JUNE, 1926

Weird Tales

The Unique Magazine

Don't Miss SPIDER-BITE, by Robert S. Carr, in This Issue

WEIRD TALES
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Vol. VII, No. 6—25c

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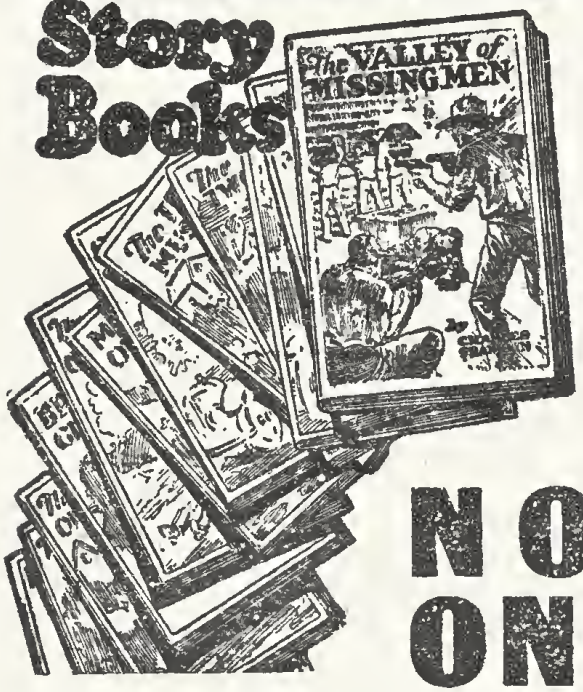

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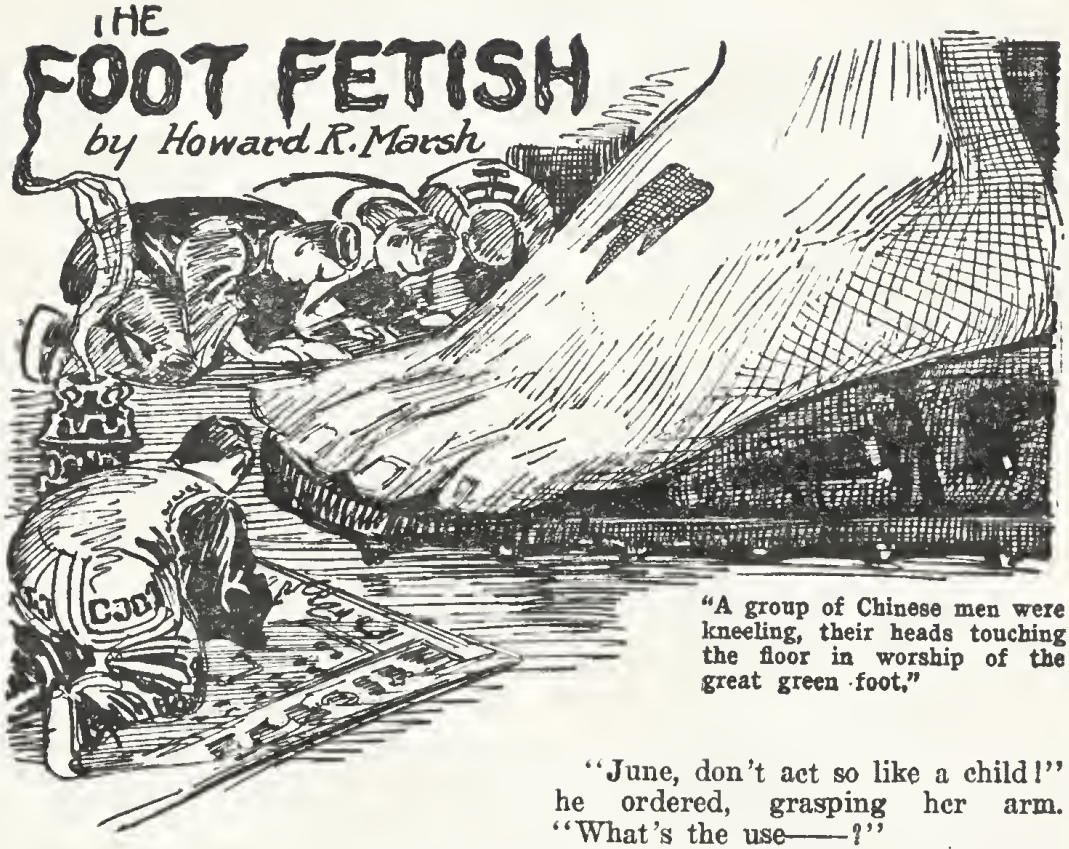
THE FOOT FETISH

by Howard R. Marsh



"A group of Chinese men were kneeling, their heads touching the floor in worship of the great green foot."

"SHE shrank from the burning glances of the leering, luring eyes which appraised her golden beau-u-ty!"

June Hubbard struck a dramatic pose, one arm crooked before her face, the other extended as if to ward off a blow. She was jostled forward, almost from her feet, by hurrying pedestrians behind her. Still she maintained her pose, murmuring, "The beady little eyes, set deep in the yellow faces, seemed to caress her beau-u-ty!" With dramatic impulse she hid her face in her furs, mocking fear of those "leering, luring eyes."

A dozen paces ahead of her a tall, gray-haired man, suddenly conscious of her absence from beside him, turned and pushed back. Before his long arms tourists, shoppers and Chinese men in heterogeneous garb fell aside as snow from before a plow. In a moment he was beside the girl.

"June, don't act so like a child!" he ordered, grasping her arm. "What's the use——?"

"Dad, don't be angry with your only daughter!" June's blue eyes begged forgiveness even while their depths brimmed with mirth. "Honestly, I had to have one outburst! For years I have been reading about the 'leering, luring eyes of Chinatown'. Magazines, books full of terrible eyes! And all afternoon I've been watching for some of them. Dad, there isn't a pair of leering, luring eyes in all Chinatown unless they're set in the head of that Irish policeman who's holding up that corner store. I came down into Chinatown expecting to feel cold shivers as 'beady eyes watched and appraised but never promised'. Dad, I haven't been appraised once!"

Mr. Hubbard's scowl of vexation vanished; a smile replaced it. It was a sudden smile, one of the attractions of his lean brown face. "You're forgiven, June." His voice had the same muted vibrancy as the girl's.

"Of course you haven't been appraised. Only articles of worth or beauty are appraised."

"Ouch!" cried June, shaking her father's arm. "That's a cruel one. You know that I'm——"

"Worthless," finished Mr. Hubbard. "And blemished."

"Ah, the blemish! The fatal blemish!" June attempted to strike a dramatic pose again but her father marched her along too rapidly. "Bear! Well, anyway, the fatal blemish! Only it isn't fatal here in Chinatown. Not even Chinese eyes could possibly see that there's a queer mark on my foot. No sir! Besides, the Chinese eyes aren't sharp at all; they're sleepy, sodden eyes, morning-after eyes, which wouldn't show interest in Venus herself."

"Perhaps, perhaps," Mr. Hubbard agreed. "Of course, all the trash about the fearful, mysterious Chinese character is exaggerated. It's our great American superstitious fear of the unknown. On the other hand the Orientals *are* strange peoples; their thousands of years of static civilization have made them introspective, with strange desires and worships and——"

"For further references see *Stoddard's Lectures,*" June advised, laughingly. "Dad, I didn't come down here to hear an address on China. I came for thrills. As there don't seem to be any thrills running around loose, I'm going to make some." Her laughter rippled out as she noted apprehension cloud her father's face. "No, I'm not planning to kill a Chinese nor to rob a bank! Haven't you been with me enough to know that a woman's idea of a thrill is to buy something pretty and wildly extravagant? Let's try one of these dark little stores which promise hidden riches! Come on!"

Impulsively she darted into a narrow-doored store, pulling her father after her. Over the door a tiny bell tinkled; simultaneously a Chinese youth pushed aside silken curtains at the back end of the shop and stood, a vivid figure against the red background. Father and daughter hesitated, checked not so much by the sudden appearance of the gold-and-green-clad Oriental as by a sudden sickish-sweet, softly acrid odor which saturated the room. Teak and sandalwood, incense, and back of it all a smothering mist, exotic and nameless —these were combined in the fragrant yet oppressing cloud which settled over the two Americans.

The Chinese youth stood motionless against his gorgeous background; yet his presence seemed to advance down the narrow aisle until it forced itself into intimacy with the Americans.

June Hubbard felt a thrill; there was no doubt of it, for she caught her father's arm impulsively. Even Mr. Hubbard seemed disturbed; involuntarily his eyes turned to the door as though ascertaining that the way of escape was still open. Then June laughed, a tinkling laugh which vibrated gongs and bells and copper kettles and filled the narrow store with smothered sound. "Dad, how wonderful!" There was a forced, false note in her enthusiasm. Her voice seemed to be gathered into the folds of the red and gold silks which lined the wall; it lost its exuberant note. When June spoke again it was in a lower tone.

"There are wonderful things here," she said, pointing down the narrow aisle flanked on one side by mandarin coats, kimonas, tapestries, on the other by cases of beads, carved ivory, jade, statuettes of Buddha, the Three Wise Monkeys of many sizes and materials. She advanced to the nearest showcase. "See those dear monkeys! Their hands over their eyes, their ears, their mouths. 'See

no evil; hear no evil; speak no evil'. Those little ivory ones, now——"

The Chinese youth padded down the aisle, his black slippers emphasizing the vivid colors of his split *sham*. He was smiling now, clearly a trade smile which only curved a gash in his graven face.

"Very pretty, Miss," he said, stooping and reaching into the showcase. "Ivory. Very good. Six dollars." He handed the monkeys to June. His cold fingertips touched her hand and she dropped the carving to the floor.

"Oh, we'll take it," she said to cover her confusion and unwarranted repulsion. "Dad, you pay for it."

"We have some new pretty slippers," the Chinese salesman said, almost as though he had been trained in an American school of salesmanship. "Come."

He raised one yellow hand aloft, and, smiling, as though promising great pleasure, beckoned the girl to the back end of the store. "How foolish of me!" June thought. "I really am feeling a little shivery. Come, dad," she said aloud and then whispered, "Don't you dare leave me! There are spooks here!"

The Chinese youth pulled aside a yellow silk curtain; from a low shelf he took some silk slippers, tied together with red cord. He fingered the delicate footwear, staring impersonally at June as though deciding a color scheme. Then he carefully selected a pair of soft blue bedroom slippers with pink and white flowers embroidered in the toes. "Please you sit down," he said, motioning to a massive-armed teak chair glistening with inlaid pearl peacocks.

"The princess on her throne," June said with nervous flippancy.

