a lithe movement. The wrinkled, sad face of Alden looked pityingly at him in the dim light.

"You saw?" she whispered.

"My God, yes!" he groaned.

He had never been so unutterably wretched in his life. It was a revelation that something outside himself could so stir the depths of his being.

"Just like that, when the moon comes to fullness, for months past," whispered Alden cautiously, "has she walked like a dream woman to that room. I do not know if she walks in her sleep, or if he has hypnotized her by his magical arts and his influence over her."

Luke caught at the woman's arm impulsively.

"Say it again!" he got out hoarsely. "Say it again! She is not mistress of her own actions!"

Alden shook her head mournfully.

"How like a man! Always ready to believe the worst! You imagined that my lamb went, like a bad woman, to meet her cousin? Oh, I could not forgive you for your suspicions, did I not know how one's confidence in everything good and true is shaken after a short residence here. One even comes to doubt the Almighty. It is in the air, this Evil that is supreme here. But to believe my Sybil, the poor innocent lamb, guilty of—oh, you of all men should have believed in her against the entire world!"

Luke listened in shame to Alden's arraignment.

"I'm sorry," he said simply. "But—for a moment I thought how easy it would be for *him*—. Good heaven! While we stand talking here, who knows what is happening to Sybil?" He whirled around and pulled the woman with him. "I have my pistol. We'll see whether his magic will protect him from that!"

Alden caught at him with her free hand.

"Hush! Don't be rash, Mr. Porter. Trust me that no harm has yet befallen my lamb. Madam Fane is with her, also. And—only a virgin can be of use to the Master in his experiments. She is safe."

"But there must be something we can do?" begged Luke, almost frantic with apprehension, in spite of Alden's attempt at reassurance.

"Yes, there is something we can do. Follow me."

She withdrew her hand and walked noiselessly but swiftly down the corridor. At last she entered what seemed a blind passage, glanced both up and down the corridor to make sure no one else was in sight, then pressed upon a knurl of the rich

carving upon one of the wall panels. A portion of the wall moved slowly, disclosing yawning blackness.

ALDEN stepped inside, motioning the artist to follow. She touched another button within, and the door closed upon them. In the light of a pocket flash which she took from her apron pocket, she found matches and lighted candles, disclosing a room about ten by ten feet, holding a couch, a table, two chairs, and piled against one wall a quantity of tinned food, as well as two full gallon bottles of water.

"Guy Fane himself does not know about this room. How I found it years ago would make too long a story. I kept the knowledge to myself, not knowing when it might prove useful. Of late I have often thought I would conceal Sybil here if the worst came to the worst. She could stay here for a couple of weeks, while I got into the outside world and procured help. There is a small window up there, covered with ivy. She would be lonesome, but safe."

She motioned him to a chair, and herself sank upon the couch, heaving a deep sigh as she did so.

"I have a long story to tell you, a painful one to me, but only by listening to it can you understand why I am so absolutely devoted to my charge. I only fear what I have to tell you may turn you from her—if you are less a man than I hope you are."

"Why speak in riddles? I have discovered tonight that I love her. That is sufficient, is it not?"

Alden regarded him steadily for a moment. Her blue eyes were moist then, from what she must have read in his face.

"Well, let me tell you the story, as quickly as I can. I have no regrets, Mr. Porter, for myself. But when I think of Sybil, I wonder if God is punishing me, through her. Do you believe that He would deliver my little girl over to the veriest devils of hell for their sport, to punish her wretched mother for having loved not wisely but too well?"

Luke emitted a low whistle.

"You mean that Sybil is your daughter? How can that be?"

"She is my own child," declared Alden stubbornly. "And now tell me, do you find her less desirable because her father and mother loved each other sufficiently to despise the world's conventions?"

"Stop, please! I have already told you that I love Sybil. I hope to make her my wife as soon as we can get her out of this devilish place. That part of it is settled. What I'd like to know is, how you come to be playing maid to your own child? Does Madam Fane know?"

"Nobody knows, Mr. Porter. Not even Sybil. And if Madam Fane knew, she would have me out of the castle—or worse yet, down in some secret dungeon—the next moment. Yet Madam Fane knows who and what Sybil is. That is the reason that I fear Madam, and the Master."

"For heaven's sake, stop riddling!" Luke said impatiently. "Get at the pith of it, can't you?"

"How can I begin? It tears my very soul to go all over it once more. Yet I must—I must!"

The artist's pity rose for the unhappy and mysterious woman.

"I'm sorry if I appeared abrupt or harsh," he said gently. "But it is important that you give me all the information you can, just as quickly as possible. It may throw light on a confusing situation. I can assure you of one thing; I believe that you did nothing from bad motives. Sybil's mother could have been mistaken—but not wicked."

Alden smiled wanly.

"For that I thank you, Mr. Porter. Here is the situation."

She began the story, telling it in short, terse sentences, each word of which was fraught with significance.

"Finding himself in financial straits, Arthur Fane married a wealthy heiress, who tried in vain to win the love of her handsome husband. Madam Fane discovered that her husband had married her for money and that he was intimate with the daughter of a near-by farmer, a girl whom she had never seen but whom she believed to be the commonest of the common. In a fury of insensate rage, the wife planned revenge. She was a woman of strong passions. Within the castle she had happily built for her husband and herself, she had a strange chapel equipped, and there she spent all her time alone. . . . After the birth of his son and heir, Arthur Fane left the castle, renouncing with a kind of horror the young mother, the child, and the money he had married to procure.

"Until that day, Mr. Porter," Alden declared with simple dignity, "Mr. Fane and I had been friends only. But when I found that Madam Fane had revenged herself upon him in some secret and horrible way that revolted him to such an extent that he would no longer live under the same roof with her, I gave myself to him gladly, proudly, and have never regretted—for myself—having taken that step to lighten a little the burden of his remorse and grief."

She continued: "Only once did he refer to the reason for his desertion of Madam Fane. 'My God,' he said to me, 'I can never banish that sight from before my eyes! She lifted the cover and showed me my child—. It was *not* mine. Before God, it was not *mine!* It was the offspring of some devil out of hell, but not my flesh and blood, I swear.' "

Arthur Fane fled with the farmer's daughter. Untrained to any work that fitted him to support a wife, he struggled along with his faithful and devoted companion for several hard years of poverty and suffering. Typhoid fever attacked his enfeebled frame, robbing Alden of the father of her child, then a lovely little girl of two years. Broken in health, unable to care for herself and still less for the child, Alden permitted an appeal to be made to Madam Fane for the offspring of Arthur Fane.

"I was sick, hopeless, miserably unhappy, longing only to die. Madam Fane sent word that she naturally did not care to see me, but that if I would give up the child to her absolutely, she would bring it up as if it were her own, in expiation of some wrong which she admitted she had done her husband. Sybil was sent to her. But as I grew stronger, my longing for my baby grew. I applied to Madam Fane, under an assumed name, for a position as maid in her household. She needed a nurse for Sybil, and God let me stay to watch over my little girl."

"And then He must have sent me, also," the artist murmured in low tones, "and the sooner we start to get her out of this hellish place, the better."

"We can do nothing tonight, Mr. Porter. Sybil has disappeared in this manner for months now, always at the full of the moon, or near that time. Madam Fane assists the Master, which fact in a measure is a safeguard for my little girl. And I know —how I cannot explain—that for tonight she is guarded."

"Where is this devil's chapel where Guy Fane performs his experiments?" asked Luke grimly. "I'd like to take a look at it."

Alden mused thoughtfully.

"It might be managed, if they are still in the Master's study. But they may have gone into the chapel to perform invocations, and then—"

"I'm not afraid of that silly rot," Luke snorted scornfully.

Alden regarded him with pity.

"That is because you do not know how powerful the Master is," she asserted sadly. "You would be a babe in his hands."

Luke laughed, regarding his strong, capable hands meaningly. She answered quickly.

"Oh, that isn't what I mean, at all. He can look at you, with his face unveiled, and you would be frozen, at his mercy. You don't know—."

"Nonsense! I'll risk it, anyway. It's quite possible that I can outstare him," Luke suggested, with grim humor.

"Perhaps—but I doubt it," she answered quite seriously. "And now I must ask you to restrain your impatience until I tell you it is time to act in safety. Tomorrow you can, if you will, try to get word to anybody you know, outside. Perhaps you may be successful, where I have found the attempt futile," sadly. "One thing you must promise me, Mr. Porter. Sybil must never know the secret of her birth. She must never learn that I am her mother."

Her pale blue eyes pleaded with him. The artist, sensing her fine desire for sacrifice, acquiesced unwillingly.

"We can go, then, and see if the chapel is unoccupied."

She opened the secret panel, showing Luke how the button worked, and the two emerged hastily, closing it behind them.

CHAPTER 8

LUCIFER'S CHAPEL

"FOLLOW me. Make no sound."

Luke followed down dark passages, up and down winding stairways. At last a closed door at the end of a long corridor was reached.

Alden turned with a warning gesture.

"I am now taking you where you can, unseen, look down into the interior of the chapel. I found the place years ago, by accident." She shuddered convulsively. "Good God—it was—*horrible!* I have not been there since. And I cannot face the Evil that dwells there. You must go in alone."

Luke's hand was turning the knob with caution, but he whispered sternly:

"If I do not return within a half hour, you must open the door and come for me. For Sybil's sake!"

To himself he was thinking resentfully that if Herbert Binney's mind were not so easily unbalanced, the little occultist might have been of assistance. As matters stood, however, Cagliostro Moderno would be a nuisance instead of a help, owing to his blind, mad devotion to occultism.

Luke opened the door. A stream of brilliant ruby radiance shot out through the chink, casting a lurid and ghastly gleam upon the white face of the poor mother, who dropped to her knees with a terrified gasp, and began to pray fervently.

The artist looked within. There was a long, narrow gallery, with apparently no discernible outlet save the door by which he was now entering. A lattice-work screen rose from the solid stone balustrade, forming a shield for him while permitting at the same time an unobstructed view of the immense room below. Through the lacy interstices of this screen there poured that intolerably brilliant red light.

Luke closed the door quietly and stepped close to the screen. What he saw below filled him with unutterable horror and loathing. . . . He was looking upon one of those unholy places which have been desecrated to mocking ceremonials by the foul imaginations of perverted men and women, devoted body and soul to the worship of Evil. The room was a

large one, and the crimson light illuminated it sufficiently for him to distinguish fairly well the decorations and furnishings, all of a character so bizarre, so vile, as to force upon him the conclusion that they must have been designed and carried out by diseased imaginations. Walls and hangings were black, absorbing the radiance of that ruby illumination, but here and there the artist could distinguish what he felt must have been, in a white light, embroideries of occult symbols upon the hangings.

Against this background stood, at irregular intervals, great white crosses before which were sculptured figures in black, figures that made him shudder with uncontrollable horror at their repulsive and abhorrent ugliness. It seemed as if the human imagination had here attained the climax of revolting, horrific distortion and deformity in sculpture and pictorial art. Not a statue, not a painting, but showed the human face and form in such revolting deformity as to send sickly shudders through the observer's shrinking frame. The purpose of this ghastly place was obvious. . . .

The red light shining everywhere now attracted Luke's attention. It originated in a crystal sphere, hung on almost invisible chains in a shrine just back of the altar. The gleam was not a quiet one; it played about the heart of that globe like darting flames of unquiet, unholy fire. And as these tongues of ruby light played in and out and licked the surface of the sphere uncannily, the shadows in the chapel moved and danced, until it seemed to Luke's excited gaze that they actually possessed life and only waited the right moment to move from their pedestals and go horribly forward to worship at that altar. Evil—*unutterable* Evil—hovered about that glowing sphere. . . .

A FUGITIVE gleam of golden light came from behind a draped doorway at one side of the altar. The light grew stronger. A short squat figure voluminously veiled in black emerged, carrying a tall candle of black wax that burned with a yellow flame. The figure advanced to the lower steps of the altar, paused, made a deeply reverent genuflection. Then Guy (for Luke surmised that it was he) placed the candle in a ready holder at one end of a long marble slab which formed an altar. Again he bent deeply, then faced about behind the altar as if waiting.

The curtain swung aside again, this time admitting a processional of three persons. In the van strutted with inconceivable pride and dignity the short, stout form of Cagliostro, draped in trailing red robes embroidered with black symbols of mysticism. The occultist bore another candle, which he as solemnly placed at the lower end of the altar, taking his place then beside the Master. The other two worshipers were women. Madam Fane was the first, kneeling upon the steps before the altar with a kind of shrinking dread discernible on her face. She was in black, but the other figure was white-draped. Luke, a choking sensation in his throat, recognized the tranquil, unmoved face of Sybil Fane.

The girl went forward to the steps of the shrine, bowed deeply, then mounted the stairs until she stood above the two adepts, and immediately before the crystal globe, which began to shimmer vaguely with the violent agitation of those red and evil tongues of lurid light. Madam Fane arose; from a great casket at one side she took double handfuls of some powder, casting it upon a tripod censer that up to now had apparently been unlighted. But at once, following her action, that crystal sphere shot out its tongues of flame—longer—longer. One reached—*ignited*—the

incense; tall spirals of smoke poured out, heavy with some Eastern fragrance that rose almost overpoweringly to Luke's nostrils. As he inhaled it reluctantly, it seemed to him that the obscene sculptured figures below began to stir uneasily, coming to life at last.

Madam Fane sank once more upon her knees, her forehead resting on the stair above her. Sybil continued to stand, immovable, before that glowing sphere, from which an occasional tongue of flame shot out toward her, but retracted before coming in contact with the girl. Behind the altar the two magi now raised their arms in frantic invocation toward the shrine of the ruby globe.

"Lucifer! Lucifer!! Lucifer!!! Son of the Morning, we offer Thee that sacrifice Thou has demanded. Give us a sign! Appear, we implore Thee!

"The hearts of doves and young lambs have I offered Thee, oh Lord of the Fallen Hosts! Tonight I offer the soul of a virgin, a virgin maid, Lord Lucifer! A sign! A sign, that my sacrifice will be acceptable!"

Cagliostro was stirring uneasily, carroty head lifted from between his outstretched arms. Luke could see inexplicable emotions following each other over that cupid's bow mouth that twisted so oddly. The squinty blue eyes were now upon Sybil as she stood motionless before the great globe.

He leaned toward Guy Fane and whispered something hurriedly. The Master bent a dark gaze upon him through the folds of the veil.

"Hush, fool! Do you not see that Lord Lucifer is showing Himself to His worshipers?"

Cagliostro, offended, shrank back.

From the sphere shot those quivering tongues as of living flame, licking its surface in gracious curves and reaching out on either side of Sybil's quiescent form like the groping tentacles of an octopus. The still air began to stir with murmuring sounds. A soft, whining hum vibrated on the atmosphere as if some unearthly visitant were cleaving the ether with sweeping wings as it passed through space.