The Chinese youth pulled off her tan walking shoes. His little eyes studied June's face. "Yes," he said simply. "Princess on throne. That throne once was for Woo Loo *ahmu*. *Ahmu* is word for wife, mother-wife. You know? Woo Loo had many wives, but the princess,—she was wife of whole *pu*, whole tribe, angel of whole *pu*. Princess of the Sacred Foot, you would call her name. Up in Gobi; Hill Country. She was a child of the gods and—— This slipper goes nice like silk glove! See!" The long yellow fingers smoothed the slipper over June's foot, caressed the soft silk. Suddenly the delicate hands of the Chinese half-clenched; his body grew rigid. For a moment it seemed that he would fall forward on his face. He gained control of himself only with great effort. His fingers were resting over an irregularity on June's instep; his eyes were fixed on a jagged outline which showed through the silk stocking. Suddenly he rose, backed away, disappeared between the red curtains in the back of the store.

Impulsively June kicked off the blue slipper and reached for her walking shoe. "Let's get out," she whispered to her father. "I've had enough. He's crazy! He saw that mark on my foot and——"

Mr. Hubbard nodded. "Opium, maybe. Thought I smelled it here. Hurry! Don't stop to lace your shoe!"

They turned to hurry away and almost fell over two old Chinese men who had mysteriously appeared from some side opening in the tapestries. The aged Orientals bowed, smiled ingratiatingly, their black skull caps almost touching the floor. They sensed the fear of the Americans and subtly strove to overcome it.

"Please do not hurry," begged the older man, tucking his arms in the sleeves of his orange *sham* and bowing low. "My son, he not well. He leave you and come to me. He say you like blue slipper. I know better. I have cloth-of-gold slipper for miss. Sit down just one minute." The other

Chinese man pushed forward the teak chair and led the wondering June back to it.

Mr. Hubbard was a little angry, a little uneasy, but mostly determined not to make himself ridiculous. "All right, June," he said bruskly. "Only hurry!" He pulled out his watch, making a pretense of being pressed for time.

"Just one minute," the old image of Buddha insisted. Already he was pulling at June's loose shoe.

June jerked her right foot from his hand and extended the other one. "This foot, please," she said, feeling that in some way the birthmark on her foot was provocative of danger.

"Yes, miss," the old Oriental agreed, but he grasped the right foot and pulled off the shoe. It was only a fraction of a second before June jerked her foot away from him and jumped to her feet, tense and angry, but in that half-second the old Chinese fingers had pressed the stocking tight against June's instep so that the blemish was clearly outlined. It was a queerly shaped mark, a tapering rectangle running down her foot and ending in a jagged flare at each lower edge.

Mr. Hubbard had watched the Chinese man's sudden move; now he grasped the old man by the shoulders and pushed him roughly aside. He fell to the floor. From there he chanted guttural excited words to the old man behind the chair.

"Shut up!" shouted Mr. Hubbard, advancing threateningly. "Another word and I'll kick in your yellow ribs!" But still the rush of Chinese words went on, broken by exclamations from the wizened man who cowered behind the chair. Mr. Hubbard, unable to kick a man who was down, turned his attention to June, who was frantically pulling on her shoe. "Come on, June! I don't like this devil-chatter!"

In a moment the two were outside, with the immediate memory of a bell tinkling over their heads and back of that the whole grotesque, inexplainable scene in the Chinese shop.

"Ho!" Mr. Hubbard took a deep breath of the fresh air which swept up Grant Street from the bay. "That tastes good after that stuffiness in there! Now what the devil——"

"Don't swear, dad! But it *was* an awful sensation, feeling those snaky fingers on my foot. Why do you suppose the whole pack went crazy over that mark? Or was *that* it, do you suppose?"

"Yes, it was the mark, I believe. It meant something to those fanatics. They were not pure Chinese but Hillmen, I take it, from their reference to the Gobi and the Hill Country. In that country there are strange worships. I believe they have foot fetishes. You know, June, the foot as a fetish is one of the oldest of all——"

"Now, dad, don't stop to give another page from the encyclopedia. Let's get away from here! Ugh! Those fingers!"

FATHER and daughter walked as rapidly as the crowded sidewalks of Grant Street would permit. It was almost dark now. Already street lights were flickering and from many windows came the reflected glare of polished wood, brass, shiny silk. June held her furs close to her face. No ridicule now of the "leering, luring eyes"! Those old graven faces, the frozen expression of the Chinese youth when he discovered the birthmark, the guttural mouthings of the old man on the floor,—these had all affected her deeply. Like all buoyant natures, when she was not radiantly happy she was almost melancholy. Her father, too, seemed uneasy.

The two were silent as they left

Chinatown behind them, reached Market Street, turned right, right again toward the hotel. From time to time June cast apprehensive glances over her shoulder. Suddenly she grasped her father's arm.

"Dad! We're being followed. There's a Chinese boy watching us every minute!" She broke into a half-run, an instinctive flight from danger.

Mr. Hubbard whirled. A dozen feet behind him was a dapper Chinese youth, immaculately dressed in the latest style and swinging a little cane. He hesitated as Mr. Hubbard faced him, then strolled on, apparently unconcerned.

"Dad!" June called from on ahead. There was real fright now in her voice. "Dad! Where are you?" Her father hurried, passing the Chinese youth again. In a moment he had caught June's arm; in another they were in the brilliantly lighted hotel lobby, trying to laugh at their fears. But the mirth was half-hearted, for the Chinese had sauntered nonchalantly past them, stopped near the elevator, pulled a cigarette from a leather case and lighted it, then backed to the wall, from whence he could watch the entire lobby.

Mr. Hubbard was tempted to take June outside again, hoping to lose the lurking Oriental in the crowded streets. He started toward the door, June still on his arm, then seeing that the Chinese was sauntering toward them, turned straight to the elevator. "Ninth floor," he said loudly to the elevator man as he stepped into the cage.

The Chinese youth hesitated, then stepped aside; the door was clanged shut and the elevator started up. "Did I say ninth floor?" Mr. Hubbard asked good-naturedly. "I meant the seventh." He smiled meaningly at June, but the girl was too perturbed to appreciate her father's subterfuge.

In a minute father and daughter had entered their connecting front rooms which faced out over the brilliantly lighted city, with Nob Hill looming up in the middle distance. Inside his room Mr. Hubbard waited a moment, then suddenly peered out into the hall. No one was visible. He closed the door, locked it and threw open the door between the two rooms.

"June, I'm a little tired," he said. "I think it would be better to have dinner brought up to our rooms and stay inside tonight. Tomorrow we'll go down to Los Angeles."

"Yes," June replied, "it will be better to eat in our rooms, I'm sure." She threw aside her coat and furs, walked to the window and looked out. Down on the sidewalk below thousands of people were hurrying along, like so many ants after a rainstorm. Some of them, yes, surely many of them, were Chinese men with long yellow fingers, expressionless faces and hard eyes. She shuddered and backed away from the window.

"Dad," she called. "Won't you find out who have the adjoining rooms?"

Mr. Hubbard realized the worth of the idea and called the room clerk. "Mr. John Powell is in 708," he reported. "Sounds like a good American name. Room 714 is vacant yet." He hesitated. Then, "We're acting like a couple of babies," he declared. "Let's forget the whole thing."

"All right," June agreed. "We'll order dinner,—or let's make it supper. Then read and to bed. I'm anxious to get to Los Angeles. Suppose we'll see Douglas Fairbanks and Bill Hart?"

She tried to assume a light-heartedness she did not feel.

THAT night Room 714 was engaged by an aristocratic-looking man who might be white, or again might be Mongolian. His face was swarthily gray. He certainly was not pure

Chinese, still——. The room clerk gave him the benefit of the doubt and decided that he was white. The same room clerk was surprized that this man should always go up to his room, while apparently he never came down. He was more surprized about dawn when he received a call, asking that a porter be sent up to 714 immediately for a trunk. Then the tall, swarthy-faced man came down and paid his bill. "An early train to Seattle," the guest said suavely. Yes, he had his own expressman outside. He'd give directions about the trunk. Looking up at this moment the clerk saw four other tall, swarthy-faced men leave the elevator and walk to the door.

"Friends?" he asked, pointing to the departing men.

"Yes," the suave gentleman explained. "They called for me; we're on a sight-seeing expedition together. We're off for Seattle." He paid his bill and departed to take care of his trunk. But instead of loading it on an express wagon, he and his four "friends" packed it into a big curtained automobile, which sped away toward the wharves of the Embarcadero where the great steamship *Empress* was coaling for its morning departure for Shanghai.

2

JOHN POWELL enjoyed a restful, although somewhat dreamful night in Room 708. He had spent the hours before midnight strolling the streets of Chinatown, and he was physically tired. Early in the evening he had joined a sight-seeing party and for an hour was content to witness the "show" part of the Chinese sections, to visit the gambling houses and tea rooms which were carefully stage-set to interest tourists. Then, realizing that the whole trip was a cut-and-dried affair, he slipped away from the party and began his own investigation.

A less courageous man would have hesitated to penetrate some of the dark areaways where John Powell's curiosity led him, to tiptoe up some of the stairs whose narrow openings were set flush with the sidewalk, or to sneak into "go downs" and peer through torn curtains at the Chinese faces in the dim, smoky rooms. But John Powell was one of those rare mortals to whom fear is almost unknown. Perhaps his splendid physique, his six feet of lean muscularity, had found that it could take care of itself without aping the caution of others; certainly in his twenty-six years of existence he had learned not cowardice, but confidence.

So the dangers of Chinatown did not exist to John Powell; the exotic sights and mysterious happenings alone interested him. Thus he dreamed, not of Chinese ogres with red-handled knives, living Buddhas demanding a human foot for toll—such dreams as June Hubbard was dreaming in the next room—but of the delicate, cameo faces of the silk-clad Chinese girls he had seen in the garish second-floor room above a canyonlike alley-street; of the emotionless face of a Chinese dandy as he collected the fan-tan markers; of the fragile hand of a slender, yellow wraith who beckoned to him from a half-closed door; of these John Powell dreamed. And toward morning he dreamed a fantasy of dancers around a great copper kettle from which arose an intoxicating, numbing odor and toward which he was being led by some invisible, resistless spirit.

He awoke from this dream just as he was about to faint before the strength of that pervading perfume. For a few seconds dream and actuality were indistinguishable; each struggled for mastery. He seemed drugged, still under the power of that odor. It took effort of will to force

himself out of bed. Then suddenly he realized that the numbing fumes were real; that his room fairly reeked with them. In an instant he was before the open window, gulping great lungfuls of the air. It was daylight; the sun was beginning to gild the tops of the highest buildings; already it had rolled back the fog which blankets San Francisco for the night. The fresh morning air chilled him and awoke all his senses.

Chloroform! That was the smell! He remembered a brief stay in a hospital and—— But whence did it come? His first thought was that perhaps he had been drugged and robbed, but investigation proved that his room had not been entered. Then he located the origin of the odor; it penetrated around the door between his room and the next to the right.

"Suicide!" John Powell forced himself to consider the idea. Perhaps. Again, it might be some fumigant which he detected, or some insomnia victim seeking easy sleep. He checked his impulse to telephone for the house detective, and knocked loudly on the door to the next room. There was no response. He knocked louder. Still no sign of life. A moment more he hesitated, then he walked to the room telephone.

"Who's in Room 710?" he asked.