Luke's knees suddenly gave way under him. Some potent influence against which he was powerless to resist had pushed him down. He knelt because he could not stand up. But he could still stare through the lattice with starting eyes. Sybil was moving, as if impelled by some irresistible force. She moved slowly backward down the steps of the shrine until she reached the marble slab. Upon this she bent back, until she lay upon it, arms stiff at her sides.

Guy Fane was throwing his hands into the air with wild and triumphant gestures. Then he fumbled under his enveloping garments and drew forth a knife. As the blade flashed upward, Cagliostro Moderno, awaking from his trance, flung himself forward and knocked the knife clanging and whirring, down into the middle of the room. His face, a mingled materialization of stupefaction and horror, writhed into that squared semblance of a Greek tragic mask which he had worn on the night he had fled through the forest from the monster he had seen bending over the bridge.

"I forbid it!" shouted the little occultist frantically.

"Fool! Let me alone! How dare you interrupt? Lord Lucifer, I implore—"

Madam Fane had come to her feet and was watching the two, who swayed back and forth as they struggled on the steps of the altar. The shrouding veils that concealed her son's face were in the hands of the other mage, who tore at them frantically. They parted—. From his vantage point, Luke strained to see, but Guy Fane's back was toward him. Only the tragic mask of Herbert

Binney's round face was visible, and that was frozen into a horror so dreadful, so unbearable, so nearly verging upon utter madness, that Luke's blood congealed in his veins. What was the little man seeing, that he should shrink back, letting the veil fall again over Guy Fane's now motionless figure? Could it be true that the Master could blast with a look of his terrible eyes?

There was a frightful wailing cry from the occultist's widened lips. He staggered away from the altar, down the steps, stumbling as if blinded, and plunged out of sight behind the drapery that hung before the door by which the procession had entered. Luke tried to get to his feet. He managed to rise and cling to the screen. How to rescue Sybil was his overmastering thought, but until he could conquer that strange weakness which had overcome him, it was useless to do other than try, if necessary, to shoot from his concealment, in the hope of at least terrifying Guy Fane enough to stop the present ceremony. With this in mind, he fumbled for the automatic.

MADAM FANE, however, had run up the steps of the altar. She bent over the girl. After a moment, she lifted the golden head upon her arm, regarded Sybil's face intently, and then addressed her son, who watched without changing the position he had held as the horrified Cagliostro fled his presence.

"She is coming out of the trance, Guy," said Madam Fane, almost with eagerness. "You can do nothing more tonight. Let me take her back to her room, my son." she almost pleaded.

A hard laugh issued from the Master.

"I would have won tonight—by now—had not that fool—may he be blasted in soul and body forever!—prevented me. I thought him pliable enough to serve my purpose. Now I must get him out of the way, or he may try to balk me in my plans. Fool! To trust any other human being!"

Madam Fane lifted the supine form into her arms, but as she turned to go she spake again.

"You lied to me, Guy. You told me you would not resort to the knife —with her. The knife I will not suffer, I tell you. You must find some other way to your purpose. Is not Lucifer powerful enough to give you what you seek, if you deliver over this girl's soul, instead of her body?"

"Oh, mother, mother! How often must you stand in my way, just when I see it clear? Yes, it can be done without blood, but the experiment is difficult, and who knows when she will love enough to build the foundation for her own destruction?"

"As to that, my son, all is ready," asserted Madam Fane.

"Mother! Are you sure?"

Madam Fane walked away, carrying the light form carefully. At the door she turned back for a minute.

"Guy, if you do not play me false in this matter, I will serve you to the bitter end. But I will not have the girl's life given to Lucifer, not while I can prevent it. All shall come as you desire, but with her a living sacrifice."

"Do you feel the prophetic spell upon you, my mother?"

"I am not sure. . . . But, you can consult—her—later."

Guy Fane, thinking himself alone, leaped up the shrine steps and prostrated himself before the crystal globe. The tongues of ruby flame grew paler. The chapel's dusk increased.

Luke found himself able to walk, and managed to get to the door. Outside knelt Alden, still praying. He touched her gently on the shoulder, and she started, opening her closed eyes to look at him questioningly.

"Madam Fane has taken Sybil back to her room," Luke told the anxious mother. "But tomorrow we must get her out of this devilish place. I have seen her tonight stretched upon the altar, and Guy Fane would have buried a knife in her heart had not Binney been there to prevent the crime."

"Give me your pistol, please," whispered Alden tensely. "If they try to take her from me again, I can at least save her from such a horrible death. . . . Better she should die innocent at her mother's hand than a bloody sacrifice to the Powers of Evil."

Luke hesitated a moment, then laid the pistol in the mother's hand.

"I can get along without it, I fancy. And now that Binney seems to have come partly to his senses, perhaps we can enlist him on our side. Unless he is sent away," he added, remembering the Master's words. "And between ourselves, I think it would be wise to warn Sybil of the danger that lies ahead. She ought to know. It might be dangerous to spring it all upon her at the last moment. She believes her cousin a kind of god, doesn't she?"

"She shall know the truth about him," promised Alden grimly.

CHAPTER 9

THE MASTER CONSULTS AN ORACLE

Luke's first thought now was to see Herbert Binney immediately and make sure of the little man's coming to his senses. He therefore went from the chapel to the occultist's room, while Alden hurried back to look after her charge.

At his first knock, the artist was sure that he heard smothered moans and incoherent exclamations within the occultist's room. He rapped a little louder. A voice behind the door answered, trembling with some strong emotion.

"Off with you, Sathanas! Get thee behind me, accursed one! I will have no more to do with your evil work."

The voice died away in confused babblings.

"Binney! It isn't Fane. It's Porter talking. Let me in! I must see you at once."

"Away with you! You can not deceive me again, Beelzebub!"

"Open this door!" Luke said, low-toned but forceful. "Pull yourself together, you little idiot! This is Luke Porter speaking. I must see you on a matter of life and death. Open up!"

The door knob rattled feebly. There was a short pause.

"I'm afraid!" whined the occultist from within. "What if you aren't what you claim to be?"

"If I'm a mage, I could slip in through the keyhole, you little jackass!" Luke exploded, thoroughly out of patience. "Open this door, or I'll shoot off the lock!" (A futile threat, when he had given his automatic to Alden!)

The door knob turned slowly, and the door opened, the pallid face of Herbert Binney appearing in the opening, pale blue eyes squinting in shrinking dread at the artist, who jerked the door from the other man's hands, slipped inside, closed and locked it behind him.

"Thank God, Mr. Porter, it's you!" whined Binney in his scared relief. "Oh," and he clutched at the artist's coatsleeve frantically, "we must get out of here, immediately! Without waiting for anything! This place is a hell, Mr. Porter, with living demons haunting it! I—I've just met—*him*—face to face again! Oh, my God, shall I ever be able to brush the awful memory of his horrible countenance from my mind? My blood froze in my veins, I tell you! My—"

Luke reached out, took the little man by the shoulders, and shook him so hard that the fellow's teeth actually played the castanets against each other.

"Keep still for a minute, you incredible idiot!" he snapped, in a low voice. "I saw the whole business, just now, in the chapel. What I want to know is: where do you stand?"

The pale blue eyes stared into Luke's flashing gray orbs with astonishment.

"You—*you* saw—?" stammered Herbert Binney, stupidly. "How—how could you have seen? Then you saw—his—face—?" The voice broke pitifully, and the occultist began to tremble as if seized by an ague. "Good God, Mr. Porter, you must realize how important it is for us to get out of here immediately!"

"Will you shut up?" Luke apostrophized him through clenched teeth. He looked distastefully at the terrified magician. "You stopped Guy Fane at a critical moment, Binney—"

"I know," assented the other, his breath catching. "But I never dreamed that he would dare do such a thing. To attack that sweet girl with a knife! Why, only the most evil of spirits would ask for, or expect, such a devilish proceeding, and Mr. Fane assured me that he had no intention of injuring her physically. I haven't been quite sure myself just what his intentions toward her were, but he explained that she wasn't—you understand" — he tapped his forehead significantly with one forefinger—"just right. He thought he could, by giving her a severe shock of some kind, bring back her wandering senses."

"He lied to you, you ass! And you're so fed up with your importance that you swallowed everything he told you, of course," Luke grunted disgustedly. "Now that you've seen something of what he's capable, do you intend to go on with that rotten mummery, or will you help me get Sybil Fane out of this devil's den?"

"Oh, I'm only too anxious to get out myself," the occultist assured him hastily. "But—how do you propose to manage it?"

"I don't know, yet. Tomorrow I shall tell him that Sybil is to be my wife, and that I wish to leave, with her and her maid. If he refuses to let me go, I'll have to think up something else."

"I—I could help you, perhaps," offered Cagliostro, trying desperately to regain something of the ground he felt he had lost in the artist's esteem and respect. "I—I'm not as silly and stupid as" (resentfully) "you think I am. I can meet Guy Fane on his own ground—on magical lines—and hold my own. I *know* I can," he added, more firmly.

"We don't want any magic," Luke negated, rather unkindly. "It's all rot. Guy Fane knows how to utilize natural forces to make an appearance—"

The squinty blue eyes regarded the artist now with assurance. The button nose wrinkled, as Cagliostro asked pointedly:

"You can say that, after seeing that ceremony in the chapel tonight? Mr. Porter, there was much more in it than I care to admit, myself. Guy Fane is a true adept; a Master of supernatural powers and forces, but of a nature to make a Child of Light shudder sickly."

Luke let go the little man's shoulders and stepped back from him.

"Listen, Binney! Are you going to let yourself go again, the way you did tonight in the chapel? Just because another human being happens to be more than ordinarily ugly?"

"Listen, Porter!" retorted the mage disrespectfully, but with a measure of return to his old proud impressiveness. "When you find yourself face to face, without previous warning, with the Devil himself, you

are apt to let your weak flesh gain the mastery. But when you know beforehand what you're up against, you prepare for the ordeal and—and you conquer—or—die," he finished with a plaintive gravity.

"Then you are ready—?"

"You will have to trust me to help you in my own way," stipulated Cagliostro seriously. "But I can assure you that I am ready, even for death—if by dying I can thwart that devil from hell!"

Luke clasped the little fellow's hand and gave it a hearty grip.

"Then I can look upon you as an ally, tomorrow," he said, rather relieved to find the occultist himself once more.

"I shall get to work along my own lines," assured the mage, with earnestness. "I shall have much to do, to prepare myself for a battle of will with that—with—*him*. But I shall win. Never fear, Mr. Porter, I shall win!"

LUKE left him then, and hurried through the corridors to Sybil's boudoir, at the door of which he tapped cautiously. The door was opened by Alden, whose white face met his questioning gray eyes with agony written on it.

"She hasn't come back! Oh, dear God, she is with Guy Fane in his study, and I am afraid—afraid!"

Luke whirled about.

"I'm going there," he announced. "This thing has got me. I can't sit down quietly while Sybil is in that devil's power. I'm going for her. Never fear, I'll bring her back with me, Alden."

He dashed up the hall, leaving her leaning weakly against the door frame.

The door of the Master's study swung open silently at his approach, in a sinister fashion which the young man disregarded in his anxiety. He rushed into the room, and all at once stopped, midway to the glowing crystal globe that burned threateningly in the shrine at the farther end of the apartment. It was as if some giant hand had been placed against his breast, holding him to the spot against his will. He struggled vainly to advance. Perspiration poured down his face and streamed from every pore in his body.

"Rash man, beware of too much daring! You have seen how easily I can thwart your impotent purposes. Beware, lest I raise my veil and wither you where you stand," intoned the ominous voice of Guy Fane.

Luke restrained himself by an effort, and all at once that force which had held him back was gone. Before he could move, Guy Fane's voice spoke again.

"It is not well to cross swords with me unadvisedly, Mr. Porter. My door opened to you, because I am not afraid of you, or your petty personal desires and intentions. Remain, if you will, but interrupt at your peril! Interruption will only result in terrible evil to Sybil, who is entranced. To arouse her with any shock might put to flight forever that which forms her individual soul, her personality. There would be left a maundering idiot, Mr. Porter. I have warned you."

Luke had learned something of the practise of modern spiritualism and psychic phenomena; he dared not stir for fear, therefore, of wakening Sybil from her trance. Guy Fane had stopped him most effectually by that warning, which Luke knew to be well founded. He stared about the room.

On a couch under the ruby sphere lay the entranced girl, hands crossed upon her girlish bosom, motionless save for the even rise and fall that showed her still alive and breathing. Before her stood the black-veiled form of the Master, with uplifted arms, in invocation.

"Sybil! Answer! Where are you now?" he exclaimed in a voice of dignity and with an air of high authority.

From the girl's lips came a low murmur, seeming another voice than her ordinary one.

"I hover here, Master, above the clay housing of my spirit, awaiting your commands."

"It is well. I have stripped from your eyes" (he made a sweeping gesture over her face with both hands) "the veil that hides the future. Tell me, shall I soon be free from the hideous and loathsome covering of flesh that conceals my shrinking spirit?"

Without hesitation, that mild voice declared:

"Yes! Before another night shall have passed, you shall shed your monstrous husk and step from it into glorious freedom."

"Lucifer! All-powerful Prince!" exclaimed Guy in wild triumph, tossing his hands high in invocation toward the shining ruby globe. "Not in vain have I called upon Thee, Lord and Master. Oh, I shall serve Thee well, when I shall have won to that face, that form, that are to be mine! —Sybil! Tell me if I shall offer your pulsing heart to the Lord and Master of your destiny, as I have long intended?"

A struggle seemed to be going on in the body of the girl. Her face distorted painfully. Luke clenched his hands, to keep from rushing to her side. Then from the tortured lips issued the reply:

"My heart has already gone forth, and is in the safe keeping of the master of my destiny."

"Strange! Strange! Most strange!" muttered Guy Fane, bending to examine her face closely. "Tell me truly, Sybil, plainly. Shall I offer your heart soon to Lucifer? Your beating, pulsing heart? I conjure you, give me the truth!"

Again the girl's face showed that disturbance, that conflict. Then her voice issued, hardly audible, from writhing lips:

"Proud and presumptuous man, you command the truth! It shall be yours. You have attempted by futile magic arts to alter the decrees of destiny. All that has happened is that you have become a tool in the scheme of greater forces than your puny soul can imagine. You believe you have seized upon the prerogatives of the Ruler of the Universe. You have associated with the evil Fallen One. Harken, Master of Evil Arts! It is your soul that lies at stake, and not your body. Less yet is there danger to the body of this poor girl through whose lips I speak."

"Lucifer! Who is talking now?" gasped Guy Fane.

Luke could plainly see the trembling of that squat body.

"It matters little who I am. But this innocent girl is protected as you can never imagine. Spare her of your own free will, before she is snatched out of your hands! Show that your hideous body conceals but poorly a noble soul! Mortal, this is your last opportunity for your own salvation!"

The voice ceased. Luke, although realizing that something must have gone wrong, and that Guy Fane was gravely disturbed by the upsetting of his calculations, felt no slightest disturbance, but on the contrary a profound conviction seized upon him that all would yet be well.

"By Lucifer and His seven fiends, you unknown speaker, I shall carry out my plans or die in the attempt! I know not who you are that speaks to me unbidden through the lips of this entranced girl, but I dare you to thwart me, mysterious oracle! Sybil Fane is devoted to expiation of that which her father's sin brought upon me. The Almighty and all His angels

cannot hold me back now! I know too much to be disregarded!"

"Then Lucifer must receive that for which He has waited patiently these many years! Farewell, wretched worker of ill spells! You have doomed yourself, when you might have worked a noble magic!"

Silence, terrible and oppressive, reigned after these last words. Then the Master called with fierce energy:

"Sybil! Return to this clay before that intruder shall have robbed you of it before what is foreordained shall have come to pass! Return, I say!"

He made frantic passes over that blond head. The girl sighed. Then one hand went up sleepily to rub her eyes.

With a contemptuous gesture, Guy Fane beckoned the artist.

"She is normal now. Take her to her maid. I have finished with her—for the present," ominously.

Luke needed no further invitation. He picked Sybil's slender form up and held her close.

"You shall never lay a finger on her again," he said to Guy Fane tensely, his gray eyes like thunder clouds shot with lightning.

The Master paid no more attention to him. He went to the shrine where swung the ruddy globe, and sank on his knees before it, his forehead touching the marble step.

CHAPTER 10

SHUT OUT

LUKE carried his precious burden directly to Alden, who, after she had carefully brought Sybil back to consciousness, sat beside her, listening to the artist's recital of that strange possession by some unknown entity of the girl's unconscious body.

Sybil herself, enlightened now by her old nurse and by her lover as to her cousin's nefarious designs upon her, lay with wide violet eyes upon Luke's face, her expression that of one who refuses to believe what appears incredible to intelligence.

"I shall see Guy Fane tomorrow," declared Luke firmly. "I intend to make a formal demand for Sybil's hand, and as he has already given me his permission to marry her, I don't see how he can refuse to let me take her away, especially if we go right down into town and get a license, and hunt up a minister immediately."

Alden shook her head, a bitter smile curling her kindly mouth.

"Don't you think cousin Guy will let us go?" demanded Sybil. "Why, Alden, I'll be of age in another ten days, and then he *must* let me go. He's told me as much himself, often."

"There is something mysterious about it all, my lamb. But I feel sure he will let none of us go until he has carried out his own plans."

"Then I shall appeal to Madam Fane. She is a woman, with a woman's heart," began Luke, when Alden interrupted him.

"First of all, she is Guy Fane's mother, and she owes him a terrible debt, too horrible for me to put into words," the older woman said unwillingly. "She will think first of her son's plans, Mr. Porter. The rest of us are pawns, to be moved by him as he pleases."

"He makes a mistake, I'm afraid," Luke murmured.

"Perhaps Mr. Binney can suggest something," Sybil offered. "He's a magician, isn't he?"

Luke couldn't help smiling at Sybil's ingenuous conclusion.

"For some reason your cousin has terrified Cagliostro Moderno almost into spasms," he told the girl. "But for all that, he's promised to do what he can. In his own way," he amended.

"But his own way may be the best way," the girl declared.

"Mr. Porter, I think my lamb ought to get a little sleep while she

can,'' Alden suggested darkly. ''Do you mind—?''

''Luke, don't go away!'' begged Sybil, violet eyes suddenly wide with fright. ''Oh, Alden, don't send him away! Let him sleep on the chaise longue in my boudoir. Then he'll be here, if—if anything should happen.''

Luke and the older woman exchanged glances.

''Perhaps that isn't such a bad idea, Mr. Porter,'' conceded Alden. ''But I'd hate to have Mr. Fane know.''

''There can be no possible harm,'' Luke decided. ''Certainly, the man who is as devoted to Sybil's interests as her future husband must be, can watch over her welfare. Especially after such an experience as she has had tonight,'' he finished grimly. ''Sybil, my darling, sleep. Alden and I will both be here to see that no harm comes to you.''

Sybil pouted her crimson lips, and Luke bent, stirred to the depths by her innocent trustfulness, and very tenderly gave her their first kiss.

LUKE'S resolve to see Guy Fane early that next day was forestalled by the Master himself, in a fashion that made the artist resentful, as it put him in the wrong at once. Mason brought the message, and he brought it to Luke, before the young artist had left Sybil's boudoir. The major-domo wore a certain knowing air for which Luke would have liked to call him to account, except that it was too vague an expression to base such a proceeding upon.

''Mr. Fane asked me to inquire if you didn't think it would be well for you to see him at once, under the circumstances,'' the man said.

Luke was furious, but there was, after all, nothing upon which he could put his finger. Controlling himself as best he could, he answered shortly:

''Tell your master that after last night's occurrences I feel I have a right to make certain demands of him, and I am only too happy to make them immediately.''

Ten minutes afterward, he walked into the open door of Guy Fane's study, his mouth set in a grim line as he advanced toward the protecting screen at the farther end of the room.

''Be seated, Mr. Porter. Pray do not come any farther. As you have had reason to learn, I am—protected.''

Luke paused involuntarily. He remembered that giant hand which had stopped his progress the night before. . . .

''That's better, Mr. Porter. Now, if you will be seated, we can get down to business more comfortably. I presume you wish to inquire, with what I must consider characteristic curiosity, my dear sir, into my private affairs?''

''I have come to tell you that I wish to take Sybil away from this—this devil's den,'' the artist jerked out furiously.

''Ah! How thoughtful of you, dear Mr. Porter! And so you have come to this unwarranted conclusion—''

''Unwarranted?'' snapped Luke. ''When only by a hair's breadth did that poor girl escape your knife last night?''

A tense pause succeeded upon his words. When Guy Fane spoke now, it was in measured accents.

''I begin to understand. You managed to gain access to the chapel, then?'' The troubled note left his voice, and he continued with his wonted imperturbable suavity: ''You took the liberty of going where you had no business to enter, and then you jumped to silly conclusions, because you imagined,''—and the voice grew icy with disdain—''I presume, that I was about to take the life of my cousin, a girl who has been brought up un-

der my own eyes, and nurtured as tenderly—. Why, my dear Mr. Porter, I believe you have the instincts of a budding occultist, yourself! I must see to it that you are present at my next experiment,'' the voice continued with a musing lightness and that hint of double meaning that made Luke writhe.

''If there are any further experiments, you may be sure I shall be present,'' the artist declared. ''But I do not think there will be any more. At least, not with my wife as the subject of them.''

''Your wife?''

There was a sudden note of alarm in the Master's voice that did not escape Luke's notice.

''Perhaps I should have said, my promised wife,'' he amended.

''Oh!''

The exclamation escaped the Master's lips in a gust of breathy relief. And then, as if to cover his momentary lack of restraint, Guy continued smoothly:

''You are certainly what is called, in vulgar vernacular, a quick worker, Mr. Porter. So Sybil is in love with you, and you with her? So quickly!'' Admiration in the voice; again Luke writhed.

''Sybil wishes to go with me, and her maid, today,'' Luke asserted.

''Why such haste, dear Mr. Porter?'' soothed Guy Fane.

He laughed softly.

''But there, young love is always impetuous, isn't it? Have you realized that there must be a license? And that I certainly will not permit my charge to go from here until I see her properly married to you by a regularly ordained clergyman?''

''Are you insinuating—?''

''My dear Mr. Porter, you have acted so like a child that I feel I must take the proper steps to safeguard my innocent cousin. You are afraid that the ceremony—so sadly interrupted by the misunderstanding with the little Cagliostro—was aimed at my cousin's life. No, Mr. Porter, she must live. *Live,* do you understand? Only a life—but there, you would never understand. . . . I presume you are in a hurry now to rescue the fair lady and make your escape from the roof that has been her safe shelter from childhood?'' he pursued plaintively. ''So be it, Mr. Porter. Will this afternoon suit your plans?''

Luke's face altered in spite of himself, at this unexpected acquiescence. Guy Fane laughed again.

''You can leave all details to me, impetuous lover. I shall send a couple of servants to impersonate you two at the license bureau, so that you won't have to go down into town until you leave here for good. I shall have a clergyman sent for. If you don't like him,'' negligently, with an undertone of mild amusement, ''you can get married again after you leave here. We will have a wedding supper, and tickets ready for the 10 p. m. New York train. If this suits your plans?''

Bewildered to the last degree, Luke managed to get out:

''I hope I have misjudged you. But —but what did you intend to do with that knife?''

''My mother, and that foolish magician, have both demanded explanations on this point,'' Guy said wearily. ''Nothing I tell them seems clear to their blinded imaginations, which must have run away with them. I can use the girl living; of what use would she be dead? I had but started a ceremonial—'' and he interrupted himself to cry with enthusiasm, ''Ah, my dear Mr. Porter, one time you shall see such a ceremonial as I doubt has ever been carried through in its entirety before in the history of the world! You shall be there, I promise you!''

Something sinister troubled the artist vaguely, but he dared not let his imagination start working on the

Master's veiled insinuations. He told himself that by evening he and Sybil would be well out of the purlieus of that strange castle.

"Well, now that we've settled everything," proceeded Guy Fane gayly, "suppose you tell Sybil that you have my permission, and that tonight she will see Fanewold Castle for the last time—unless you are so kind as to bring her back to visit a lonely and afflicted man, some day. No, do not thank me, Mr. Porter. I am still a little hurt at your unfounded suspicions of me and my motives. You shall know more of me before another twenty-four hours," he promised. "And now, if you will excuse me—"

LUKE took the hint and went out, the door shutting behind him, apparently of its own volition. He lost no time in telling Sybil of Guy's ready capitulation. Alden's forehead wrinkled more than ever as she listened.

"I don't know why Sybil's marriage to you should fit in with his plans," she said in a troubled voice. "And I feel positive that he does not intend to have her leave Fanewold tonight as your wife."

"Don't be so pessimistic, Alden dear," begged Sybil prettily. "Come and help me pack. If we're going away tonight," and she turned to Luke gayly, "we must get everything ready. There'll be lots to do. Come, Alden!"

Alden did not follow the girl immediately. She stood looking at Luke irresolutely. At last she said:

"Mr. Porter, if you find it difficult to get away from here with Sybil, don't bother about me. To them I am nothing but a servant who loves her. They won't do anything to me. You can see about me later on."

"Depend upon it, that if I get Sybil safely away from here, my next thought will be for you," Luke said determinedly. "And now, I must pack my bags and painting materials."

IT WAS quite evident to Luke that there was something going on in the place, later that afternoon. Alden whispered to him that all the servants had been sent away. She was white with apprehension, but the artist thought it quite possible that Guy Fane had ordered a lot of marketing done for the wedding supper, and that the castle people had been sent to do these many errands. Going back to his room, he almost collided with Cagliostro Moderno, who was hastening down the corridor.

"Hello, Binney! What are you doing now?" the artist demanded.

"I'm going with Madam Fane to town on an errand," the little occultist replied. He lowered his voice: "Once I get there, I'll get in touch with the authorities and see that some of the police are sent out here, to get you and Miss Fane out. That—devil—tried to explain his stunt with the knife, but I don't trust him. He is sheer fiend."

"Did you tell him that?"

"I'm not the fool you think I am, Mr. Porter," returned the little man with dignity. "I let him think I believed all he said, with the result that I'm now getting the chance to go to town."

"What is he sending you for?" persisted Luke.

With an apprehensive glance up and down the corridor, the occultist whispered:

"He's sent a maid and one of the men to impersonate you and Miss Fane, to get a license. And I'm supposed to take the license, and then get a minister. Madam Fane is waiting for me," bitterly, "but I shall evade her, if I can. Even if I have to make a scene."

"Don't make a scene," advised Luke, thoughtfully. "Get the clergyman, and when he is here, we'll make

him see how the situation is, and that will tie Guy Fane's hands. Besides, we may need you. Never can tell."

"I'll do my best," promised Herbert Binney, with dignity, pulling his black mantle about him to conceal his insignificant features.

Luke smote him mightily on the shoulders.

"Go to it, old man," he said heartily.

THE minutes fled, became hours. Darkness was falling, now, but Herbert Binney did not return. Moreover, instead of the stir of festive preparations a heavy and oppressive stillness brooded over the castle.

"Come out on the roof garden," Sybil half whispered, the spell of the waiting upon her also. "I think I'd feel better out in the air."

The three went out, just in time to see another part of the mysterious drama played before their eyes.

There was the sound of the drawbridge lowering, and simultaneously the galloping of horses' hoofs. Then a carriage swung into sight, dimly outlined by the carriage lights. It whirled to the draw, and stopped. A woman—"Madam Fane!" cried Alden—sprang out and ran across the draw. The bridge creaked—rose in the air. The driver of the carriage whipped his horses around and back in the direction in which he had come.

And as the three stared with straining eyes, the sound of someone shouting fell upon their ears.

"Help!" cried a masculine voice several times, as a little figure came stumbling and sobbing up the road, only to be brought to a short stop by the sluggish water of the impassable moat.

"Who is it?" shouted Luke through cupped hands.

But he knew only too well who it was.

"It's me—Binney!" wailed the voice, admission of failure in the very use of that hated, commonplace name. "It's me! They've shut me out! They've shut me out!"

Luke recovered from his amazement and wonderment after a moment's astonished exchange of glances with Alden, whose wrinkled face held a deep significance, which he did not like.

"How'd it happen?" he shouted back, abandoning caution, convinced now that matters were not as they should be.

"Minister wasn't at home," wailed the occultist from below. "Madam Fane left word that we'd go there for the ceremony tomorrow. I tried to leave the carriage, but the driver managed to be in my way—and it's cold out and there weren't many people around—and—"

"To make a long story short," Luke told the two women dryly, "our little friend didn't succeed in getting word to anyone of our plight, and now he's been shut outside, so that he can't help us. Hey, Binney, can't you tramp it back to the town? You might bring help, that way."

In the growing darkness the occultist was shaking his head in furious negation.

"No, no, no!" he called up, with more caution. "I must get inside at once. It would take me hours to get back—I'm no walker. And magic must be fought with magic."

"The only way you can get in, Mr. Binney, is by swimming across the moat," began Alden.

"What?" almost screamed the occultist. "Swim among those water snakes and other things? Woman, do you think I'm crazy?"

"Not crazy," coldly called down Alden. "Just a wretched coward, if you will have the truth, Mr. Binney."

She retired from the parapet scornfully, but Luke saw that her face was melancholy with apprehension.

"What made you get out of the carriage?" inquired Luke.

"She dropped her handkerchief outside and asked me to get it for her," confessed the duped magician, mournfully.

"I understand. And the driver whipped up his horses, and they left you in the road, twelve miles out of town! A fine idiot you've shown yourself to be!"

"Oh, Lord! Don't I know it? And now, what am I going to do?"

Alden came back to the parapet, and bent over, speaking with cautiously lowered voice.

"You go to the garage, and when it's dark bring Mr. Porter's car around. Can you drive? All right. Have it near the draw. And then go back to the garage. My room is opposite there, and I may think up some plan to get you into the castle, if I know you will be waiting."