"Mr. Hubbard and Miss Hubbard have rooms 710 and 712," came the quick response. "Shall I have the operator ring them?"

"No thanks, not now." Powell wanted time to think, to decide how far he should allow suspicion to carry him.

He tried the door again; it was bolted on the other side. "Curiosity, thy name is John Powell!" he murmured, stepping back from the door, preparatory to charging it.

POWELL had learned line-bucking under the tutelage of one Coach Yost; he hit the door low and hard, then grimaced as he rubbed a bruised shoulder and contemplated the unmoved door. He placed a pillow on his shoulder for a pad, crossed the room and took a running start. But for all its grained veneer the door was steel, set in a steel frame.

"Third down and nothing gained," Powell muttered. "Try a forward pass!"

He hastily donned trousers and coat, then went to the window. By clinging tightly to the right edge of his own window frame he was able to swing his feet across to the sill of room 710. He contorted and twisted, but couldn't balance his body, and hung dangling eighty feet above the sidewalk. Cautiously he released one hand from the frame behind him, grasped the brick-edge ahead and swung across, feeling one dangerous second of flight through space.

Immediately all thought of past peril left him, for through the closed window he saw a man's body sprawled grotesquely on the floor, blankets around his feet, his arms warped behind him. Glass tinkled on the pavement below as John Powell threw himself through the windows. Fumes, the sickish, sweet odor of chloroform smote him, almost drove him back, but he ran across the room and opened the door into the hall. Drafts of fresh air were established, carrying away the deadening fumes. Powell lifted the man from the floor and carried him to the window. There he flexed the inert body. It was several minutes before the man began to gulp the air.

"June!" he cried. "June!"

John Powell held a glass of water to Mr. Hubbard's blue lips. At last the older man spoke, rapidly, incoherently. Piece by piece Powell grasped the story, the sudden night attack, the conviction that his daughter had been stolen, the experience of the previous afternoon,—these Mr.

Hubbard told, begging piteously for aid.

Powell crossed to the next room, June's room. It was apparently undisturbed; there were no signs of a struggle. The bed had been slept in, but was otherwise undisturbed; feminine clothes were neatly arranged on a chair; there were no signs of violence, but the room was empty. Powell tried the next door, leading into room 714. At first he thought it had not been occupied, but closer examination showed cigarette stubs, muddy tracks.

"The devils worked from here," Powell muttered, pausing to note how the doors between the two rooms had been jimmied. He hastened back to Mr. Hubbard. That gentleman was too nauseated, too numbed, to be of assistance. Yet the situation called for instant action; a man had been attacked in one of San Francisco's leading hotels; his daughter had been abducted.

In less than five minutes John Powell, completely dressed and thoroughly determined, was cross-examining the room clerk. That sleepy-eyed individual knew little beyond the fact that room 714 had been occupied by a tall, swarthy man who was visited by some "friends".

"Luggage?" Powell asked. "What did they have?"

That stirred some cell in the clerk's slow-moving brain. "They called the porter to take out a trunk about daylight," he said. "I'll call him."

The porter came, a stupid hulk of a man, sullen and suspicious. Yes, of course, he remembered the trunk. "I knew I'd get in trouble over that blamed thing," he snorted. "It wasn't my fault, either."

"What wasn't your fault?"

"That it was lifted. I put it down in front of the freight elevator and went to call an express man. When we came back the trunk was gone. I didn't have nothing to do with——"

"We aren't blaming you for anything," Powell quieted the porter. "We merely wish to locate that trunk."

"It wasn't yours, was it?" The porter was still sullen.

"No, it wasn't mine. But we're after it and the owners of it. What did it look like?"

"Say, what are you, anyway? A 'dick' looking for dope? Did them Chinese birds have a trayful of hops?"

"Then they were Chinese?" Powell asked.

"Sure! At least part Chinese. Funny-looking ginks, not exactly yellow, but not white, that's a cinch. You asked what the trunk looked like. It was a wooden box, a kind of chest, covered with carvings. Heavy devil to handle, I'll say. Them Chinks made me carry it right side up with care. So it was hops, huh? Well, I'll be——"

"What color was it? How long? Did it have any handles?"

"Whoa-up! Not so fast! It was wood color, except it had a greenish tinge. Five feet long, I'd guess; five by three by two. Carved brass or something for handles."

"Have you any idea where it dispeared to?"

"I told you 'no'. It was just gone. The only thing in sight on the street was a big car, turning the corner."

SATISFIED he could glean no more useful information from the porter, Powell hurried back to Mr. Hubbard. June's father, sick with anxiety, was frantically pulling on his clothes. Powell reported the trunk incident. Already he was satisfied that the chest contained the missing girl, dead or alive. Mr. Hubbard agreed that such an abduction was a possibility. At Powell's request he repeated all he could remember of

the weird incident in the Chinese shop the day before.

"Of course, that's it," Powell stated. "Your daughter was kidnaped, probably because of some significance attached to the mark on her foot. A foot-fetish people wanted her. Pretty deep for us. But hurry! We'll go down to that store and get the truth from those yellow devils if I have to pound it out of them!"

John Powell and Mr. Hubbard raced into the Chinese section in their chartered taxicab. Before 8 o'clock they whirled up before the dingy store and in a moment assailed the Chinese youth who appeared from behind the curtains. But that gayly-dressed individual was all smiles and urbanity. In reply to the frantic questioning of Mr. Hubbard he shrugged his shoulders. "I not know, I not know," he repeated. "No see lady you talk about."

"Tell us or I'll kill you!" Powell shouted, grasping the Chinese by the shoulder and shaking him. "Tell us, or I'll smash every bone you have!"

The Chinese smiled as if at a joke. "I not know," he reiterated. "Just one minute. I go ask my honored father."

Baffled, helpless, Powell was forced to let the youth disappear through the curtains in the back of the store. A moment later the yellow face peered out. "You wait," he said. "I find out!"

They waited, John Powell and Mr. Hubbard, waited for long minutes. There was no sound from the back room. "I'll see what's going on back there," Powell muttered at last, pushing the draperies aside.

He half expected a savage onslaught; instead he saw three graven-faced Chinese quietly drinking tea and eating rice. They rose when Powell strode into the room.

"Very nice tea!" one of them said graciously. "Will mister have tea?"

Powell stared into the expressionless old face; there was something indefinable shining from the man's eyes, a cunning satisfaction, perhaps, a pleased appreciation of his own cleverness. "Will mister have tea? We talk of ladee."

The Chinese overplayed his part. The solution flashed through Powell's mind. These men were attempting to detain him. Why? To poison him? Attack him when the moment was right? No, hardly that. Then he knew. It was to allow someone else time to get June Hubbard safely away.

He turned quickly toward the curtains, ready to resume the chase, he knew not just where. Immediately the three Chinese plunged after him. The curtains were pulled down and trapped his arms and legs. He tripped and fell. Atop him the Chinese piled. Fingers reached for his throat; the silk was pulled tighter and tighter around his neck. He was slowly smothering.

Slowly, like a giant lifting a family of pigmies, John Powell rose to his feet, the Chinese clinging to his shoulders and throat, his arms, his legs. From the other room came a cry, then the sound of a heavy fall. Other Chinese had downed Mr. Hubbard easily. Well, all the more reason for Powell to fight.

An immense anger rose in him. Who were these yellow men to try to fight John Powell? He straightened his right arm, carrying on it into space one of the clinging Chinese. Using the body of the Oriental as a flail, he whirled to beat off the others. Arms encircled his legs and tripped him; he was falling again. If he went down he was lost. His six feet of muscular body responded to the desperate call on it. There was a flailing of arms and legs, torn bits of silk flying through the air, quick gasps of pain, guttural oaths. Three Chinese bodies came hurtling from the mêlée and crashed against the walls

or on the floor. Powell stood in magnificent freedom, breathing defiance. For a moment all thought of the abducted June Hubbard was gone; John Powell was merely an American youth who had fought three aliens to a standstill and was giving them chance for more. Then he saw Mr. Hubbard, lying tied and gagged behind the nearest counter in the outer room. There was his duty—that old man and his daughter!

He ran to pick up Mr. Hubbard and carried him to the taxi. "To the Embarcadero!" he called to the driver. "Fifty dollars if you get there before 9 o'clock!"

INSIDE the speeding taxicab Powell untied the gasping Mr. Hubbard. June's father seemed to have needed the rough treatment to arouse him from his despairing lethargy. "Don't go!" he begged. "Beat those Chinese until they tell us where June is!"

"They wanted us to stay!" Powell declared. "They would have been beaten willingly if they could have detained us. I think that I know why! The *Empress* sails at 9 o'clock for China. I know it, for last week I was considering taking a trip on it. June's aboard! I'm sure! That's why they tried to hold us back there!" He leaned from the window and excitedly shouted to the taxi driver for more speed. "It's a matter of seconds, now!" he exclaimed to Mr. Hubbard. "It's sailing time already!"

The little rattling taxicab careened around the last corner and pulled up before Wharf 19. With a checked groan, Powell saw that the gate was closed. He tossed some money to the driver and leaped from the machine, followed by Mr. Hubbard like a tail to a comet.

The paneled gate was not built to withstand the assault of a determined six-footer. It crashed and splintered. Powell and Mr. Hubbard plowed through the wreckage, threw off detaining hands, dashed frantically along the wharf and made a final leap across the widening gap between the *Empress* and its dock.

On the upper deck five swarthy-faced individuals watched the sensational race. They looked at each other meaningly, then, without a word, went down the forward stairs to the main cabin, along the narrow corridor to two adjoining rooms. They filed in quietly, to join a sixth Mongolian who was bowed before a bed surrounded by incense tapers. On the bed, garbed in a mandarin robe of indescribable brilliance, was the white, drugged figure of June Hubbard.

3

THE first few hours on the *Empress* were a continuous fight for John Powell and Mr. Hubbard. They were unwelcome guests. There was no accommodation for them. The purser promised them that a tug would be signaled and they be sent ashore. In desperation Powell asked to see the captain. That official was on the bridge and wouldn't leave it until the *Empress* was safely through the Golden Gate.

"Let us wait until we see him," Powell begged. He dared not trust his story to lesser officials; they would not believe him, would laugh at his excuse for remaining aboard. Everything depended upon the captain. "Let us see him," Powell insisted. "If he makes us leave I'll pay the expense of securing a tug to come after us. Oh, I'm solvent and sane, I tell you!" He pulled a book of travelers' checks from his pocket and dazzled the purser by their size. "I'm a chronic traveler, but this trip is not for pleasure. It's a matter of life and death. Wait until we see the captain."

(Continued on page 860)

SPIDER BITE

by Robert S. Carr

"As Za drew himself to his full height and tightened his grip on the brutal weapon, the white, handlike thing upon the ceiling dropped, alighting tenacious as a burr on the back of the brown man's neck."

"BY THE tomb of Ner-Taul, in the chamber of the pool, lies Za, the scribe. By the sting of the box and the juice of the jar he shall arise after descending. Keeper is he to the jewels of Ahma-Ka."