"Whatever you say," agreed the little man submissively. "But get in I must," he added determinedly, "for I am the only one of us who knows how to handle supernatural forces," mysteriously.

Luke felt like saying "Fiddlesticks!" but in grave silence watched the occultist walk off down the side of the moat and disappear into the night.

[TO BE CONCLUDED]

*No. 4. The Severed Hand**

By WILHELM HAUFF

I WAS born in Constantinople; my father was a dragoman at the Porte, and he also carried on a fairly lucrative business in sweet-scented perfumes and silk goods. He gave me a good education; he partly instructed me himself, and also he had me instructed by one of our priests. He at first intended that I should succeed him in business, but as I showed greater aptitude in my studies than he had expected, he destined me, on the advice of his friends, to be a doctor; for if a doctor has learned a little more than the ordinary charlatan, he can make his fortune in Constantinople. Many Frenchmen frequented our house, and one of them persuaded my father to allow me to travel to the city of Paris in his native land, where such learning could be best acquired, and free of charge. He wished to take me with him gratuitously on his journey home. My father, who had also traveled in his youth, agreed, and the Frank told me to hold myself in readiness three months thence.

I was beside myself with joy at the idea of seeing foreign countries, and eagerly awaited the moment when we should embark. The Frank at last concluded his business and prepared himself for the journey. On the evening before our departure my father led me into his little bedroom. There I saw splendid clothes and weapons lying on the table. My gaze was chiefly attracted to an immense heap of gold, for I had never before seen so much collected together.

My father embraced me and said: "Behold, my son, I have procured clothes for your journey. These weapons are yours; they are the same which my grandfather hung around me when I went abroad. I know that you can use them aright, but make use of them only when you are attacked; on such occasions, however, defend yourself bravely. My property is not large; behold, I have divided it into three parts: one part for you, another for my support and spare money, but the third is to me a sacred and untouched property—it is for you in the hour of need." Thus spake my old father, tears standing in his eyes, perhaps from some foreboding, for I never saw him again.

The journey passed off very well; we soon reached the land of the Franks, and six days later we arrived in the large city of Paris. There my Frankish friend hired a room for me, and advised me to spend wisely my money, which amounted in all to two thousand dollars. I lived three years in this city, and learned what is necessary for a skilful physician to know. I should not, however, be stating the truth if I said that I liked being there, for the customs of this nation displeased me; besides, I had only a few chosen friends there, and these were noble young men.

The longing for home at last possessed me mightily; during the

**Translated from the German.*

whole of that time I had not heard anything from my father, and I therefore seized a favorable opportunity of returning home. An embassy from France left for Turkey. I acted as surgeon to the suite of the ambassador and arrived happily in Stamboul.

My father's house was locked, and the neighbors, who were surprized at seeing me, told me my father had died two months ago. The priest who had instructed me in my youth brought the key; alone and desolate I entered the empty house. Everything was just as my father had left it, except that the gold which I was to inherit was gone. I questioned the priest about it, and he said, bowing: "Your father died a saint, for he has bequeathed his gold to the Church." This was, and remained, inexplicable to me. However, what could I do? I had no witness against the priest, and had to be content that he had not considered the house and the goods of my father as a bequest.

This was the first misfortune that I encountered. Henceforth nothing but ill-luck attended me. My reputation as a doctor would not spread at all, because I was ashamed to act the charlatan; and I felt everywhere the want of the recommendation of my father, who would have introduced me to the richest and most distinguished persons, but who now no longer thought of the poor Zaleukos! My father's goods also had no sale, for his customers had deserted him after his death, and new ones are only to be got slowly.

Thus when I was one day meditating sadly over my position, it occurred to me that I had often seen in France men of my nation traveling through the country exhibiting their goods in the markets of the towns. I remembered that the people liked to buy of them, because they came from abroad, and that such a business would be most lucrative. Immediately I resolved what to do. I disposed of my father's house, gave part of the money to a trusty friend to keep for me, and with the rest I bought what are very rare in France: shawls, silk goods, ointments and oils; then I took a berth on board a ship, and thus entered upon my second journey to the land of the Franks.

It seemed as if fortune had favored me again as soon as I had turned my back upon the Castles of the Dardanelles. Our journey was short and successful. I traveled through the large and small towns of the Franks, and found everywhere willing buyers of my goods. My friend in Stamboul always sent me fresh stores, and my wealth increased day by day. When at last I had saved so much that I thought I might venture on a greater undertaking, I traveled with my goods to Italy. I also employed my knowledge of physic, which brought me not a little money. On reaching a town, I had it published that a Greek physician had arrived, who had already healed many; and my balsam and medicine gained me many a sequin. Thus at length I reached the city of Florence in Italy.

I resolved to remain in this city for some time, partly because I liked it so well, partly also because I wished to recruit myself from the exertions of my travels. I hired a vaulted shop, in that part of the town called Santa Croce, and not far from this a couple of well-appointed rooms at an inn, leading out upon a balcony. I immediately had my bills circulated, which announced me to be both physician and merchant. Scarcely had I opened my shop when I was besieged by buyers, and in spite of my high prices I sold more than anyone else, because I was obliging and friendly toward my customers.

THUS I had already lived four days happily in Florence, when one evening, as I was about to close my

vaulted room, and was examining once more the contents of my ointment boxes, as I was in the habit of doing, I found in one of the small boxes a piece of paper, which I did not remember to have put in it.

I unfolded the paper, and found in it an invitation to be on the bridge which is called Ponte Vecchio that night exactly at midnight. For a long time I sat and wondered as to who it might be who had invited me there; and not knowing a single soul in Florence, I thought perhaps I should be secretly conducted to a patient—a thing which had often occurred before. I therefore determined to proceed thither, but took care to gird on the sword which my father had once presented to me.

When it was close upon midnight I set out on my journey, and soon reached the Ponte Vecchio. I found the bridge deserted, and determined to await the appearance of him who had called me. It was a cold night; the moon shone brightly, and I looked down upon the waves of the Arno, which sparkled in the moonlight. It was striking 12 o'clock from all the churches of the city, when I looked up and saw a tall man standing before me completely covered in a scarlet cloak, one end of which hid his face.

At first I was somewhat frightened, because he had made his appearance so suddenly; but shortly afterward I was myself again and said: "If it is you who ordered me here, what do you want?" The man in scarlet turned round and said in an undertone: "Follow!" At this, however, I felt a little timid about going alone with this stranger. I stood still and said: "Not so, sir; kindly first tell me where; you might also let me see your countenance a little, so that I may convince myself you mean me no harm." The red one, however, seemed to pay no attention to this. "If you are unwilling, Zaleukos, remain," he replied, and continued his way. I grew angry. "Do you think," I exclaimed, "a man like me allows himself to be made a fool of, to be forced to wait on this cold night for nothing?"

In three bounds I had reached him, seized him by the cloak, and cried still louder, whilst laying hold of my saber with the other hand. His cloak remained in my hand, but the stranger had disappeared round the nearest corner.

I became calmer by degrees. I had the cloak, at any rate, and it was this which would give me the key to this remarkable adventure. I put it on and continued on my way home. When I was at a distance of about a hundred paces from it, someone brushed very closely by me and whispered in the language of the Franks: "Take care, Count; nothing can be done tonight." Before I had time to turn round, this somebody had passed, and I merely saw a shadow hovering along the houses. I perceived that these words did not concern me, but rather the cloak; yet it gave me no explanation concerning the affair.

On the following morning I considered what was to be done. At first I had intended to have the cloak cried in the streets, as if I had found it. But then the stranger might send for it by a third person, and thus no light would be thrown upon the matter. Whilst I was thus thinking, I examined the cloak more closely. It was made of thick Genoese velvet, scarlet in color, edged with astrakhan fur and richly embroidered with gold. The magnificent appearance of the fur put a thought in my mind which I resolved to carry out.

I carried it into my shop and exposed it for sale, but placed such a high price upon it that I was sure nobody would buy it. My object in this was to scrutinize everybody sharply who asked for the fur cloak;

for the figure of the stranger, which I had seen but superficially, though with some certainty, after the loss of the cloak, I should recognize amongst a thousand.

There were many would-be purchasers for the cloak, the extraordinary beauty of which attracted everybody; but none resembled the stranger in the slightest degree, and nobody was willing to pay such a high price as two hundred sequins for it. What astonished me was that when I asked if there was not such a cloak in Florence, everybody answered, "No," and all assured me that they never had seen so precious and tasteful a piece of work.

EVENING was drawing near, when at last a young man appeared, who had already been to my place, and had already offered me a great deal for the cloak. He threw a purse with sequins upon the table, and exclaimed: "Of a truth, Zaleukos, I must have your cloak, even if I should turn into a beggar over it!" He immediately began to count out his pieces of gold. I was in a dangerous position: I had exposed the cloak only to attract the attention of my stranger, and now a young fool came to pay an immense price for it. However, what could I do? I yielded; for on the other hand I was delighted at the idea of being so handsomely recompensed for my nocturnal adventure.

The young man put the cloak around him and went away, but on reaching the threshold he returned; unfastening a piece of paper which had been tied to the cloak, and throwing it toward me, he exclaimed: "Here, Zaleukos, hangs something which I dare say does not belong to the cloak." I picked up the piece of paper carelessly, but behold, on it these words were written: "Bring the cloak at the appointed hour tonight to the Ponte Vecchio, and four hundred sequins are yours." I stood thunderstruck. Thus I had lost my fortune and completely missed my aim! Yet I did not think long. I picked up the two hundred sequins, jumped after the one who had bought the cloak, and said: "Dear friend, take back your sequins and give me the cloak; I can not possibly part with it." He first regarded the matter as a joke; but when he saw that I was in earnest, he became angry at my demand, called me a fool, and finally it came to blows.

I was fortunate enough to wrench the cloak away from him in the scuffle, and was about to run away with it, when the young man called the police to his assistance, and we both appeared before the judge. The latter was much surprized at the accusation, and adjudicated the cloak in favor of my adversary. I offered the young man twenty, fifty, eighty, even a hundred sequins in addition to his two hundred, if he would part with the cloak. What my entreaties could not do, my gold did. He accepted it. I went away with the cloak triumphantly, and had to appear to the whole city of Florence as a madman. I did not care, however, about the opinion of the people, for I knew that I had profited after all by the bargain.

Impatiently I awaited the night. At the same hour as before I went with the cloak under my arm toward the Ponte Vecchio. With the last stroke of 12 the figure appeared out of the darkness and came toward me. It was unmistakably the man whom I had seen the day before. "Have you the cloak?" he asked me. "Yes, sir," I replied; "but it cost me a hundred sequins ready money." "I know it," replied the other. "Look: here are four hundred." He went with me toward the wide balustrade of the bridge, and counted out the money. There were four hundred; they sparkled magnificently in the

moonlight; their glitter rejoiced my heart. Alas! I did not anticipate that this would be its last joy. I put the money in my pocket, and was desirous of looking thoroughly at my kind and unknown benefactor; but he wore a mask, through which dark eyes stared at me frightfully. "I thank you, sir, for your kindness," I said to him; "what else do you require of me? I tell you beforehand it must be an honorable transaction."

"There is no occasion for alarm," he replied, whilst winding the cloak around his shoulders; "I require your assistance as surgeon, not for one alive, but dead."

"What do you mean?" I exclaimed, full of astonishment.

"I arrived with my sister from abroad," he said, and beckoned me at the same time to follow him. "I lived here with her at the house of a friend. My sister died yesterday suddenly of a disease, and my relatives wish to bury her tomorrow. According to an old custom of our family, all are to be buried in the tomb of our ancestors; many, notwithstanding, who died in foreign countries are buried there and embalmed. I do not begrudge my relatives her body, but for my father I want at least the head of his daughter, in order that he may see her once more."

This custom of severing the heads of beloved relatives appeared to me somewhat dreadful, yet I did not dare object to it lest I should offend the stranger. I told him that I was acquainted with the embalming of the dead, and begged him to conduct me to the deceased. Yet I could not help asking why all this must be done mysteriously and at night. He answered me that his relatives, who considered his intention horrible, objected to it by daylight; if the head were severed, then they could say no more about it; although he might have brought me the head to embalm, yet a natural feeling had prevented him from severing it himself.

In the meantime we had reached a large, splendid house. My companion pointed it out to me as the end of our nocturnal walk. We passed the principal entrance of the house, entered a little door, which the stranger carefully locked behind him, and now ascended in the dark a narrow spiral staircase. It led toward a dimly lighted passage, out of which we entered a room lighted by a lamp fastened to the ceiling.

In this room was a bed, on which the corpse lay. The stranger turned aside his face, evidently endeavoring to hide his tears. He pointed toward the bed, telling me to do my business well and quickly, and left the room.

I took my instruments, which as surgeon I always carried about with me, and approached the bed. Only the head of the corpse was visible, and it was so beautiful that I experienced involuntarily the deepest sympathy. Dark hair hung down in long plaits, the features were pale, the eyes closed. I took my sharpest knife, and with one stroke cut the throat. But oh horror! the dead opened her eyes, but immediately closed them again, and with a deep sigh she now seemed to breathe her last. At the same moment a stream of hot blood shot toward me from the wound. I was convinced that the poor creature had been killed by me. I had no doubt that she was dead, for there was no recovery from this wound. I stood for several minutes in painful anguish at what had happened. Had the man of the red cloak deceived me, or had his sister merely been apparently dead? The latter seemed to me more likely. But I dared not tell the brother of the deceased that perhaps a less deliberate cut might have awakened her without killing her; therefore I wished to sever the head completely; but once more the dying

woman groaned, stretched herself out in painful movements, and died.

Fright overpowered me, and, shuddering, I hastened out of the room. But outside in the passage it was dark, for the light was out. I felt my way haphazard along the wall in the dark and descended the stairway. I found the door ajar, and breathed more freely on reaching the street. Urged on by terror, I rushed toward my dwelling place, and buried myself in the cushions of my bed, trying to forget the terrible thing I had done.

But sleep deserted me, and only the morning admonished me again to take courage. It seemed to me probable that the man who had induced me to commit this nefarious deed might not denounce me. I immediately resolved to set to work in my vaulted room, and if possible to assume an indifferent look. But alas! an additional circumstance increased my anxiety still more. My cap and my girdle, as well as my instruments, were wanting, and I was uncertain whether I had left them in the room of the murdered girl or whether I had lost them in my flight. The former seemed indeed the more likely, and thus I could easily be discovered as the murderer.

At the accustomed hour I opened my vaulted room. My neighbor came in, as was his wont every morning, for he was a talkative man. "Well," he said, "what do you say about the terrible affair which occurred during the night?" I pretended not to know anything. "What, do you not know what is known all over the town? Are you not aware that the loveliest flower in Florence, Bianca, the governor's daughter, was murdered last night? I saw her only yesterday driving through the streets in so cheerful a manner with her intended one, for today the marriage was to have taken place." I felt each word of my neighbor like a sword-thrust. Many a time my torment was renewed, for every one of my customers told me of the affair, each one more ghastly than the one before, and yet nobody could relate anything more terrible than that which I had seen myself.

About midday a police officer entered my shop. "Signor Zaleukos," he said, producing the things which I had missed, "do these things belong to you?" I determined not to aggravate the affair by telling a lie, and acknowledged myself as the owner of the things. The police officer asked me to follow him, and led me toward a large building which I soon recognized as the prison. There he showed me into a room.

My situation was terrible, as I thought of it in solitude. The frightful idea of having committed a murder, unintentionally, constantly presented itself to my mind. I also could not conceal from myself that the glitter of the gold had captivated my feelings, otherwise I should not have fallen blindly into the trap.

Two hours after my arrest I was led out of my cell. I descended several steps until at last I reached a great hall. Around a long table draped in black were seated twelve men, mostly old men. There were benches along the sides of the hall, filled with the most distinguished personages of Florence. The galleries, which were above, were thickly crowded with spectators. When I had stepped toward the table covered with black cloth, a man with a gloomy and sad countenance arose; it was the governor. He told the assembly that he, as the father of the murdered girl, could not sentence, and that he resigned his place on this occasion to the eldest of the senators. The eldest of the senators was at least ninety years old. He stood in a bent attitude, and his temples were covered with thin white hair, but his eyes were as yet very fiery, and his voice powerful and weighty. He com-

menced by asking me whether I confessed to the murder. I requested him to allow me to speak, and related undauntedly and with a clear voice what I had done.

I noticed that the governor, during my recital, at one time turned pale, and at another time red. When I had finished, he rose angrily. "What, wretch!" he exclaimed; "do you even dare to impute to another person the crime which you have committed from greediness?" The senator reprimanded him for his interruption, since he had voluntarily renounced his right; besides, it was not clear that I did the deed from greediness, for, according to his own statement, nothing had been stolen from the victim. He even went farther. He told the governor that he must give an account of the early life of his daughter, for then only would it be possible to decide whether I had spoken the truth or not. At the same time he adjourned the court for the day, in order, as he said, to consult the papers of the deceased, which the governor would give him.

I was taken back to my prison, where I spent a wretched day, always fervently wishing that a link might be discovered between the deceased and the man of the red cloak. Full of hope, I entered the Court of Justice the next day. Several letters were lying on the table. The old senator asked me whether they were in my handwriting. I looked at them and noticed that they must have been written by the same hand as the other two papers which I had received. I communicated this to the senators, but no attention was paid to my statement, and they told me that I might have written both, for the signature of the letters was undoubtedly a Z, the first letter of my name. The letters contained threats against the deceased, and warnings against the marriage she was about to contract.

The governor seemed to have given extraordinary information concerning me, for I was treated with more suspicion and rigor on this day. To justify myself, I referred to my papers, which must be in my room, but was told they had been looked for without success. Thus at the conclusion of this sitting all hope vanished, and on my being brought into court the third day, judgment was pronounced on me. I was convicted of wilful murder, and condemned to death.

ON THE evening of this terrible day which had decided my fate, I was sitting in my lonely cell; my hopes were gone, my thoughts stedfastly fixed upon death, when the door of my prison opened, and in came a man, who for a long time looked at me silently. "Is it thus I find you again, Zaleukos?" he said. I had not recognized him by the dim light of my lamp, but the sound of his voice roused in me old remembrances. It was Valetti, one of those few friends whose acquaintance I had made in Paris when I was studying there. He said he had accidentally come to Florence, where his father, who was a distinguished man, lived. He had heard about my affair, and had come to hear from my own lips how I could have committed such a crime.

I related to him the whole affair. He seemed much surprized at it, and adjured me, as my only friend, to tell him all, so that I should not leave the world with a lie behind me. I confirmed my assertions with an oath that I spoke the truth, and that I was not guilty of anything, except that the glitter of the gold had dazzled me and that I had not perceived the improbability of the stranger's story. "Did you know Bianca?" Valetti asked me. I assured him that I had never seen her. Valetti now related to me that a profound mystery rested on the affair, that the governor had

very much accelerated my condemnation, and now a report was spread that I had known Bianca for a long time and had murdered her out of revenge for her marriage with someone else. I told him that all this coincided exactly with the man of the red cloak, but that I was unable to prove his participation in the affair. Valetti embraced me weeping, and promised me to do all he could to save my life.

I had little hope, though I knew that Valetti was a clever man, well versed in the law, and that he would do all in his power to save my life. For two long days I was in uncertainty; at last Valetti appeared. "I bring consolation, though painful," he said. "You will live and be free with the loss of one hand." Affected, I thanked my friend for saving my life. He told me that the governor had been inexorable in regard to having the affair investigated a second time, but that he had at last agreed, in order not to seem unjust, that if a similar case could be found in the law books of the history of Florence, my punishment should be the same as the one recorded in these books. Valetti and his father had searched in the old books day and night, and at last found a case quite similar to mine. The sentence was: that his left hand be cut off, his property confiscated, and he himself banished forever. This was my punishment also, and he asked me to prepare for the painful hour which awaited me. I will not describe to you that terrible hour, when I laid my hand upon the block in the public market place and my own blood shot over me in broad streams.

VALETTI took me to his house until I had recovered; he then most generously supplied me with money for traveling, for all I had acquired with so much difficulty had fallen a prey to the law. I left Florence for Sicily and embarked on the first ship that I found for Constantinople. My hope was fixed upon the sum which I had entrusted to my friend. I also requested to be allowed to live with him. But great was my astonishment when he asked me why I did not wish to live in my own house. He told me that some unknown man had bought a house in the Greek quarter in my name, and this very man had also told the neighbors of my early arrival. I immediately proceeded thither, accompanied by my friend, and was received by all my old acquaintances joyfully.

An old merchant gave me a letter, which the man who bought the house for me had left behind. I read as follows: "Zaleukos! Two hands are prepared to work incessantly, in order that you may not feel the loss of one of yours. The house which you see and all its contents are yours, and every year you will receive enough to be counted amongst the rich of your people. Forgive him who is unhappier than yourself!"

I could guess who had written the letter, and in answer to my question the merchant told me it had been a man whom he took for a Frank, and who had worn a scarlet cloak. I knew enough to understand that the stranger was, after all, not entirely devoid of noble intentions. In my new house I found everything arranged in the best style, also a vaulted room stored with goods, more splendid than I had ever had.

Ten years have passed since. I still continue my commercial travels, more from old custom than necessity, yet I have never again seen that country where I became so unfortunate. Every year since, I have received a thousand gold-pieces; and although I rejoice to know that unfortunate man to be so noble, yet he cannot relieve me of the sorrow of my soul, for the terrible picture of the murdered Bianca is continually on my mind.

NOMADS of the NIGHT

by David Baxter

Author of "The Brown Moccasin"

Bats have long been the symbol of all that is weird and horrible and gruesome. Virgil called them harpies; legends of blood-sucking vampires have been built about them; and they are regarded as peculiarly unclean, repulsive creatures. Whenever an author wants to add a touch of ghostly horror to his description of a ruined castle or a haunted house, he has a bat dart across the scene in the gathering gloom.

David Baxter, careful observer of animal life that he is, comes to the defense of the maligned flying mammals in this nature-study, and paints an intimate and sympathetic picture of the family life of the Kansas brown bat—a picture which is not at all in accord with the popular misconception of the "flitter mouse." Mr. Baxter's delineation, you may be sure, is accurate; and those readers of Weird Tales *who enjoyed his interesting story of the Kansas watersnake in the February issue* (The Brown Moccasin) *will need no invitation to plunge into the vivid narrative of the four-cornered race of death which he presents in* Nomads of the Night.

THE smoky-purple haze of early-summer twilight crept up out of the flat valley to flood the sandhill district with a shallow sea of glimmering solitude. The grayish-blue dome of sky, sprinkled with pale stars, hung heavily, like an inverted bowl, close above the tumult of rocky ledges and hoary dunes. And the myriad voices of day blended gradually into the incessant drone of night as the landscape grew more vague and lonely.

From her throne low in the east an immense red moon waved her wands of light over the gloomy depths of a deserted rock quarry, near the center of a wilderness of weeds and stunted trees, turning the grim stone walls into a blurring nocturne of bronze high-lights and inky shadows.

Some fifty paces away a great gray owl gripped his claw-polished limb in a box-elder and gazed intently at a black, mouthlike crevice, where it

opened near the bottom layer of rock. With his yellow eyes glowing greedily and his short neck craning eagerly, the fierce robber of the night had remained immobile for nearly an hour, fully alert and expectant, for all his rigid silence.

From the blackness of the deep horizontal fissure there had emanated strange sounds: thin, rasping, little sounds, as of a dead cottonwood leaf blown quaveringly along a stone walk, or as of some small creature scratching ineffective claws upon a granite floor. Alternating and commingling with these tiny rustlings, other odd noises had echoed: repressed, labored breathings, hissing whines of puny distress.

A trifle puzzled and a bit nervous, the feathered king of night had heard and heeded. In fact, the queer little sounds had awakened him from an all-day drowze, hungry as usual. He now proposed to pounce without warning upon the cause of his disturbed dreams, should the creature come out of the cavern.

And so he had waited instead of flying off about his night's business, among the foliage of surrounding shrubbery where it hung motionless in an attitude of spent dejection. Long shadows lying athwart each tree and bush might be hiding some morsel to tempt his palate. The heaviness of sleep seemed to weigh down every object within the vision of the wary bird as he, now and then, pivoted his head to gaze over distant huddles of mottled sand dunes.

PRESENTLY, a weird little creature with dragonlike wings flitted out into the open space 'twixt stone wall and owl perch. Swiftly and silently it circled, dipping anon erratically, but gracefully, mounting high and higher, then fluttering wildly and diving dizzily to the very tops of tall gum-weeds growing along the floor of the abandoned quarry.

Again and again this brown goblin wheeled near to the mouth of the cavern, only to turn like a flash and disappear through the trees, miraculously evading outstretched, entangling limbs, and approaching again, in a moment, from a different direction; seeming almost to take shape from the hazy void itself, so silent and ghostlike did he come.

The gray owl watched the aerial contortions of the dragon-winged animal without emotion, save for the greed which shone in his round orbs. He knew it was useless for him to try catching the elusive animal among the trees, for it could dart swiftly through a network of branches where he would have found it difficult indeed to squeeze his bulky form an inch at a time. His sole hope was that the bat would fly near enough for him to strike it with his powerful wings. One stroke of his mighty pinion, and the restless nomad of the night would flap awkwardly to the ground, an easy prey to the hooked beak of the savage killer.

But this hope was vain, as nature had equipped the brown bat with a pair of wings so sensitive they could detect the size and location of any object, no matter how small or how swiftly it was approached, animate or inanimate. Even when the beady black eyes could not see it, the bat was able to sense the proximity of an enemy in time to evade it.

In fact, the brown bat's wings, ears and nose membranes are a network of supersensitive nerve centers, which warn him of the approach of anything, and which immediately notify him when he is approaching an object, no matter how dark the night. Any change in an air current, such as where it is deflected by a tree limb or is shut off by some obstacle, is instantly communicated to the bat's brain through the delicate nerve system of the rubberlike membrane stretched over his wing frame. So delicate is

this system that the bat suffers agony when anything touches the wing covering.

This seemingly supernatural power of divination is but a sense of touch developed to an unbelievably high degree. In truth, the brown bat's wing is really a hand with greatly elongated fingers; the first digit, or thumb, terminates in a hook or claw, which is the only part of the hand that can be utilized as such. The rest of it is used solely for aerial locomotion and to cover the body when the animal is dormant. In fact, the brown bat is the least terrestrial of all animals. Even his tiny apelike feet are entirely unsuited to walking; they are used to hold him suspended, head down, from his perch, and to assist him somewhat in seizing obstreperous beetles. His travels on the earth are nothing but an ungainly shuffle.

By some grim derision or perhaps overconfidence, on the part of an inscrutable nature, this indigenous little mammal was created half bird, half beast, and by nature was given such an impish face and aspect that he has but few friends in all the animal kingdoms, including man. Even the latter, of whom he is valuable benefactor and near relative, fears him and shudders with superstitious dread at his near approach.

There are yet today many people who believe the bat to be a creature of ill-omen and unearthly powers. Many, in this enlightened age, still believe the "flitter mouse", as he is called, to be a repulsive animal of horrid habits and evil influence, when in reality the little brown flyer of the nights is an extremely affectionate, family-loving creature of clean customs and exemplary living.

In days when Virgil referred to the bats as harpies, it was to be expected that they should be feared and shunned, but today folk should know that the rubber-clad nocturnal is one of man's best friends. He is the third nearest relative of man in the United States, which fact probably accounts for his penchant for darting close to anyone he chances to meet in the evening dusk, feeding upon the hordes of insects that naturally gravitate around man.

However, the gray watcher was concerned merely with waiting developments, evidently fully aware of the reason for the great anxiety of the brown flitter to enter the cavern in the quarry wall. Again and again the bat materialized out of the dusk like a dragon-winged goblin, swooping with lightning speed down over the tree-tops into the quarry pit.

At last he circled the pit completely as if to make certain the coast was clear. Then on the second round he darted deftly into the blackness. Guided by his tense wing-senses safely past ragged, jutting rocks and sharp corners, he disappeared from the owl's range of vision instantly. Peer and crane as he would, the owl could not make out what was taking place in the dark recess, although he could distinctly hear the peevish squeaks and chattering snarls that greeted the flyer and echoed out into the night.

On a small sloping shelf of rock near the back of the cave, there crouched another awkward goblinesque creature, who met the first with a long, warning snarl of thin high-pitched protestings. So angry was this voice that the owl outside must have thought the owner of it were choking.

Bobbing up and down on her partly distended wings a little mother bat met the intruder with anything but a pleasant welcome, although the wide-open mouth, with its rows of white, needle-pointed teeth and the snarling, foxy snout, looked a deal more dangerous than they were in actuality. The piggy ears of the recumbent one

also lent to her wizened countenance an exaggerated expression of fierceness that put fear into the heart of the unwelcome visitor.

Bats can start flying only from an elevation, so the mother had selected the high shelf as the first home of her four tiny babies, who were the exact replicas of herself in shape and clothing, even to the woolly eyebrows and naked wing membranes. Pigmy counterparts of their parents, goblins in miniature, they were, with widespread mouths and blinking pinpoint eyes. And already they were cleverly imitating their mother in paroxysms of puny, clicking snarls.

But the intruder's intentions were good, in so far as they went. He merely wanted to see how his family was progressing. How he knew they had arrived is another of nature's mysteries, since the male bat had paid no attention to their coming, nor to the welfare of the mother for many days.

The female *cheiroptera* failed to recognize him, if indeed she had any desire to do so. This wing-handed husband was virtually a stranger to her. To be accurate, she never did know to whom she had been wedded during that early spring, after a long winter of hibernating, when she and scores of her kind, male and female, had clung to each other, head downward in an inert cluster, neither knowing nor caring about the fierce blizzards raging outside of the cave where they slept a sleep nigh unto death.