Professor Ashbrooke frowned as Phil finished translating. "It does sound a little odd," he admitted, "but it's hardly worth getting so excited over, do you think? Still, those old Egyptians generally had something to say when they wrote on the stone tablets."

"Perhaps the tomb of Ner-Taul never was thoroughly examined," suggested Phil; "let's investigate this 'chamber of the pool' business. That inscription sounds as though the earlier excavators might have overlooked something valuable."

Ashbrooke smiled. "You do like to organize wild goose chases, don't you? That riddle you just ran across probably doesn't mean anything at all."

"But there's the chance of discovering a new tomb—and it mentioned the jewels of Ahma-Ka." Phil's face was pleading and boyish.

The professor laughed shortly. "Egyptology is no hobby for a modern young romanticist—you get excited too easily." He turned and stared out of the window across the rock-strewn little valley that lay baking in the Egyptian sun.

"I think we're passing up a mighty interesting clue," persisted Phil.

Ashbrooke suddenly relented. "All right," he said, "we'll go, but the chances are ninety-nine out of a hundred that we shan't find a thing."

2

"WAS I right?"

Professor Ashbrooke swept the bare, dusty tomb-chamber with a half-contemptuous fling of his arm. Phil was silent.

"But then," continued the professor patronizingly, "there wasn't any digging to do, so there's nothing wasted but our time."

Phil bit his lip. "We knew before we came here that there was nothing here in *this* tomb," he exclaimed a trifle indignantly; "it has already been opened. What I want to do is see if we can get some clue to the meaning of that riddle about 'the sting of the box and the juice of the jar.' Look here." He took from his pocket a paper bearing the English translation of the puzzling inscription. "This says '*by* the tomb of Ner-Taul', not *in* it. It plainly states that the tomb of Za, the scribe, is near here somewhere. All we have to do is find it."

"Exactly." Ashbrooke was mildly sarcastic. "And how do you intend to go about it?"

"Well, first I'm going to have a good look at every inch of this place." Phil strode over to a far corner of the tomb and began to tap along the wall with a small geologist's hammer. Suddenly he stepped back in alarm.

"What's the matter?" snapped the professor quickly.

Phil smiled a bit shamefacedly. "Just a loose stone in the floor. Kind of gave me a start." He turned around and resumed his tapping.

Ashbrooke pursed his lips in silence a moment, then exclaimed: "There couldn't be a loose stone in here—this whole room is carved out of solid rock!"

Phil's eyebrows lifted. He stepped back and rejoined his companion. "That may be," he said slowly, "but nevertheless the floor moved under my feet right over there." He pointed to where his boot-tracks showed in the heavy dust. The professor darted forward, knelt, and began to dust the stone floor with his handkerchief. A moment later Phil was following his example.

"Here's a straight crack," he announced presently. "Seems to be the edge of a block. Yes, it is—here's the corner!" Soon they had uncovered what seemed to be a separate section of stone, roughly four feet long and three feet wide.

"You say it moved?"

For answer Phil placed one hand on the stone and shoved vigorously downward. With a low grating sound that end of the block sank into the floor while the other raised itself slightly.

"A stone slab mounted on an axle through the center," analyzed the professor quickly. "Push down again and harder, Phil."

Phil complied. When the under edge of the end of the block appeared, Ashbrooke hooked his strong fingers over it, and their combined efforts succeeded in raising it to an almost perpendicular position. Phil gave one more tug. As it swung perfectly upright, both men heard a metallic click.

"Wonder if it will stay that way now?"

"It seems to be pretty solid." Phil pushed against the stone to see if it would roll on its axle. To his surprize it was firm. He pushed harder, but he might as well have tried to move the rocky walls on either side, for the revolving slab was now securely locked in its upright position. He shrugged, then stepped back from the opening as a strong current of air arose; icy with the clammy coldness that comes to dead air long imprisoned underground. Like the breath of a phantom the young man felt it on his cheek. He shuddered at its faint but ghastly odor—an aromatic mustiness that hinted of grim-

visaged mummies peering into the eternal blackness of their underground tombs. . . .

He involuntarily moved closer to the professor. "Queer odor, isn't it?" he said slowly. "Makes one think of spooks and open graves and things like that."

Ashbrooke silenced him with an irritated gesture. "Rot!" he exclaimed bruskly. "Phil, your imagination is your greatest fault. . . . But it certainly is strange how *wet* that air is!"

"'The chamber of the pool,'" quoted Phil. Try as he would, he could not keep a certain hollow ring out of his voice. The professor turned and frowned.

"What's the matter with you? You're beginning to get on my nerves. Go outside and get some fresh air if you feel nervous—don't stand around in here and croak like Poe's raven." He consulted his watch. "Time for lunch anyhow; let's both go."

PHIL felt immensely and inexplicably relieved as he stepped out into the bright glare of the Egyptian sun and was immediately ashamed of himself for it. He wouldn't let his imagination run wild again, he promised himself. When they re-entered the tomb a half-hour later, his step was almost jaunty.

Accompanying them were Beeba, their native foreman, and another native, carrying small picks, shovels and electric lanterns. The slab still held its perpendicular position and seemed as firm as before. Phil turned his flashlight's strong beam down into the hole, revealing smooth sides and a level stone floor some seven or eight feet below. He lay down and projected the light around the interior of the pit.

"There's a tunnel, leading off to the left," he announced.

"Let me see," exclaimed the professor. He lay down by Phil's side and craned his neck. "It's carved out of the solid rock, so there's no danger of a cave-in. I wonder how the air is down there." He sat up, tore a leaf from his notebook, lighted it and tossed it down a few feet back in the tunnel. It burned brightly.

"It's all right," he said, satisfied as to the safety.

Phil leaped down into the stone-walled pit, holding his flashlight before him. In a moment the professor and the two natives had joined him. In single file they started through the tunnel, their elbows brushing the walls.

They walked a moment in silence. Suddenly Ashbrooke halted, so abruptly that Phil, in second place, collided with him.

"What is it?" he whispered. The professor moved aside so that Phil could look ahead. Immediately before them the ceiling of the tunnel sloped sharply to the floor, barring further progress. The angle where the ceiling met the floor was filled with an accumulation of dust and debris. Phil dropped to his hands and knees and poked in the litter.

"Give me a shovel," he said presently, turning to one of the natives.

In a few minutes he revealed that the slope of the ceiling was not complete, but ceased as abruptly as it had begun at a point about ten inches from the floor, leaving an aperture the full width of the tunnel at the bottom. A gust of air, colder and wetter than before, swept past them like a ghost escaping from a sepulcher. Phil was busy with his flashlight.

"I think the tunnel continues," he said after a brief inspection. "I'll crawl through and see what's on the other side. If there's anything we want, we can break down this part of the wall and get it."

"I'm going with you," said the professor. He stopped and surveyed the ten-inch crack dubiously, then regarded his rather rotund waistline. "I don't think I can make it," he added; "let's see."

He experimented, then stood up and brushed the dust off his clothes. "Impossible," he laughed. "One's enough, though; there's no danger." He spoke the last sentence in a slightly louder tone. An instant later an eery voice echoed out of the blackness behind them. Faintly it came, a single word—"Danger!"

Both natives started, the whites of their eyes plainly visible. Ashbrooke coughed. "Peculiar echo," he remarked evenly. Phil licked his dry lips. To him the echo had had an entirely different inflection from that the professor had given it. . . Why hadn't the other words come echoing back too?

Then he shook himself, dropped flat and, flashlight in hand, crawled slowly into the forbidding hole before him. Ashbrooke had an uneasy feeling, a premonition almost, as he watched the tips of Phil's boots disappear.

"See anything?" he called, to dispel his nervousness.

"Not yet." The voice came as if from the bowels of the earth. When it ceased the silence was so intense that to Ashbrooke the ticking of his watch in his trousers pocket was as loud as the rapid, rhythmic dropping of coins into a metal bowl close at hand. He was relieved when the sepulchral voice resumed its reporting.

"It's high enough to stand up, I guess. Wider——" There was an instant of scuffling, the smacking thud of a body falling violently upon unyielding rock, a groan—then silence.

For an instant Ashbrooke was petrified. Then he quickly prostrated himself before the opening, cupped his hands and called.

"Phil! Oh, Phil! Answer me! Are you hurt?" He listened intently for a reply. None came. He could hear a liquid dripping somewhere beyond in the blackness. . . . Again he called. A steady drip, drip, drip, now quite audible, was his only answer.

He wheeled on the terrified natives. "Break through that rock!" he commanded. Although numb with fright, they moved forward to obey, only to stop short as a new horror presented itself.

Ashbrooke followed their wide-eyed stare and his lips curled back in revulsion, for there, crawling slowly up the wall before them, was a huge white spider, a creature occasionally encountered in very old tombs.

The frightful thing was fully as large as the fingers and palm of a grown man's hand, with a bloated body and unusually thick legs—legs that looked as though possessed of a strength far out of proportion to the size of the body. Covered as it was with matted white hair, it stood out against the dark rock like a bleached skull mounted on black velvet. It crawled slowly, deliberately, as if gorged to repletion on some hideous meal, the probable nature of which caused Ashbrooke an involuntary shudder.

The two natives were absolutely paralyzed with fear. Their eyes bulged in their sockets and on their foreheads a cold sweat stood out in great beads, for not only is the Egyptian tomb-spider a fearsome and horrible thing to behold, but the legends and superstitions which surround it are of such a nature as would cause the most harmless and mild-appearing creature to be regarded with mortal terror.

Ashbrooke regained control of himself with an effort. He drew his re-

volver, took carcful aim, and fired. The soft-nosed bullet spattered the huge spider into a sticky clot that drooled slowly down the rocks. With the roar of the revolver the natives bolted screaming into the darkness, dropping the tools and lanterns in their mad flight.

The thin pencil of illumination from the flashlight his only guide, the professor hurriedly made his way back along the tunnel. He broke into a run when he heard the natives' screams double in volume. At the end of the tunnel he found them, pointing upward. He took a startled glance, then stepped back aghast.

The trap-door was closed!

For an instant he felt a hysterical impulse to scream with them, but the very panic of the others steeled his own nerves against giving way. He grasped Beeba roughly by the arm and shook him.

"Brace up!" he barked; "we've got to get the door open! Down on your hands and knees—quick!"

They obeyed his command, and in a moment were braced together in a corner of the wall, their bare knees padded against the coming pressure with Ashbrooke's jacket. Still holding his flashlight, he stepped lightly upon them, one foot on each of the bare, brown backs. He settled himself, snapped out his light and pocketed it, placed both hands against the cold stone of the door overhead, took a deep breath and—pushed.

For a moment he was assailed by the horrible suspicion that someone had placed a heavy weight over the trap-door, for it seemed immovable. Then to his great relief it gave, slowly and ponderously, but enough to assure him that it was moving on its axle.

Inch by inch the great stone slab swung upward. The effort was tremendous. Though the atmosphere in the tunnel beneath the old tomb was chilly, hot perspiration streaked down Ashbrooke's face. The natives winced and cried out softly as the steel hobnails of his boots bit into their backs, but they held fast.