Nature provides many strange ways of sustaining life for creatures whose food supply is cut off entirely by winter. Hibernating is probably the strangest of all. The sleeper passes into a stage that is virtually death. All organs cease to function, and no signs of life are apparent, save a sporadic quivering or irritation of the outer skin.

When the animals spend the dormant period in clusters, as bats usually do, there is little doubt that the purpose of the massing is the collective warmth afforded by bodily contact. However, it is still a mystery to science how the animals at the top of a cluster sustain the weight of the rest.

With the arrival of warm weather the cluster disintegrates and the individual members fly out into the twilight like a small cloud of crepuscular butterflies, fluttering and dodging for a while ere they obtain complete control of their wings. It is as if they were stiff after the long sleep. Some dance among the tree tops a while with their mates, others seek instant obscurity, when spring restores their wonted activity.

Now, when the delinquent husband darted into her retreat, the female mammal drove him out with peevish scoldings. He was glad to leave, however, and soon hurried away in fickle flight for an air waltz with some other brown dancer, leaving the mother alone to teach the ways of aerial life to her youngsters, who had as yet but feeble strength in their fragile wings, and only their milk teeth with which to crunch the tough, armored beetles that formed a goodly share of the food eaten by indigenous mammals.

So the mother knew she must care for the flock without help from her mate for a period of about three weeks before they shed their milk teeth and in this interim gained sufficient strength to fly alone. Although born with the same supersensitive wing, nose and ear membranes, the young bats were really helpless for the first few weeks.

After the male bat flashed out and circled into the gloom of outlying hills, much to the chagrined disappointment of the gray owl, who still maintained his look-out post on the box-elder limb, the female proceeded to clean and dress her babies. Each

little elfin was gone over carefully and licked, cat-fashion, with her monkeylike tongue, in spite of stuttering and impatient squeaks.

Awkward as the work was, the mother bat persevered until the last olive-brown coat and yellowish waistcoat shone like moist satin. Her sundry lickings were interspersed with clicking whispers and shrill chidings, almost human in their solicitude. Only after the entire brood was properly dressed were any of them permitted to nose around for their source of food supply.

But four babies were too many! By some mishap or slip in nature's plan, the brown mother had been given too many offspring! Usually there should be but two; sometimes, but seldom, three. This was a serious handicap from the very beginning. Quadruplets! It didn't matter so much at first; they were so small and weighed so little, even though they did depend solely upon the parent for sustenance. But, after the first few days, the entire brood must cling to the mother's breast fur for a period of approximately twenty days, at which time their first teeth would be exchanged for a permanent set consisting of four varieties similar to man's teeth.

Long before the teeth would appear, however, the quartet would be quite large and heavy—too heavy, in fact, for the unfortunate mother. For as soon as the youngsters were strong enough to cling head down to her breast fur, the mother bat must take them out of the quarry cavern for experience in air sailing. Just a few nights could she leave them on the ledge while she sought strength-building food for herself.

DURING this time, and a night or so after their birth, the mother bat disengaged herself from the squirming four and flitted out into the moonlight, where her flying was rather weak and uncertain, much to the pleased surprize of the feathered night king, who was again seated on his throne above the quarry pit. And it was with greedy anticipation that he watched her wheel in wobbly circles before and below him. So erratic were her initial attempts that it kept him busy screwing his head around and back again.

But the gray killer's glee was short-lived, for the little *cheiroptera* had the wisdom of her nature. Experience had taught her to keep shy of trees when she was physically unfit. So she practised in the open spaces until she was mistress of her wings, and circled far and wide in search of anything edible in the shape of nocturnal moths, gnats, or flying beetles.

Presently her skill was rewarded. She neatly snared a roaring June bug in the fur-covered sac formed by the conjoining membrane of tail and hind legs. Reinforced by the pelvic girdle of fur, this pouch served both as a rudder and an air-seine for snaring the larger forms of crepuscular insects. The gnats and mosquitoes she caught by the million with her mouth alone as she darted through their teeming hordes, but the more rugged bugs required the use of her tail sac, which also served to assist her in rapidly doubling back in pursuit of a particularly agile insect.

It was needless to carry food back to the family in its original state, so the mother bat merely gorged herself to repletion on her favorite moths.

Finally, as the red moon changed to silver and the twilight deepened, the soarings of the brown bat brought her to a narrow river gliding like a brocaded silver ribbon down over the dusky plain below the rock quarry. There she balanced a moment, then nose-dived straight for the iridescent water, where she scooped up a mouthful of the cold liquid. So daintily and gracefully did she dive and

snatch up the water, that the surface of the stream was scarcely ruffled.

Several times she repeated the diving, despite the great risk of being swallowed by a leaping black bass, which broke the surface dangerously close to her as she arose for the last time. The fish was quick, but the bat sensed his nearness ere he attained the surface of the stream.

Back to the cave, through moonlight so bright that it turned her to an inky dragon against the hazy horizon. Swift as the wind she flew. Scarcely pausing in her dizzy speed, the mother bat darted into the gloomy interior of the crevice. And she was just in time to save the family from a horrid extermination. A monster gray rat crouched within springing distance of the helpless quartet. The sinister bristling of the rodent's whiskers, the cruel glint in his eyes, told the mother bat his evil intentions only too plainly. But her sudden entry and her burst of metallic snarling startled him, causing him to shrink back into the darkness, where his retreating scamper echoed loudly.

As this danger subsided, the mother bat alighted near her brood and hobbled ungracefully over to cover them. It was difficult indeed to walk on legs constructed solely for aerial locomotion.

Half famished, the young bats bounced and clawed for a turn at the nursing, as the mother gathered her pigmy counterparts to her bosom. She was a wise parent and managed to satisfy the cravings of all.

IT WAS well past midnight, with the waning moon resting far down in the west and the chorus of night hushed to solemn silence, when all of the youngsters were finally fed and sleeping. A new dawn was sweeping slowly and majestically over the countryside, bringing with it a fresh burden of daytime dangers to the nocturnal nomads.

The bat family was reasonably safe from daylight marauders, however, so the mother settled back, with her silky rubberlike wing membranes enfolding the furry four, long before the sunlight hours. In fact the odd little mammals are scarcely ever awake more than six hours out of every twenty-four—six hours of flying and eating, and eighteen for digesting.

By day their best means of defense is to hang perfectly quiet, with wings folded like a dusty black cloak, resembling a bunch of partially withered leaves so closely that it is difficult for the sharpest of eyes to detect them. Fortunately, too, the majority of the bat's enemies are also nocturnal creatures who must sleep during the day.

THE long day dragged by uneventfully for the bat family, save for an occasional sleepy squeak as a youngster adjusted himself to a more comfortable position, or the resisting snarl of a fellow sleeper who disliked to be disturbed.

Once that veriest of earth wanderers, the diamond-back rattlesnake, paused below the cavern entrance to sound a loud alarm, probably because he was in a particularly savage humor, mayhap because he was disgruntled at not being able to climb up the steep wall of rock to explore the cracks and crannies of the bat cave. Much as he liked a meal of brown bats, the reptile did not tarry long, however. Hunting was more profitable among the rag weeds and Russian thistles, for here the sun in sultry fervor cast a spell of drowzy stupor over the toads and lizards, making them easy to catch.

Then night came again on moonlit wings to bring the bats an urgent need of food and drink. But the batlets were still too weak to hang to their mother's fur for any twilight sailing in the sky; in fact it would

be several days before they could hold to her while she flew. So the mother bat was forced to leave them again unguarded while she foraged for her own stomach. Not only had she to satisfy her cravings, but she must build up surplus strength against the time when she must carry the family with her. She must be in excellent trim in order to support a weight almost equal to her own.

Thus the nights went by. For several nights she left the brood to shift for itself while she drank and was merry, except on the night of a terrific rain storm, when she remained at home and went to bed hungry.

After this, for the balance of nearly three weeks, she carried the writhing little fellows wherever she went, flying after food or resting, head down, from trees or ledges. Changing sleeping quarters frequently, the bats always hung upside down when at rest. Instinct told the mother that it was an unsafe policy to sleep more than a few days at a time in the same nest.

TOWARD the end of three weeks, the moon was again peeping into the bat cave. Only the gray owl was missing from the scene. The trees, the stone wall, the dark underbrush, the weeds and shadows, all seemed the same as on the night of the feathered king's first futile vigil. The big dulled sun had dropped below the western rim of the sky and the murky twilight was stretching across to the dim east to crown the massive humps of white sand, each with a purple halo.

It was a bit of sandhill Kansas, painted on an immense heavy-grained canvas by some giant medieval artist.

All was motionless, except for an agile bird known as a bull-bat, who soared crazily in the middle distance, quite spoiling the effect of this living tapestry. This solitary flyer, a nighthawk, was almost identical with the brown bat in so far as actions were concerned. He wheeled and circled on oddly balancing wings, with the incredible swiftness of the little wing-handed mammal; but he was no relation to her, either blood or ancestral. He had feathers and talons and a short wide beak surmounted by noctivagant eyes, in place of fur and thumb hooks. By day he sat stupidly around on posts or trees, instead of hanging head down in the dark crevices like his namesake. The name "bull-bat" was given him because he flew and fed only at twilight, cleverly imitating the brown bat in his fluttering maneuvers.

Paradoxically enough, this enemy of the brown bat had no cannibalistic designs upon the fur-coated creature. He was not raptorial, except for the preying upon insect life. His vicious attacks upon the bat were aimed solely to drive an industrious rival out of the insect-hunting business. He sought merely to kill the bat or drive her from his game preserve.

On this particular evening the mother bat dropped out of her daytime retreat. After falling perhaps two feet, her cupped wings caught the air, steadied her, and she climbed high up into the upper strata of atmosphere before she was aware of the proximity of the feathered bat. In pure exultation she fairly looped the loop through the grid of moonbeams where they sifted through the interstices of an osage orange hedge. Turning and diving, and doubling swiftly back, she flew like a thing possessed, always sure, through it all, that the four youngsters were still clinging tenaciously to her breast fur. The batlets never so much as squeaked a protest against the perilous ride.

Meanwhile the bull-bat came on apace, soaring over the hills on swift, silent wings.

A gaudy moth sailed out of the shadows beyond a tall, trembleleaf cottonwood. The brown bat spied it, and immediately gave chase.

In and out, back and forth, through the grove and across the ridges with lightning speed, went pursuer and pursued. Grim determination drove the wings of both, one to kill and the other to escape destruction: a race typical of wild life. Nature's inscrutable law of survival: one life to preserve another.

All too soon, the bull-bat arrived to make of the race a three-cornered chase, with one pursuing and two trying to escape. Bent on colliding with the brown bat to crush the delicate framework of her wing-hands, and bring her absolutely helpless to the ground, he closed in behind the twain. Just one slender bone fractured, and the bat's pinion would be useless, so finely adjusted was its equilibrium.

But the cruel night-hawk was not to have his way unmolested. The route led past a thick-foliaged box-elder tree, wherein sat that mighty king of darkness, the gray owl. He espied the swaying bull-bat as he passed through a shaft of moonlight, and without hesitation lunged heavily out of his place of concealment to bring up the rear of what had now become a four-cornered race of death.

The brown bat overtook the panic-stricken moth and neatly scooped it into her tail sac. Turning to flit back to her favorite region by the rock quarry, she saw her feathered foes for the first time. She saw the gray owl come up with the bull-bat, heard his raucous squawk of fear, heard the owl's cry of triumph, and watched the pair go down together into a wild-plum thicket amid a terrific clash of rending bones and fluttering feathers.

The shrieking voices arising out of the bushes told of a battle unto death by two of night's fiercest nomads.

But the frightened mammal did not await the outcome. Too anxious was she to get home with her restless babies, who seemed to sense the danger and were now beginning to wriggle peevishly. So large and strong had they grown that it was quite a problem to navigate the air currents with them when they hung quietly. When they persisted in moving about, which they did at times, they would literally trip her up, causing her to stagger drunkenly and strive mightily to maintain her balance.

As TIME passed, the feeding and carrying of the young bats became more problematic. The mother realized she could not support her own weight and the increasing weight of her family much longer. As the youngsters grew in size and strength, they required more nourishment. And, to complete the cycle, they hampered her wing functioning to such an extent that food was increasingly harder to procure. They were no longer sucklings entirely, but depended a great deal upon such insects as the mother could catch for them. She often sacrificed her own stomach to satisfy their voracious appetites, thus weakening herself and thereby reducing her ability to snare sufficient insect food.

She struggled desperately, bravely, slowly reaching the stage where it would be impossible to go on, where starvation faced the whole family. A tragic ending was in sight for the five little night-lovers if nature did not soon intervene.

Then, one night as the brown mother essayed to fly out of her hiding place, she fell clumsily to the bare rocks on the quarry floor, where she lay flat on her back for several

minutes in spite of the ever-present danger from earthly enemies. It was the end! She could not longer flit through the twilight with her living burden!

There was the bitter alternative, and this she finally accepted. In spite of angry, stuttering protests, in spite of shrill pleadings, in spite of the ties of affection, the tired mother pried loose one of her brood and pushed him away from her. In order that the other three might have a chance to live she discarded one, the backward little imp of the lot. It was nature's law: to outcast the weakling.

However, nature sometimes relents! For as the brown bat dropped from a gum weed where she had climbed to start her flight, another bat appeared upon the scene.

It circled low over the outcast, who bounced and fluttered on the hard stones like a distraught child. Twice the strange bat darted above the crying youngster. The third time it paused long enough to permit the batlet to fasten his thumb hooks in the thick breast fur. Then out through the trees into the dim distance winged the rescuer and its adopted waif.

Who knows? Perhaps the male parent was repentant! Or perhaps this was some other mother who had lost her entire family and could not resist the maternal instinct so strong in wild life, particularly the life of night's nomads!

He Spent His Life in Bondage to a Color

The Yellow Pool

By FRANK OWEN

Author of "The Lantern-Maker," "The Wind That Tramps the World," etc.

OSCAR WILDE might have gotten his theme for the *Symphony in Yellow* from Paul Benoit if he had known him, although if he had, the poem could not have been called a symphony. For although Paul Benoit was as yellow as saffron, he presented a far from harmonious appearance. He was out of tune with the color scheme of life. He was about sixty years old but the marks of a peculiarly eventful though unhappy life were indelibly stamped upon him. His sickly-yellow face, straggly, filthy-yellow beard, yellow shirt (once white), and trousers yellow-green with age—all served but to accentuate his horrible expression. His laugh was a leer showing toothless gums, yellow-red, a laugh not easily forgotten. When he was keenly pleased, it rose to a shrill pitch, weird and wild, but even odder than his laugh was the far-away look in his eyes. He lived in one world but heard and saw in another. He was like a man who dwelt in yesterday. He never talked of the present, or of the future, but only of the past. He liked to linger about the shadowy, forbidden corridors of unpleasant memories.

Many people are color-blind; they can not distinguish one shade from another; but Paul Benoit was color-mad; he was madly in love with

yellow. Except for this one peculiar twist to his mind, he was sane enough. Although now quite poor, he had once been extremely wealthy, one of the pioneer scientists who fought and conquered yellow fever in the Canal Zone.

He went color-mad in 1912 after he had been lost for several days in the deadly swamps near Panama. He had wandered out into the wilds one morning, as was his frequent custom, on some particular branch of research work. So interested did he become in his observations that he lost all track of time. He wandered through the maze of yellow bushes, not heeding the direction he took. It was intensely hot, so hot that the very air seemed molten yellow, and the yellow-chrome sky seemed to merge into the golden jungle-swamp. Toward midday the sun grew so glaring that it seemed as though all the fires of the heavens were concentrated solely upon him. He was almost blinded by the terrific yellow brilliance. He plunged forward like a drunken man. He knew not where he was going, but even had he known he could not have found his way in the burning glare.

Two days later he was found by a searching party that had been scouring the country for miles around. For three days he remained unconscious. Then one morning he awoke, weak but apparently perfectly rational. He remembered nothing of his experience and was very much interested in all his comrades had to say about it. To talk of the swamplands caused him no revulsion.

Within ten days he was up and around again. It was then that he was seized with color madness. He went wild over yellow. Every other color ceased to exist for him. His every emotion was mirrored in a yellow tone. His house inside and out he painted yellow. Furniture, bedding, carpets and rugs all changed in rapid succession. Everything about his house was soon of a single tone of yellow. When one visited him in the heat of the day, it was like a visit to the sun. The light glistened and flashed back and forth, intensified by every object. The glazed finish to the walls made of them yellow mirrors. It was a veritable madhouse, but still there was something awe-inspiring about the weirdly burnished glow. And the silent swamps in back of the house, stretching for miles toward the west, served only to emphasize the oddness of the spot.

Not far from the house in the heart of the swamps was a stagnant yellow pool about a hundred feet wide and of unfathomed depth. The mixture of yellow muck and water shone in the sunlight like a pool of liquid gold. It was this pool that Paul Benoit used in much of his research work. He had built a stone ledge along one side of it so that one might approach in safety to the very brink.

It was Dr. Colton who first suggested to Paul Benoit that he go off to California for a rest.

"A bit of quiet and peace in a white man's country will do you a world of good," he said.

Although he did not express his feelings, Dr. Colton believed that Paul Benoit was going mad from the sun. He believed that only in a sea-voyage was there any hope.

We had expected Paul Benoit to object to the suggestion, but to our surprize he seemed to welcome it.

"I do feel a bit fagged out," he admitted, "and I guess I'm about due for a fortnight's holiday."

Paul Benoit remained away for three weeks. Then he returned one morning when the sun glowed down unmercifully from a yellow-orange sky. But he did not return alone. He brought with him a golden girl who, he asserted, was a Manchu princess.

He took up his residence again in the yellow house with the mysterious golden girl. Never have I seen a woman who could even approach her in attraction. She drew me to her against my will, yet never did she seem even cognizant of my presence. If I had been the dust beneath her feet she could not have been more disdainful of me. In looks, she was a thing glorious to behold, tall and slim and molded like a Grecian goddess. Her almond-shaped eyes seemed to glow with the fires of golden passion; her lips were like splashes of blood on her yellow-olive skin. Her jet-black hair glistened like polished ebony. It seemed to reflect the golden glory of her face. When in her presence, it was as though one were enveloped in a golden-yellow cloud. Even after dusk, she seemed to cast off a radiance as though the sun were still shining on her.

And now I became conscious of another change in Paul Benoit. He had turned pagan. He worshiped that golden girl. He used to make her stand nude in the dazzling sunlight, by the yellow pool, her gorgeous golden body gleaming in the haze like the bronze body of a Hellenic statue. Golden girl, golden sun, golden pool—a symphony in yellow magic. Her body gleamed like burnished gold. She stood poised on the very brink of the vapid pool, not moving, as still as death. It was a sight more wonderful than Saadi, the poet, ever dreamed of. It was magnificent, but it was mad. Materialists are wrong when they say there is no meaning in color. There is witchery, an allure as seductive as hashish.

I don't know when it was that we began to realize that the golden girl was enameling her face in an effort to make it white and was putting just a touch of carmine in the center of her cheeks. It was that touch of red that shattered the harmony of Paul Benoit's life. No more terrible clash with his beautiful yellow could be conceived. The incongruity of it was very impressive. She who was yellow wanted to be white, and he who was white worshiped yellow.

One day out by the pool, he seized her roughly by the wrist.

"Why are you trying to change your color?" he cried.

"Because I hate it," she said tensely. "To me there is nothing so vile as yellow. It is the color of putrid swamps, of disease, of unhealthy things."

"You lie," he snarled. "It is the color of the sun. Yellow dawn, yellow butterflies, yellow flowers, yellow gold. No other tone is so submerged in wealth."

She laughed mockingly at the intensity of his passion. As she did so, the golden thread of reason snapped within him. He seized her by the throat and held her over the yellow pool. His long bony fingers closed about her neck like steel talons. Without a murmur, she went limp in his arms. Her face began to turn blue. Oh, the horror of it! His golden girl was turning blue when he desired more than anything else for her to remain that wondrous yellow tint. His feelings revolted. Spasmodically he released his hold on her throat. As he did so there was a purling splash as the body of the golden girl disappeared forever in the yawning yellow pool.

Now many years have passed but Paul Benoit still lives in the yellow house by the yellow pool. He is old and poor. All his friends have fallen away from him. He is neglected, forgotten; but he does not care, for every night, at eventide, he goes to the yellow pool and sits for hours crooning wild, weird love songs to the golden girl whom he imagines he still sees poised nude on the brink of the water like a figure of burnished bronze.

THE EYRIE

SINCE Marco Polo came back to Europe early in the Fourteenth Century with his strange tales of far Cathay, Oriental tales have held extraordinary fascination for us of the Western world. They take the reader out of the ruts of humdrum everyday existence; they weave a spell of bizarre wonder; they transport us to a fairyland of exotic strangeness and romance.

The few Oriental stories that have been published in WEIRD TALES during the past year were popular with you, the readers, far beyond expectation, considering the proportion they bear to other stories. The gripping orientales of E. Hoffmann Price; the exquisite Chinese stories of Frank Owen; the tale of Chinese magic told by Soong Kwoen-ling and James W. Bennett in the April issue;—all these have found immediate favor. Murray Leinster's torture-tale of India, *The Oldest Story in the World,* published in the August issue, is fighting out first place with Lieutenant Burks' Haitian voodoo story, ***Black Medicine,*** in the voting for favorite story in that issue. So we are going to give you more Oriental tales. More Oriental stories and more semi-scientific stories (for these seem to be what you, the readers, desire); and fewer crime stories (for these seem to be least in favor).

You have asked for weirder stories, and we bow to your wishes. Our suggestion in the August Eyrie, "How about a few old-fashioned ghost stories?", brought an immediate flood of letters, all emphatically in favor of more ghost stories, many of them asking us not to spoil the mystic atmosphere of our ghost stories by twisting the plot into a rational explanation.

Again we bow to the readers. We will print the best ghost stories obtainable. But we ask your help, for good ghost-thrillers are the hardest stories to find. In this age of materialism, hardly anybody seems to write ghost stories any more, unless he exposes his ghost as a fake in the last paragraph. We have scheduled Frank Stockton's humorous ghost-tale, *A Transferred Ghost,* for our *Weird Story Reprint* series, and will include Sir Walter Scott's ghost classic, *Wandering Willie's Tale,* in the same series; but the new ghost-story manuscripts that flow to the editor's desk are for the most part silly, or else follow slavishly the trite example of the wailing ghosts of the past, and so they are regretfully returned to their authors. We have a few excellent ghost stories on hand, however. Lieutenant Arthur J. Burks has written a novelette called *The Ghosts of Steamboat Coulee,* which is a regular corn-cracker. But such stories are rarer than hen's teeth. So we ask you: please send us some good ghost stories—tales that will make our hair stand on end and our teeth chatter and send the chills racing up and down our spines. We like 'em (don't let anybody tell you different!) and our readers like 'em, too.

Several of our readers write that they want back issues of 1923. We can not supply them. If any of you have any 1923 issues prior to October, and wish to sell them, please list the issues you have and the price you want, and let us know. We will put you in touch with the readers who want to buy these back issues.

Seabury Quinn writes from Brooklyn: "The August issue of W. T. is GREAT. I've read it all through, and think the best story in the book is *The Oldest Story in the World,* by Murray Leinster. That tale is equal to Kipling's stories of the elder vintage—the ones on which his reputation really rests. It's a wow. The style is abso-gosh-lutely perfect as a vehicle for the plot, and the author has squeezed the last drop of suspense and horror out of it." And Frank Belknap Long, Jr., writes from New York: "*The Oldest Story in the World* is a stylistic gem. I read it three times, and I am convinced that it would have done credit to the Kipling of 1890. That is a real short-story."

E. L. Middleton, of Los Angeles, in a letter to The Eyrie gives a searching analysis of the stories in WEIRD TALES: "The kind I like best are those which are frankly supernatural, with no attempt at a rational explanation. For this, perhaps *Whispering Tunnels* in last February's issue is my favorite of those published in WEIRD TALES since it started. This story had ghosts and demons and was not spoiled by a natural explanation. However, for thrills and interest, *The House of Dust* in last November's issue was among the best of those stories which had a rational explanation. Of those stories dealing with scientific creations of life, *The Malignant Entity* in the Anniversary Number is supreme. For absolute unusualness and oddness, *When the Green Star Waned,* in last April's issue, is perhaps the best. For creepy thrills, and for its kind, *The Ghost Guard,* in March, 1923, was unsurpassed. If you keep publishing just about the kind of stories you have since the beginning without any radical departure from this program, I think you will be about right.

"Tales of werewolves are always acceptable. Tales of conflicts with evil spirits, as in *Whispering Tunnels,* are good. Among the most fascinating kind are those of conflicts with evil and malignant forms of vegetation, such as that of *The Abysmal Horror* (January, 1924), and of any force which might destroy the world, such as *The Moon Terror* of the May, 1923, issue. Give plenty of stories of the fourth dimension, and those on the order of *Penelope* (May, 1923); also of horror stories of skeletons, such as *The Closed Room* (November, 1923).

"Of the more recent stories in WEIRD TALES, *The Fireplace* in last January's issue is very good. Give us more tales where a ghost sits and talks calmly to a live person, in a definite locale, as in this tale. Publish more about Atlantis. A very excellent Atlantis story was *The Lure of Atlantis* (April, 1925).

"I make a plea for 'a few old-fashioned ghost stories'. Also, I wonder why it is that most of the time a natural explanation is strived at. I think this is more often a demerit, rather than a merit, in a weird story. *Invaders From the Dark* and *Whispering Tunnels* gained by being supernatural, and for me would have been spoiled by any other kind of treatment. Again, very often in ghost stories which are out-and-out ghost stories without a natural explanation, so much is left 'hanging in the air.' For instance, *The Statement of Randolph Carter* (February, 1925). In this story the man went into a tomb and something got him. Maybe it was burglars, or werewolves or

ghosts or ghouls or the devil himself. The story was rather annoyingly indefinite.

"One of the best stories ever published in WEIRD TALES was *The Amazing Adventure of Joe Scranton* (October, 1923). It was a fascinating tale of astral personalities leaving their bodies, and was very logical and reasonable. There is one thing which seems to be a necessary part of almost all of the 'astral' stories published in WEIRD TALES, and that is that one or more of the astral personalities has such a mean and stinking disposition. This criticism does not apply to *The Amazing Adventure of Joe Scranton*, but to *Adventures of an Astral* (March, 1925), and to several others. I wonder if it would not be possible for an astral to swap bodies for awhile and still act decently.

"For reprint, I vote for *The Willows*, by Algernon Blackwood. For sheer subtleness and beauty, I think it is one of the greatest stories ever written."

Writes Colin Ross from his theater dressing room: "No other magazine can ever gain the hold on me that your publication has. My profession (the theater) gives me many dull moments of leisure which to my notion can be filled in no better nor more satisfactory way than reading WEIRD TALES. Dull, confined hotel rooms become spaces of mystery and adventure when that magazine is near. The August issue is excellent. There is nothing to condemn but much to applaud. Only *please* keep WEIRD TALES weird! I notice a great scarcity of the good old-fashioned ghost stories. Give us some of those."

T. A. Fardon, of West Roxbury, Massachusetts, writes: "I expect that some of these tales will start the hair growing on my one bald spot. As tomahawks—to raise the scalp—they can not be beaten; and as chill producers to offset fever the M. D. has nothing better."

"The August WEIRD TALES was surely a good number," writes Miss Elizabeth O'Brien, of Chicago. "I just loved *The Lantern-Maker*. I vote for stories of werewolves and vampires, pseudo-scientific tales and *loads* of stories of Haiti."

Catherine Howard, of South Bend, Indiana, writes to The Eyrie: "Even though I have been reading WEIRD TALES for more than two years, I get more and more enthused over each and every new number. This seems to be *the* magazine among the Notre Dame students. Every time I get on the Notre Dame car around the first of the month I see fellows eagerly absorbed in reading WEIRD TALES—all sorts of fellows, little green freshies up to the sedate seniors, and it seems to be a great favorite of the world-famed 'Four Horsemen.' Believe me, I am rooting for WEIRD TALES everywhere I go."

Gordon R. Pugh, of Toronto, writes: "The August issue did not reach Toronto till the day before yesterday, and you can believe me I was just about pining away for the book. I cast my vote for *The Purple Cincture*—it is the best frightful story I ever read. Hope you give us some more stories about the other planets."

Writes Glenn Craig, of Baxter Springs, Kansas: "I had always somehow despised reading until by chance I purchased your Anniversary Number of WEIRD TALES last year. Since that time I have been a constant reader, and have enjoyed in this magazine some of the best stories I have ever read or heard. They are always so clean cut and so well developed that they are gripping to the last word."

What is your favorite story in the present issue? Send in your vote to The Eyrie, Weird Tales, 408 Holliday Building, Indianapolis, Indiana.

The Thing in the Pyramid

(Continued from page 478)

the recent additions to its force the elemental had received. For a mad moment I wanted to go on, to pit my will against that hideous unseen force; but common sense prevailed. I returned to the temple, took up one pack, and started out of the city. The moonlight seemed beating my back with hard, mocking blows. My footsteps rang out as never before. I was alone in the dead city of the Mayas, alone and afraid. I hurried toward the hills. Before dawn I had reached the forest, the living, murmuring forest.

That trip to the coast is a nightmare. Looking back I do not understand how I ever succeeded. But I did; I reached Belize three weeks later. I sent the *Laughing Sally* back to New Orleans and came north on a tramp steamer; anything was preferable to the *Laughing Sally*.

Since then for three months I have been resting. Now I am determined to go back. Away from that influence, perhaps I underrate its effect; but I am going back to decipher those Mayan hieroglyphics. I believe I can, with the aid of Egyptian and Aztec. I know I can. I also believe I can successfully resist the Thing in the Pyramid. My party will camp just over the rim of the valley and I will spend one day out of four with them. At the first sign of weakening on my part I will leave. But I must go back to find the key to the secret of the Mayas.