There in the utter blackness and silence the trapped man strained for what seemed ages. His arms ached and throbbed till he feared he would collapse, his whole body trembled and the great vein on his sweat-bedewed forehead stood out alarmingly.

At last a thin ray of faint daylight filtered in from the tomb above. With renewed vigor he pushed till the crack had widened to several inches. Then, summoning every ounce of strength, for an instant he held the great rock with one hand while with the other he reached for the far end. His fingers crept around the thick block, he made one last tremendous effort and the slab swung into perpendicular, locking there as it had done before.

His strength spent, he staggered gasping against the wall while the natives scrambled up and out with an almost monkeylike agility. Beeba reached a hand down and helped Ashbrooke out.

"Get the electric drill—we've got to get Phil out of there!" he shouted as soon as he had regained his breath.

In a few minutes they were dragging the heavy apparatus to the edge of the pit. At first the natives were loth to climb down into the gloomy place again, but when the professor fingered the butt of his revolver nervously, they obeyed with alacrity.

Under the blaze of two electric lanterns, Ashbrooke watched the powerful drill quickly cut through the soft stone wall beyond which Phil had disappeared. He called from time to time but received no answer. As soon as a large enough hole was made, he squeezed through into what appeared to be a large chamber. But he had no time to take note of his

surroundings, for the first object the light fell upon was the huddled form of Phil lying on the floor. He quickly knelt beside him, and was feeling his pulse when to his relief the young man opened his eyes and looked about him dazedly. He saw Ashbrooke and tried to smile.

"Something lit on me," he said weakly, "bowled me over and I cracked my head on the floor." At that moment a bright illumination dazzled them as Beeba, the wall demolished, stepped through carrying an electric lantern. The professor helped Phil to his feet.

"How do you feel? Want to go outside and get some fresh air?" he inquired.

"No, I'm all right—just a sore lump on my head," Phil assured him.

Together they looked about them. The chamber in which they stood was fairly large and almost square. A few articles of furniture, a gold-encrusted chariot and several large urns of preserved fruit were grouped about in the tomb, but the scene that caught their attention and held it was in the center of the room.

From a hole in the ceiling, water dripped slowly into a small oval pool which was apparently quite deep. At either end of the pool an upright mast was sunk into the stone floor, and between the masts, above the water, was suspended a hammocklike swing in which reposed a mummy. On a low stand at the brink of the pool were an ornate little jar and a small carved box.

For the first time in his life Phil saw the professor really excited. "Just wait till I get my camera in here!" he exclaimed. "What will the British museum say to the arrangement and position of *that* mummy! Why, Phil, we've found something new—absolutely new!"

But Phil was gazing toward the mouth of the tunnel by which they had entered. "That's what hit me," he said quietly, "look!"

Ashbrooke turned.

From an axle set high upon the wall above the opening extended a long wooden beam, parallel and close to the side of the chamber. On the end of the beam was affixed a wicked-looking metal blade set so that when the wooden arm swung down, it would sweep quite close to the floor, thus decapitating or seriously injuring a person who might be emerging through the ten-inch crack the electric drill had just enlarged. The beam was discharged by pressure against a small wooden trigger set on the floor.

"I kicked that trigger with my foot as I stood up," said Phil. "If I'd crawled one foot farther—zowie!" He made an unpleasant gesture. "As it was," he continued, "it was only the shaft that hit me and knocked me over. It's a good thing I stood up as soon as I found I could. Even so, I don't think that knife missed me very far."

"Why, say, Phil, that thing seems to be cocked ready to go off again. How could it reset itself. . . . There's something mighty queer here, I tell you! See if there is any way a person could get out of this chamber except through our tunnel. That heavy beam couldn't swing back up in place itself. . . . We'd better set it off, though, or one of the men might get hurt."

He advanced, kicked the trigger with his boot and leaped backward. The murderous weapon swept down with a creak, but instead of swinging back up again as a thing of pendulum construction might naturally be expected to do, it remained suspended in the air on the farthest extremity of its arc.

"There must be a catch of some sort up there," said the professor, indicating the hole where the axle disappeared in the wall, "but that's

all the more reason why it couldn't swing back in place by itself. . . *Someone was in here while you lay unconscious!*"

"If there was," said Phil uneasily, "he's in here yet. You can see for yourself there's nobody here but that mummy over there."

"And I hardly think he'd do it," supplemented Ashbrooke smilingly. Instinctively both men turned their gaze toward the grim brown profile that was visible over the edge of the ornamented hammock. Suddenly Phil gripped Ashbrooke's arm.

"Look! For God's sake, look! The thing's moving!"

The professor took a step forward and his jaw dropped. Then it snapped shut and he straightened up. He cleared his throat.

"Bunk! Your imagination's playing tricks, or else it's air currents swinging that hammock. Three-thousand-year-old mummies don't move!"

Phil shuddered. "I *hope* it was my imagination," he murmured.

At that instant Beeba, who a few minutes before had gone back into the tunnel, burst in.

"Stone door closed again!" he gasped.

There was a stunned silence. Then the professor asked a question.

"When did it close?"

"Just then."

"About thirty seconds ago?"

"Yes. Swung down shut—nothing touched it."

For several seconds Ashbrooke was lost in thought. Then he exclaimed:

"Phil, run up underneath the trap-door and watch. I've got an idea."

The young man cast a last wide-eyed glance at the mummy, then trotted down the tunnel, leaping the pile of stones where the barrier had been removed. The professor called to him.

"All set," came back the reply.

Ashbrooke walked over beneath the long wooden arm that still hung motionless. He stood on tiptoe, grasped it just above the blade and pulled downward.

"Anything happening?" he shouted at the tunnel-mouth.

"No!"

He pulled harder. The beam moved downward a few inches.

"Say, this trap-door's beginning to open!" yelled Phil excitedly from the tunnel. The professor released his grip on the arm. It jerked back up into its original position.

"The door's dropped back shut again now!"

"All right, that's what I wanted to find out. Come back in here now."

As Phil re-entered the chamber, Ashbrooke smiled and pointed at the beam's axle.

"This is a really simple arrangement, and ingenious, too. See that axle? Well, that's the same axle that the stone slab is hung on. As we pulled open the trap-door, we automatically drew this swinging arm up into place and set it. When that was set, the trap-door was locked open, but when you touched the trigger and released the beam, the stone slab fell back down and bottled us up in here. We've got the drill down here now, so we'll cut the trap-door down. Then we can't get caught."

"Let's break up this unpleasant-looking business, too," suggested Phil, pointing to the knife and the beam.

After they shoveled the loose stone out of the tunnel, removed the heavy slab from its axle and took down the swinging beam, it was past time for their evening meal. Ashbrooke suggested that they reserve the examination of their discoveries till the next morning. Phil agreed with him.

3

"BETTER bring the folding table, too, Phil," called the professor from the door of the tomb; "I want to examine that mummy before we

bring him out." He turned to Beeba, who stood beside him. "Are the batteries in the lanterns in good shape?" The native nodded and followed him down the ladder which they had placed in the pit to facilitate entrance and exit.

When Phil emerged from the tunnel into the chamber of the pool, Ashbrooke was preparing to take a flashlight picture. Phil unfolded the long, low portable table he had brought with him and set it up. Then he moved over and stood beside the professor.

"I expect that's Za, there," he remarked by way of conversation, pointing at the mummy. Ashbrooke was busy and did not answer, so Phil wandered over closer to the pool. He took from his pocket the translation of the inscription that had brought them there. He reread it. . . *"By the sting of the box and the juice of the jar."* . . . His glance fell on the stand that held the squat jar and the carved box. He looked back at the professor, completely engrossed in putting a slide in his camera. Acting on a sudden impulse, Phil quickly picked up both the box and the jar and walked out. Ashbrooke did not notice his departure.

When Phil returned from concealing the two objects beneath his cot, he smelled the odor of burnt magnesium powder and found the professor in a highly satisfied humor.

"Let's take him down now and have a close look at him. I may take some more pictures, too, for he seems to be clothed differently from any mummy I ever saw before; in fact, he's virtually naked."

They moved toward the hammock. "The ropes are slipped over hooks in each of the poles," observed Phil, "we can unhook them and swing hammock and all over onto the floor."

"Good idea," commented the professor.

The ropes easily unhooked, and for a moment the two men held the thing low above the water, standing across the pool from each other preparatory to swinging it ashore.

"Wow! This fellow weighs a ton!" groaned Phil, bracing his feet to keep from slipping into the water.

"It's those ornaments on the hammock," explained Ashbrooke. "He's fastened in, too. Whoever took care of him fixed a nice safe berth. All right now, heave ho!"

They swung together. At the same instant the dry, crumbly old ropes parted and with a splash the hammock and mummy plunged beneath the dark waters of the pool.

The professor stepped back in disgust. Phil sat on the dusty floor regarding the piece of rope in his hand.

"Confound the luck!" expostulated Ashbrooke. "I wonder how deep that water is. Now he won't be worth a thing if we do get him out."

He tied a small rock to a six-foot piece of cord and sounded the pool. The stone sank the full length without touching.

"We could make a grappling iron," suggested Phil. He eyed the surface of the water. "Look at the bubbles coming up, would you?"

"Yes, that dried-up old mummy will soak up water like a sponge."

"I'd like to get him out," said Phil. "I'll see if I can rig up some sort of tackle right now."

"All right. And in the meantime I'll look over this stuff." Ashbrooke indicated the other contents of the tomb.

Phil met Beeba standing spellbound in the tomb above, watching another great white spider crawl slowly up the wall. Phil, too, was struck with revulsion at the hideous sight the creature presented, but being somewhat of an entomologist, he was also intently interested.

"Is it poisonous?" he asked.

Beeba shrugged his shoulders.

"Then why are you so afraid of it?"

The native turned horror-wide eyes upon him in an inarticulate reply.

"Did you ever hear of anyone's being bitten by one?"

Beeba admitted that he never had, but added that a horrible death would be sure to follow if one were. Phil smiled.

"Well, I never saw a spider like this before, so I think I'll add him to my collection. He seems to be a sleepy beggar—ought to be easy to capture." He stepped outside and returned a few minutes later with a glass jar and a stick. Holding the jar at arm's length beneath the creature, he dislodged it with the stick, quickly clapped the lid on and the huge spider was his captive. It lay sprawled helplessly on the bottom of the jar. Phil turned to Beeba.

"Simple, wasn't it?"

The native turned and walked away, shaking his head. "Bad business!" Phil heard him mutter as he left.

4

A THOROUGH search of the little camp revealed absolutely nothing with which even the crudest kind of grappling iron could be improvised. At noon the professor came up from the chamber in high glee, bearing a bundle of papyrus rolls which Phil knew would occupy him for some time.

After lunch the young man decided to go to the military post, some ten miles distant, to borrow a grappling iron and incidentally to pay a call on Major Knepper, the officer in charge of the post and a friend of his.

As he slipped into a clean white shirt, his eyes fell upon the glass jar and the spider within. He pondered a moment. His collection was stored back in Cairo, he told himself, and, too, he lacked the paraphernalia to properly preserve the creature, so why not make Major Knepper a present of it? He knew that the major was a well-known collector and would be able to inform him as to the name and habits of the thing.

After a fifteen minutes' whirlwind ride, he drew up by the officers' quarters at the post. He found the major at his desk, and when the necessary formalities and informalities of greeting an old friend were disposed of, broached the subject of a grappling iron. Knepper dispatched an orderly to search through the supply house.

"Say, Bill, I've got something out in the machine for you," exclaimed Phil, suddenly remembering the spider. He stepped out and got the jar. Major Knepper examined the motionless form through the glass.

"It's what is called a tomb-spider around here," he informed him. "We get hold of one every now and then. Although almost every large collection contains one or two, nobody knows very much about them. Somehow or other, no one seems to want to make a detailed and careful study of the things. I, personally, have investigated a little and found that they lack the nasty viciousness so marked in most of the other very large species of the spider family. It's queer, though, for these spiders have by far the largest venom sacs I have ever seen. Just a moment and I'll show you. . . You don't mind if I spoil this one, do you?"

"No, go ahead," Phil replied.

Deftly Knepper removed the huge spider from the jar, killed it and impaled the body on a small dissecting board. A few minutes of skilful work with a sharp penknife, and he laid aside two soft, yellowish, oval sacs the size of ripe cherries.

"Once, prompted by a morbid curiosity," he continued, "I took some of this venom and analyzed it. I

found it to be of an entirely different nature from the irritating poison of other spiders; in fact, as far as I could ascertain, it wasn't even poisonous. But then, I'm not much of a chemist and there are a great many things that scientists don't know yet. Rather a trivial matter all the way round, too, don't you think?"

"Yes, I suppose that the private life of a rare spider doesn't matter a great deal one way or another," agreed Phil with a smile.

"Have you noticed, though, that the mere sight of one will incapacitate for work any native in Egypt? They'll step over a deadly snake and never give it a second thought, but let one of these sluggish, helpless old spiders appear on the scene and they're paralyzed."

"Yes, it seems to be one of their pet superstitions," laughed Phil.

"There's no figuring out a native's way of thinking," sighed the major.

The orderly returned carrying a small grappling iron on a twenty-five foot chain. Phil thanked Knepper and said good-bye.

He drove slowly on the return trip to camp and did a great deal of thinking. Remembering the box and jar concealed beneath the cot in his tent, he determined to investigate as soon as he arrived. But mostly he thought about large, white spiders. . . .

Finding Professor Ashbrooke engrossed and oblivious among his papyrus rolls, Phil went to his tent, placed the box and the jar on his desk and started his investigation. He selected the jar. It opened easily.

He found it to be nearly filled with a thick, clear, odorless liquid which covered several leafy twigs. Phil lifted one out by means of forceps. The leaves and stems were perfectly preserved, and after consulting a naturalist's handbook, he recognized it as a rather uncommon, though not rare, shrub which could be found in that locality. Rather disappointed by the commonplace nature of his find, nevertheless he resolved to obtain a growing specimen of that shrub on the morrow.

He turned his attention to the box. Finding no lock or clasp, he surmised from the elaborate carvings on the front that the lid must be operated by a hidden spring. Painstakingly he set about to find it.

As he worked about the box he noticed an unpleasant odor, but when his fingers suddenly stumbled upon the spring and the lid flew open, he sprang up and covered his nose with his handkerchief, for there, coated with a jellylike preservative, lay fully a dozen huge white tomb-spiders!

5

"MAY I have that mummy, professor?" asked Phil, pointing to the dripping form of Za, the scribe, which they had just recovered from the pool and removed from his hammock.

"You may have it as far as I'm concerned," replied Ashbrooke; "it's spoiled for exhibition purposes. . . . But what on earth do you want it for, Phil?"

"Oh, I have a little theory I'd like to try out, that's all."

"It's all right with me," consented the professor; "I'm going to finish translating those papyrus rolls. They give some new facts on old Egyptian law that are mighty interesting." He hurried out through the tunnel to the ladder which led to the outside world, leaving Phil alone in the chamber of the pool.

Throwing several rough towels about the mummy, he quickly lifted it onto the examination table under the direct blaze of the electric lights. Unfolding the towels, he intently scrutinized the inert figure.

Za, the scribe, had been a well-formed man of medium stature. His skin was dark, his hair close-cropped

and jet-black, hands small with exceptionally long fingers.

Phil could see at once that this man had not been subjected to the usual mummification processes. The body was intact and free from the long, closely-wound linen wrappings characteristic of all other mummies. He wore but a single light garment and sandals, with an armlet of hammered silver above his elbow—a costume such as any ancient Egyptian might have worn about his private estate, the young man thought.

He lifted an arm toward him. It moved stiffly in its socket. As he turned it over, palm up, the elbow cracked sharply. The limb was but slightly shrunken, the flesh firm and cold. He held the heavy upper arm in his hand and gripped it. With a little more elasticity and quite a bit more warmth, it could easily have been that of a sleeping man. Phil flexed the arm slowly. The biceps muscle rolled evenly under the smooth, brown skin.

Suddenly Phil began to wonder how this man had met his death. In an effort to discover some wound or sign of disease he removed the clothing and examined the body minutely. Numerous scars attested that Za had been a fearless warrior in his day, but they were all old and completely healed. Poison, perhaps, Phil decided. Poisons were in vogue then and the keeper of a treasure would be a likely victim.

The features of the mummy attracted the young man's attention—the closed eyes, the straight-bridged nose, the set lips and the slightly sunken cheeks. He stood close by and regarded them for some time. Then he narrowed his eyes, cupped his chin in his hand and leaned over, peering searchingly into the dark countenance as if trying to find the answer to the mummy's secret. Tentatively he reached out a forefinger and pushed back an eyelid. He looked beneath and compressed his lips as if afraid to make an exclamation. Then again he stared fixedly at the face before him for quite a long time.

When he left the chamber of the pool, a strange light was burning in his eyes. . . .

6

PHIL arose early after a sleepless night. Bolting a hasty breakfast, he tramped around over the surrounding country till about noon. On his return he bore three small bushes which he had dug up by the roots. Two of these he carefully transplanted behind his tent, reserving the third for immediate employment.

Seated at his portable desk, he held a powerful magnifying glass over a limb of the shrub and painstakingly compared it with a portion of the preserved twig he had discovered in the jar from the chamber of the pool.

Convinced at last that they were one and the same plant, he went into Ashbrooke's tent, and, not finding the professor there, helped himself to one of a set of nature books. Settling himself on a camp stool, he thumbed through the section dealing with shrubs and bushes till he came to an account of the Mona bush. There was only a single, terse paragraph, but to Phil one sentence stood out sharply from among the rest:

"This herb was believed by the ancient Egyptians to have magical properties, and the juice of the leaves was much used by them in the preparation of their medicines."

Replacing the book on the shelf, he went down the ladder into the cool underground vault where lay Za, the scribe. The body was completely covered with a heavy canvas which Phil had purposely drenched with water. He removed the covering and wiped the trickling drops from the quiet brown face. The band of silver now fitted its owner's arm as snugly as it had done in life, Phil observed.

He was satisfied that the body had absorbed enough water to counteract the drying effect of the preservative, if indeed a preservative had been used.

Phil grew feverishly excited. He flexed the arms several times, noticing that the joints were not so stiff as before and that the flesh was softer and more elastic. Then he studied the translation on the slip of paper. *"By the juice of the jar."* . . The jar had contained sprigs of the Mona bush. . . That must mean that the juice of the leaves was in some way connected with the riddle. The juice of the leaves of the Mona bush had been used by the ancient Egyptians in their medicines. . .

Phil plucked one of the thick oval leaves from the twig he had brought with him and crushed it beneath his thumb on the table beside the mummy. Instantly a strong, pungent vegetable odor, utterly unlike anything he had ever smelled before, assailed his nostrils. It crept like the scent of incense through the damp, still air of the underground tomb, an odor both pleasant and unpleasant.

Puzzled, and fighting against the fantastic ideas and whisperings that flitted through his mind, Phil walked aimlessly about the tomb-chamber for a few minutes, pausing to study a crude sketch on the wall, or to gaze wide-eyed into the black depths of the pool from which the mummy had been retrieved. Still finding no solution to his problem, Phil turned back to the low table and Za, the scribe. Suddenly he gave an exclamation of disgust, for upon the table, apparently materialized out of the thin air, were two gigantic tomb-spiders. The young man took a quick step forward in an effort to prevent the hideous things from molesting the body, but checked himself when he saw that that did not seem to be their object. Rather, they seemed eagerly searching for something which they could not see.

Standing by the side of the table, Phil watched the two things scurry back and forth with more display of energy than he had believed them capable of. Interested, he leaned forward and noted their every move.

Almost frantically, the two great white spiders wove about, often brushing the side of the mummy in their erratic course. Suddenly the larger of the two ranged within an inch or so of the crushed leaf of the Mona bush. As if frozen in its tracks it stopped for an instant, then flexed its thick hairy legs and pounced upon the sticky green clot of juice and pulp. A moment later the other spider had done the same. Their bloated bodies relaxed and they lay quietly, seemingly finding satisfaction in the strong, peculiar odor.

His face a study in conflicting disgust, puzzlement and interest, Phil watched intently. But when he saw one of the unlovely pair endeavor to sink his fangs into the wooden table, and, failing to do so, exude an unbelievable quantity of his thick yellow venom, disgust came to the fore and with a shuddered oath the young man swept the two loathsome creatures to the floor and ground them into the dust under his heavy boot-heel.

Feeling somewhat b e t t e r, he glanced again at the crushed leaf. Queer, he told himself, how a mere odor could excite those sluggish spiders into such a frenzy! Then, like the flash of a lightning bolt, the idea came to him.

The juice of the jar! In the same metaphor the sting of the box would be the bite of a tomb-spider, for had not the little carved box been packed

with preserved spiders? And the age-old legends surrounding them, and what Major Knepper had told him . . . about their having the largest venom sacs . . . seemingly not poisonous . . . very little known. . . Why, perhaps——!

Phil dashed out of the chamber, through the tunnel and up the ladder into the tomb above. He collided with Professor Ashbrooke in the doorway. Grasping him by the arm, the younger man led him back down into the chamber of the pool, talking rapidly all the while and with passionate earnestness. His eyes burned feverishly and his face quivered.

At first the professor's weather-beaten countenance showed surprize and a mild annoyance at Phil's outburst. As he assimilated some of the rapid flow of talk, his expression changed to one of incredulous astonishment, then to anxiety for his companion's sanity, till finally he made the young man cease and began to question him. Phil repeated what he had said. Professor Ashbrooke's fingers worked nervously, he compressed his lips till they were almost bloodless, and a faint glimmer of the queer light that shone so brightly from Phil's eyes began to appear in his.