THAT is the story my friend Stephen Grayton told me the night of August 31, 1924. He sailed the next day and has not been heard from since. We are going to find out what has happened to him; and to destroy the Thing in the Pyramid.

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The Wicked Flea

(Continued from page 448)

"Yis, sor." Danny was sweating from something besides the heat as he hung up.

"Howly Hiven!" he muttered as he closed the box with a slowness indicative of instinctive caution. "First ut was a flea—an' thin ut was a toad—an' now ut is a cat. Phawt th' divil *is* ut, I wonder—an' is ut wan thing or a menagerie loike th' sar-junt says? If ut is wan thing, how can ut be three things to wunst? I dunno, but 'tis surely somethin' or I've been overlookin' a bootleggin' joint. An' even so they ain't injectin' it intil folks in taxis. Thot felly has a wound."

Suddenly he tightened his grip on his stick, felt for his service weapon and started up the street with a newly acquired stealth.

"Shoot ut, th' sar-junt says. An' if I foind ut, begob I will. Maybe after ut's dead, we can foind out phawt ut is."

IN SUCH a frame of mind Officer Daniel McGuiness once more approached Brown's house. Trees lined the street before it and Zapt's residence next door, their branches casting a checkering of shadow across the pavement. And as Danny advanced, peering intently about him—one of those shadowy patches—*moved*.

At least that is how it appeared, until closer inspection convinced him that some dark object was progressing along the sidewalk.

McGuiness came to a halt and stared. And even as he did so the thing crawled into a patch of light thrown by the corner arc lamp.

"Howly—Mither!" The words were no more than a startled gasp.

This was the most amazing sight in Officer McGuiness' life. Whatever

the thing was, it was worthy of attention. It had an enormously bloated body, seemingly encased in a series of overlapping horny scales. And it dragged itself forward, mainly on a pair of grotesque legs that stuck up above its back, at the knees—or joints, or whatever one called them.

For a breath-taking moment Danny stood with an odd sensation as though the hair beneath his helmet was striving to push the latter off. Then his hand reached for his weapon. He was startled, amazed, dumfounded, but not actually afraid. He had been told to shoot the thing if he came across it, and not for an instant did he doubt that he had met up with it. He drew the deadly service gun and aimed it. His hand steadied, centered the muzzle on the target.

"Bang!"

"WHAT was that?" said Miss Zapt.

Bob Sargent frowned. "It sounded like a blowout—or a shot."

At the last word Nellie's blue eyes widened. "Bob! It was right in front of the house!" She ran to the door and through it to the porch.

"Good evenin', Miss Nellie," a voice she recognized as that of the policeman on night duty in their district called. "Don't ye be scared. 'Tis nuthin'! I just shot somethin' wid hydrophoby."

"With—what?" said Miss Zapt.

"I dunno. 'Twas a funny-lookin' son of th' divil, askin' yer pardin."

"Father! Bob!" Miss Zapt ran down the steps and out to the street.

Xenophon Xerxes, once more in dry garments, followed with Sargent. They caught up with her where she stood beside Officer McGuiness.

"The wicked flea. He's killed it," she said, pointing to a dark and motionless object at his feet.

"Flea?" Danny began and paused

as though short of breath. "'Was ut a flea, thin?"

"Yes. The wicked flea, and no man pursueth. Haven't you read your Bible, Mr. McGuiness?" She laughed.

Danny nodded. "I hov thot. Th' wicked flea, an' no man pursueth."

He put out a foot and pushed Pulex. "Sure thin—he looks wicked but—I've been pursuin' him half th' evenin'. An' by th' same token Missus Brown was roight in sayin' he chased her dog into th' house."

"God bless my soul!" Xenophon Xerxes exploded. "Did—did this—this insect do that, McGuiness?"

" 'Tis phawt th' lady says, though till th' last few moments I've been misdoubtin' her word." Danny scowled.

"Marvelous!" The professor rubbed his hands. "Amazing! Ancestral instinct, perhaps. You see, he came off Brown's dog in the first place."

"He—phawt?" Danny dragged his glance from the body of Pulex. "Howld on, perfissor. D'ye mean to say this thing come offn th' dog?"

"Of course," Xenophon Xerxes nodded.

"Thin," said Danny with conviction, "sure I don't blame th' kiyoodle fer tryin' to escape him, wunst he had shook him off. Begorra—I—"

"Wait a bit, officer," Zapt interrupted. "Of course the creature was not originally so—large." He plunged into explanations.

Danny heard him in stolid silence. At the end he glanced once more at Pulex, removed his helmet and ran a finger about its dampened band. "An' ye raised him from—"

"A pup," Sargent interjected.

McGuiness gave him a glance. "You raised him from an ordinary little wan, perfissor?" he said in a tone of wonder.

"Exactly," said Xenophon Xerxes Zapt.

"An' he escaped you th' noight?"

"Yes. Precisely. He escaped."

'An' chased Brown's dog, an' bit a young wumman on th' ankle above her foot, an' a man in a taxicab—"

"What! What's that?" Xenophon Xerxes exclaimed. "Do you mean—"

Danny nodded. "'Tis th' truth I'm tellin' ye, perfissor. 'Twas most loikely some of his ancestral instincts again. But th' sar-junt told me to kill ut, an I did so, an' whilst 'tis a raymarkable dimonstration, as I ain't denyin', I'm thinkin' that after all ut's small loss. Fleas of thot size—"

"I agree with you, McGuiness." Xenophon Xerxes thrust a hand into a pocket and withdrew a bit of crumpled paper to press it into Danny's unresisting fingers. "Here—is a trifle for your trouble. I do not regret your excellent marksmanship in the least. And I—er—appreciate your commendable fidelity to duty. As a matter of fact I intended giving it chloroform myself." He stooped and took up the carcass of Pulex. "Good-night, officer—good-night."

AN HOUR later, and for the third time, Officer Daniel McGuiness approached the telephone box at the completion of his round. He yanked it open and jerked the receiver off the hook. "Give me th' sar-junt," he demanded and waited till he heard that officer's voice.

" 'Tis McGuiness," he said then, "an' I've claned up my district. I found thot flea an' killed ut—"

"What's that?" The sergeant's voice was gruff. "McGuiness—talk sense."

"I'm talkin' sinse," Danny retorted. "Listen." Then he explained.

"Oh—Zapt," the sergeant made comment when he had finished. "Well—that accounts for it, I guess."

"It does," said Danny McGuiness. He hung up and banged shut the box.

Dust of Shun-Ti

(Continued from page 470)

man's wrist—it had the toughness of a steel bar—downward and backward until, with a sharp exclamation, he dropped the weapon.

Wilde released the man's wrist and jerked himself up. But he had not done with him yet. The man flung himself at Wilde, and as the latter went down on his back again, the other's fingers gripped his throat. They were like talons; long and narrow and sharp-nailed.

But Wilde had got a throat grip, too, and they threshed around on the bed, arms and legs and bedclothes whirling in confusion. Wilde was far the heavier and the stronger, however, and presently, with an immense effort, he flung his assailant back. The man came at him again, but they were on even terms now. Wilde dragged him to the side of the bed and they rolled on to the floor. The man's forehead struck the boards with a sickening thud. . . .

Wilde got up and lit the lamp.

The man was face down. Wilde turned him over; an involuntary exclamation broke from his lips and he nearly dropped the lamp in amazement. Gone from the man's features were the charm and dignity and benevolence he had seen in them that evening, yet undoubtedly they were those of his Chinese gentleman, Sun Wong, now set in an expression of uncompromising hatred.

Wilde tied the man up with a bed sheet and sat down to await the coming of dawn.

THE police came in the morning. With them was a dour, gray-faced Scotsman named MacGregor, who described himself to Wilde as an agent of the federal government. He listened to Wilde's account of the affair with phlegmatic countenance, in-

terjecting only an occasional comment.

"So you believed that yarn, did ye?" he demanded, and a twinkle of mirth crept into his deep gray eyes.

"Yarn!" exclaimed Wilde. His big body stiffened. "It was a yarn, then?" he demanded. "There's no casket? No—no dust of Shun-ti?" he went on, forcing a grin to his crestfallen face.

"There'll probably be a casket, I'm thinking," said MacGregor. "And there'll be dust in it, too. Dust of death! But I'm afraid you are not up in Chinese history, young man. Shun-ti was a weakling, anything but illustrious—and no Chinee, whatever his politics, would invite a descendant of the hated Mongols to the Chinese throne. Ten years ago, Ah Foo (to give your Mongol chief his real name) was a leading character actor on the Chinese stage. He left it for a more profitable business. This man he has killed, Sun Yet, was an agent of the British government. According to his papers, while working in his Chinese fashion, he intercepted the description of the location of the casket, and came north to examine it. Ah Foo discovered Sun Yet's intention and followed him, determined to recover the map one way or another before Sun Yet could come upon the casket. Evidently, the stuff was run in by another branch of the gang. Ah Foo merely had to arrange its distribution, I expect. Probably the map was the only record of its hiding place this side of the Pacific. If this is so, Ah Foo simply *had* to get it."

"Hiding place! Casket!" gasped Wilde, in bewilderment. "What were they hiding?"

"Cocaine," said MacGregor pleasantly. "When we bust open that casket (if it is a casket) I'm thinking we'll find a hundred thousand dollars or so, of the stuff. We'd better be getting over there."

MacGregor was right.

The Horror on the Links

(Continued from page 462)

"I think the Mademoiselle Humphries were so unfortunate as to meet this man-ape when he were on his way to Kalmar's house, as he had been taught to come. As man, perhaps, he knew not this Kalmar, or, as we know him, Beneckendorff; but as brute this Beneckendorff was the only man he know—his master, the man who brought him from Africa.

"When he find that poor girl, she scream, and his savageness become uppermost—believe me, the gorilla is ten thousand times more savage than the lion—and he tear her to pieces. He also try to tear the young Mait-

land to pieces; but, luckily for him and for us, he fail, and we get the story which put us on the track.

"*Voilà!* It is finished. *Triomphe!* I make my report to the good Sergeant Costello, and show him the bodies at Kalmar's house. Then I return to France. The ministry of health, they will be glad to know that Beneckendorff is no more."

"But, Monsieur de Grandin," Mrs. Comstock demanded, "who was this man—or this ape—you killed?"

I held my breath as de Grandin fixed his direct stare on her, then sighed with relief as he replied, "I can not say, Madam."

"Well"—Mrs. Comstock's natural disputatiousness came to the surface—"I think it's *very queer* you know so much about him; but don't know his name."

"Ah, Madam," he shook his head sadly, "there are very many queer things in life; things which may puzzle even you. I bid you good night."

"WHEN the police look for Monsieur Manly—*mon dieu*, what a name for an ape-thing!—they will be puzzled," he told me as we walked toward my waiting motor. "I must remember to warn Sergeant Costello to enter that disappearance on his books as a case permanently unsolved. No one will ever know the true facts but you, I and the French Ministry of Health, Trowbridge, my friend. The public, they would not believe, even if we told them."

I wonder if they will?

FURTHER ADVENTURES

of the little French scientist, de Grandin, will be narrated in "The Tenants of Broussac." Watch for this story.

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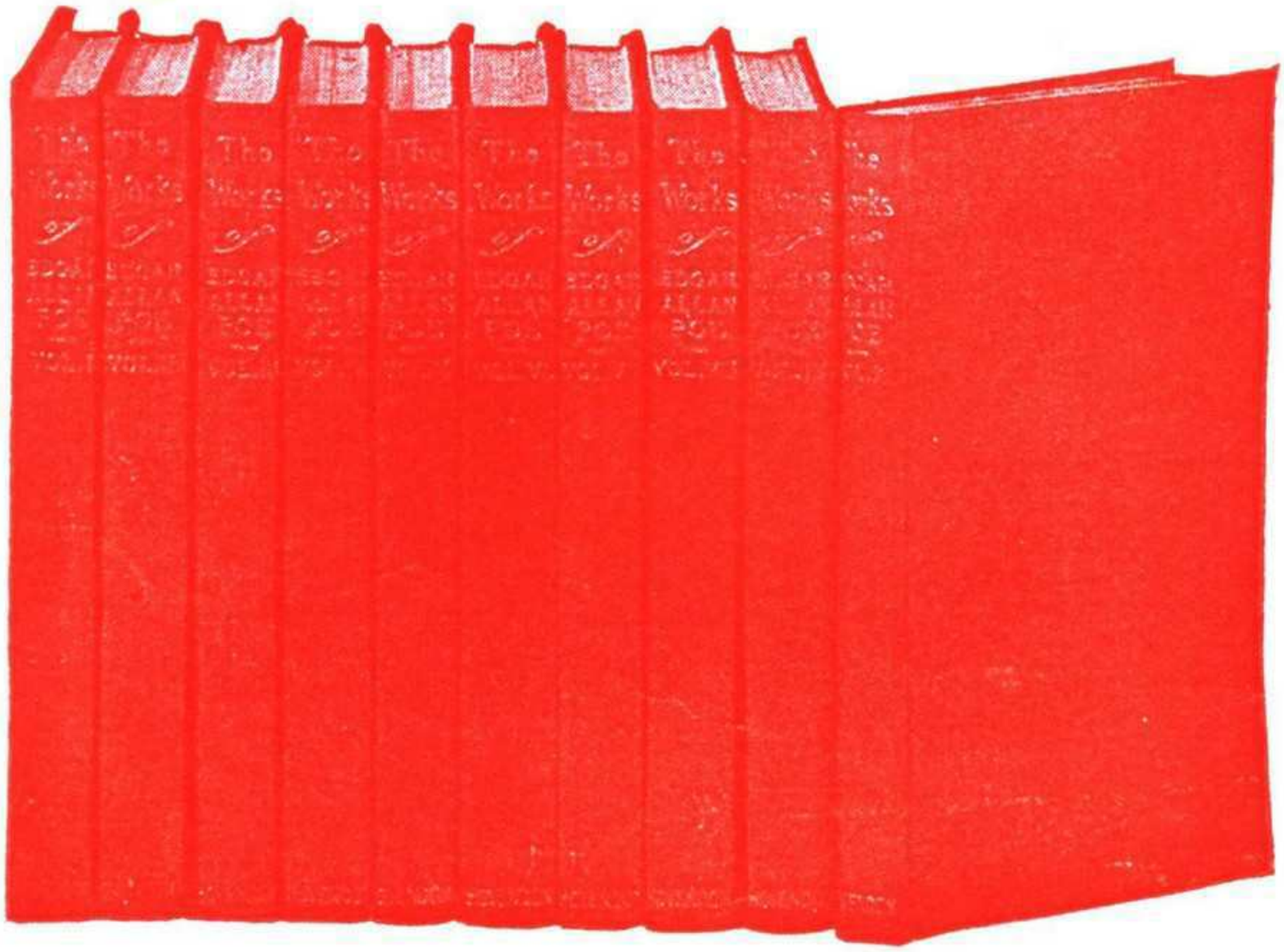

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