An hour later both men were standing beside the still form which lay on the table in the chamber of the pool. They conversed in low, vibrant tones, casting frequent glances at their silent companion, Za, the scribe.

The professor spoke excitedly of rare forms of catelepsy, of the lost art of Egyptian medicine—and also of the jewels of Ahma-Ka.

7

THE batteries in the electric lanterns were exhausted and there were no others in camp.

Thus it was that in the center of a ring of flickering yellow candle-flames, a weird and unearthly scene took place in the dark dampness of a tomb beneath a tomb—in the chamber of the pool.

The strange, unforgettable odor of the crushed leaves of the Mona bush hung stiflingly heavy in the chill, motionless air. On the low table lay the body of Za, the scribe. Their faces tense, Phil and Professor Ashbrooke stood over him.

The older man was applying a thick green liquid to the mummy. It was the juice of a great many leaves of the Mona bush. Some he rubbed on the legs and thighs, then a circular spot on the stomach, a little over the heart, liberal applications on the arms and shoulders, while the remainder he used on the back of the neck. This done, both men donned heavy rubber gloves. Phil lifted a tin box from the floor, a box with air-holes pierced through the lid. He opened it and spilled its contents full upon the bare chest of the mummy, then stepped back quickly and averted his face.

Tomb-spiders had not been hard to obtain by using the odor of crushed Mona bush leaves as a lure. . .

The professor, too, was standing with his back to the weird and horrible scene. He spoke without turning.

"How many preserved spiders was it that you found in the little carved box?"

"Fourteen." Unconsciously both men spoke in subdued tones.

"And you're using fourteen now?"

"Yes."

"What if they're not enough?"

"I've got three more in this jar to use as a last resort."

"How long do you suppose it will take?"

"I haven't the slightest idea."

For some time there was absolute silence in the twilight of the tomb. In the tall corners the shadows quivered like great black beasts held on leash.

"Oh, but a thing like this *couldn't* be!" Ashbrooke burst out. "It's impossible! Horrible!"

"We've gone too far now—all that's left to do is follow through the procedure and see whether our wild hopes and fancies are true."

Presently Phil steeled his nerves and turned slowly around. Squatting in clusters over the body were the spiders; motionless, their fangs sunk deep as they pumped their mysterious toxin into the dead veins of the mummy. It was with difficulty that he restrained himself from turning and fleeing at once from the blood-curdling and eery sight.

As rapidly as possible he plucked the tenacious things from the body and replaced them in the tin box, his hands protected by the rubber gloves. Ashbooke applied a stethoscope to the bare brown chest. He listened breathlessly for a few seconds, then sighed and shook his head. Phil began to chafe one of the cold wrists.

"We'll allow an hour for the stuff to do its work. If nothing happens then, we'll use the other three spiders. After that we'll give up the whole wild business, bury this body and try to forget that we were so foolish—so heathenly superstitious, I might better say."

THREE-QUARTERS of the hour had elapsed before the deathlike hush was again broken. The towering, monstrous shadows in the far recesses of the tomb became more restless as the candles burned low and lower. The white, strained faces of the two men stood out sharply in the semi-darkness, their bodies indistinct and shapeless.

The professor felt for a pulse in one of the thin, muscular wrists, then shook his head again.

"Get those other three spiders out, Phil," he said. "I think we're going to need them."

"Let's wait a few minutes more," replied the other. He, too, picked up a wrist and held it.

Standing very quietly, his fingertips resting lightly on the pulse, Phil strained every ounce of his powers of perception. Suddenly he gasped. Surely it couldn't be that—no, it must have been his imagination . . . but there it came again. . . Then he uttered an exclamation that caused Ashbrooke to start, for beyond the shadow of a doubt he had detected a faint pulse in the cold wrist of the three-thousand-year-old mummy!

In a few quick words Phil informed the professor, who immediately seized the stethoscope and pressed it to the chest once more. He passed the instrument to Phil. The young man listened for a moment before he could hear, coming as if from a great distance, the slow, faint, but unmistakable sound of heart-beats.

"What about the temperature?" he breathed in an awed whisper. Ashbrooke snatched a thermometer from the armpit of the reclining figure and looked at it dubiously.

"Only gone up two degrees," he announced. "Hadn't we better try a stimulant? It isn't called for, but it couldn't do any harm and it might hasten matters a great deal."

Phil nodded his acquiescence. The professor poured a liberal portion of brandy down the throat of the slowly reviving man before them.

Afterward neither Phil nor Professor Ashbrooke could hazard a guess as to how long they kept vigil over the body of Za, the scribe. Phil remembered lighting new candles twice. Neither slept.

Slowly, very slowly, the thermometer climbed and the heart-beats inereased in strength and volume. At the end of the fifth hour respiration was noticeable. Once the lips twitched. Just as the exhausted watchers were about to give way to the growing weariness that excitement can not always dispel, the eyelids were slowly raised for a moment, then drooped. Soon the heavy breathing of the man was quite audible and the limbs rolled limply.

"He's asleep," whispered the professor.

Snatching short naps by relays, Phil and Ashbrooke passed the next twelve hours. At the end of that time both the pulse and the temperature were almost normal. Phil absented himself for some time and returned with a pot of steaming coffee. The professor had just finished his second cup when he glaneed down at Za.

"Look!" he exclaimed.

Phil followed his pointing finger and saw with astonishment that Za was staring at the ceiling with wide-open eyes. Motionless as statues, they watched him slowly turn his gaze to one side till he seemed to be regarding a spot on Phil's shirt-front. The young man felt a disturbing little cold shiver scamper up his spine as the unwinking stare rose inch by inch. Before he knew it, he was looking straight into the deep black eyes of a man who had supposedly died three thousand years before!

The eyes were misty and unfocused, like those of a very young baby. Spellbound, Phil watched them shift and squint till they regarded him squarely. For a moment they gazed into each others' eyes, then a few faint lines wrinkled Za's forehead. In the same slow, deliberate manner he blinked his eyes a few times, then changed his position very slightly. The effort seemed to cause him pain, for he frowned quite noticeably.

Presently he began to open and close his mouth uneasily and to lick his dry lips with a still dryer tongue. Ashbrooke hastily supplied half a glass of cool water. Za swallowed several times and turned his head to stare with increased interest at his benefactor.

Gradually his animation increased till at the end of perhaps two hours he assayed to raised himself to a sitting position. He fell back weakly, but with the aid of the other two was soon swinging his legs slowly to and fro as he sat on the edge of the table. Phil and the professor hovered about him excitedly, hardly daring to believe their own eyes and half fearing that he might fall back any moment into a lifeless mummy once more.

By degrees his eyes brightened, his facial expressions increased and his whole demeanor livened. He pointed at the pitcher of water and was able to hold the cup with which Phil supplied him and to drink from it copiously.

Soon he evineed a desire to walk. Phil and the professor supporting and assisting him, he hobbled stiffly a few paces, then halted and looked about. A queer, dull glow came into his black eyes as he recognized his surroundings. By turns he inspected the pool, the empty chests and the mouth of the tunnel. When he saw his empty, gold-weighted hammock lying on the floor he made several unsuccessful efforts to speak. Finally he uttered a few words in a guttural tongue.

The professor shook his head and made gestures to show that he did not understand.

"Try writing in hieroglyphies," suggested Phil. Ashbrooke took his pencil and painstakingly constructed

on a leaf from his notebook a simple sentence to the effect that they did not understand his language, and inquiring if he desired anything to eat. He handed the paper and pencil to Za.

The Egyptian scrutinized it a few moments, examined the pencil curiously, then grasping it in his fist like a dagger, with a few incredibly dexterous motions set down a reply in well-formed characters. The professor translated carefully to Phil.

"He says that it is difficult for him to speak and that he is not hungry."

Phil was seized by a sudden inspiration. "Ask him where the jewels of Ahma-Ka are. This resurrection may not last but a few hours."

Ashbrooke nodded rapidly and narrowed his eyes. "I'd better work up to it gradually," he whispered from the corner of his mouth.

He made several trifling inquiries about the architecture of the tomb, to which Za replied briefly. Impatience getting the best of him, the professor put the question direct.

"Where are the jewels of Ahma-Ka?"

THE browned-skinned man looked at the paper fully a minute before he raised his head. Phil was startled at the uncanny red light which appeared to glow from his eyes. He regarded Ashbrooke till the latter grew uneasy. Then the disturbing glow was suddenly extinguished, and to the amazement of the two white men, he pointed at the black, glassy surface of the pool!

Za made his way unassisted to the edge, knelt, and extended his arm to the elbow in the water. After a few minutes of groping he brought up a loop of heavy, hand-wrought chain. Stretching it tight, he pulled. As Phil and the professor stepped quickly to his side, he made an upward gesture.

"He means for us to pull up on the chain," exclaimed Phil.

Under their combined efforts they lifted a heavy object a few inches and felt it grate to one side. The two white men, believing it to be an urn or chest containing the precious stones, endeavored to bring it to the surface. Za checked them and pointed again at the surface of the pool. The level of the water was rapidly lowering!

"We must have lifted a plug out of the bottom," cried Ashbrooke excitedly.

When grappling for the body of Za they had found the pool to be more than nine feet in depth, so it was some time later when they watched the last of the water gurgle out through a rectangular hole in one corner. By the side of the drain was a corresponding stone block, to the top of which the chain was attached leading to a heavy staple set in the stone a few inches below where the surface of the water had been.

But the object that attracted their wide-eyed attention was a small chest in the exact center of the pit, its priceless magnificence gleaming softly through the silt and slime which partly covered it.

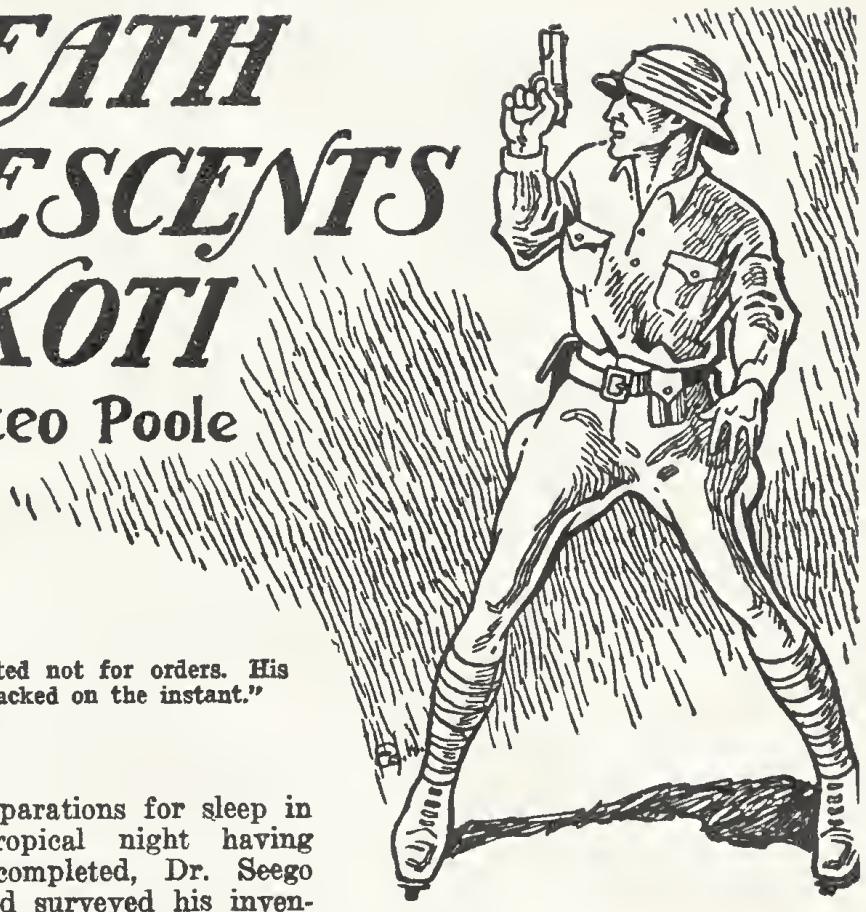
Heedless of the expression on Za's face, Phil seized a candle, lowered himself over the edge and dropped lightly down beside the chest. As Ashbrooke brushed by the motionless Egyptian he unconsciously noted that the odor of the Mona bush was still strong upon him.

A moment later Phil and the professor were bending over the open chest and tearing away the rotted leather case within. Suddenly a scintillating blaze of multi-colored

(Continued on page 863)

The DEATH CRESCENTS of KOTI

by Romeo Poole



"Phelan waited not for orders. His automatic cracked on the instant."

OUR preparations for sleep in the tropical night having been completed, Dr. Seego stood back and surveyed his invention with pardonable pride. Out of slender bars of angle steel made for the purpose he had fashioned a cage near the top of a big hardwood tree, a shelter large enough to support two folding cots, one on each side of the tree trunk, and furnished with a steel ladder in lieu of a stairway. When the panels of fine screen were set in place we had a sleeping gallery proof against all animals, insects and birds, and high enough above the ground to be cool and airy.

"Bugs may come and bugs may go," commented the doctor, "but we'll be as safe in that conning tower as a dollar in the U. S. Mint."

"Unless," joked Mark Frissian, "some of your friend Siwaloo's devils come to visit you."

"I'll take a chance on any scrub South Pacific devil opening that Yale lock," responded the doctor.

"Who's sharing your tree-top nest tonight, Doc?" asked Frissian, without any showing of envy.

"Mace was the first applicant."

Frissian turned to me. "You've got the makings of a real explorer in you," he said, jovially. "I'm not afraid, but I'll take my chances on a good sleep aboard the *Magpie* the first night. If you fellows find it so delightful here after a trial, we can set up more bird cages tomorrow." And he and Phelan, with the two black laborers, returned to the boat landing.

Dr. Seego had conceived this expedition to Koti Island to observe the odd race of Polynesian savages who occupied the place. Having been here previously himself, he knew the lay of the land and boasted a personal acquaintance with old Siwaloo, chief

of the colony. The uncanny resemblance between all Polynesian languages made it easy for the doctor to master the dialect of Koti, and he held a long conference with the aged chief promptly upon landing.

When we two had ascended to our screened dwelling that night, Seego drew the steel ladder up until the bottom end was out of reach of the ground. Noting my surprize, the doctor explained.

"Frissian tried to kid us about the devils on the island," he said, "but he didn't know there was more truth than poetry in his suggestion. When I last saw this place four years ago there were nearly twenty-five hundred people here; today, old Siwaloo tells me, his colony numbers a scant hundred and fifty."

"The result of disease?" I suggested.

"Apparently not. The people are being killed off by some agency they don't understand; and I'll have to confess that at present I don't understand it either. You've noticed that this cliff we are on is roughly V-shaped. The inside of the V is all rock formation, and the people live in caves, partly natural and partly chiseled in the face of the cliff. The only approach to these caves is by the trail we came up on. You noticed, of course, that it winds back and forth from level to level, giving access to all the cliff dwellings, and it is guarded every night. Yet something manages to elude the guards, get into caves far up the cliff, and inflict fatal injuries on the occupants. Lately this plague has fallen on so many of the men, especially the young men, that there is little life left in the colony."

"Aren't the victims able to explain what has happened?" I asked.

"They are usually delirious or dead when discovered. I haven't had time to go over the case thoroughly with Siwaloo, but so far it has me baffled about as completely as it has him. We'll get the whole story tomorrow, and see what we can do for the old man."

We smoked in silence for a few minutes, the sparse jungle around us being almost devoid of animal life, when there came a distinct vibration in our tree, as if a weight had landed against it. We strained our ears for a sound, and at last there came a furtive scratching and the faintest rustling like a rubber raincoat as the thing climbed upward toward us. The trap-door through which we had entered was closed beneath our feet, and the doctor, anxious for a look at the would-be intruder, stooped to open it. At the first click of the latch, however, the thing abruptly ceased to scratch, and only the faint, sudden vibration of the tree told us that it had leaped without pausing to study the consequences. We never heard it light. A flock of sleepy birds in the nearest tree, some fifty yards away, stirred themselves and squawked plaintively, and then all was silent.

This incident, with its mysterious ending, gave both of us plenty of food for shuddering reflection. There was no near-by tree to which a thing of that evident size could have leaped; yet it hadn't dropped. Was it a huge bird? Birds do not light low on a tree and climb, especially into a strange nest with a human scent. A monkey? No monkey could have landed silently from so high a jump.

My sleep was much troubled by visions of creeping monsters that came through the walls of our shelter, and I was impatient as a child to hear the savages' description of their mysterious enemy, which we got the next forenoon.

"THERE is a tradition of my fathers," said the venerable Siwaloo, stroking his long white beard, "that the other part of this land, around

yonder ancient volcano across the river, was once inhabited by a puny race of people not like ourselves. They neither ate, nor drank, nor slept as we do. They were smaller than our people, and not good fighters with spear or knife. In short, we could not enjoy any kind of companionship with these weaklings.

"As it was not a pleasure to continue fighting year after year with these people, and as we did not want their wives or other possessions, my fathers destroyed the spindling race, as we would do today in a like case. If one is to live in Koti, either he must be strong, to take care of himself with club and spear, or he must be pleasing or useful. My fathers killed all these brown-skinned people because they were neither.

"So far, all was right. But now that a scourge has come upon us, we can only say that these worthless pests have returned from the dark world as devils seeking to destroy our good race.

"My people can deal with snakes, with monkeys, with tigers if need be, but we know not the ways of devils, and we are helpless. Perhaps they go through the solid rock, or make themselves unseen to our sentries. We guard our trail; yet they go where they will on that same trail to do their killing. We fasten our doors with staves and thongs blessed by all the gods, and they are found open, with death inside. If the wise Americans know aught of the ways of devils, and can drive out this curse, we will repay them well in any such goods as we have, especially wives, of which we have now far too many for the remaining men."

"Chief Siwaloo," said the doctor, "could not these things climb to the top of your cliff and descend by ropes to your doors, there to do their work and then go either up or down on the same ropes?"

"The cliff," said the chief, "can not be climbed by anything living except at one or two points, and these are closely guarded day and night. The broad wall that faces the sea is covered with small bush, but not my hardiest soldier will try to climb it today, although hundreds have tried in other years. The cliff is of soft rock, that cracks off in great flat pieces, like the scales of fish. The little green bushes feed on the wet surface, and having no long roots they will not support the weight of half a man. So, even if one were small enough to trust his weight to these little bushes, somewhere up the bluff the rock must give way, and death be the answer. That side guards itself, my friend.

"And there have been no ropes. There is a scream in the night. Two minutes are gone before the nearest of us can get out to look, and nothing is to be seen. If there were ropes, someone above or below must see them in front of his door, but there is nothing.

"The victims rave about the vision of a devil in a long, flapping coat going out the door. Perhaps they see something—perhaps it is only their idea of a devil, learned from white sailors. I do not know. Surely no man would wear a long cloak in Koti. Nor would man leave the sign of the three half-moons on every victim.

"If you doubt my belief of devils, sir Americans, but follow me, and you shall see the latest victim, whose body is not yet given to the ground."

We went with him into the vault-like cave where the body of the lost warrior lay in state. On the cheek were three crescent-shaped marks, each probably half an inch long, the concave sides of the crescents facing each other. The cuts had been badly infected, and in anything but a savage death might have resulted from the filth alone. The victims, Siwaloo

told us, had all been marked exactly alike. On some exposed part of the face or body there always appeared those three little crescent-shaped cuts, and the strongest victim rarely lived longer than sunrise after a night attack.

"Yonder old volcano," warned the chief, as we were leaving him, "is a place of strange things. My people have thought that these devils might dwell there, and they have tried to hunt them out, seeking in the dark save at the mountain's base. They never found anything alive, but even so they returned sickened, and some died within a day or two.

"Such was all the success we had in the black cave. As for the old crater itself, we think it is the home of the king of all devils. The inside walls of the crater are much the same as the face of this cliff, and they can not be scaled safely. My men dread to go near its edge for fear of spells, although the bravest have ventured there at times without learning anything. Strange cries seem to come from far down in the crater, and our goats and dogs that have prowled too near its edge at night have disappeared, not to return. My white friends must be protected by most powerful gods if they would go near the volcano at either top or bottom, or you will never return."

There was a suggestion from Phelan that some of us take a turn at watchman duty upon the face of the cliff, but the doctor vetoed it. "We would be just as helpless as old Siwaloo is, or more so," he said. "The trouble comes only on dark nights, and we might see something if we had our searchlight thrown on the cliff at the right time. The weather is clear now, and they won't be bothered tonight. Tomorrow we'll have a look at the cave that troubles our black friend so."

THE principal barrier that prevented Siwaloo's people from exploring that fearful cave seemed to be that it was dark and they had no lights except crude fish-oil lanterns or pine knots, which the draft through the cave soon blew out. Hence when the four of us, Dr. Seego, Frissian, Phelan and I, entered the place we were armed with a storage battery and a 250-watt electric light.

The bottom of the cave was virtually all rock, but at intervals there were black, moldy pools of mud, emitting a vile odor.

"Here," said Seego, "is probably where our barefooted friends from across the river met their fate. Poking around here in the dark, they could easily get scratched and skinned, and if I'm not mistaken that mud is dangerous." And he took up a sample in a little bottle.

From the first we had been conscious of a noise that seemed too loud to be caused by the wind; and after a twenty-minute climb up a well-worn trail on the rock bottom we came out upon the edge of an underground stream that roared through the rocky cavern like a freight train through a tunnel. The cave at this point opened into a large space, probably forty or fifty feet high above the surface of the water, and although there was apparently no way of crossing the stream there was plentiful evidence of human workmanship in the subterranean cavern.

Crude scaffolds had been built up the rocky walls on each side of the stream, so that one could climb high up above the water. These structures were of sticks not much larger than a broomstick, and were put together in the most crude and awkward ways. They were not strong enough to hold the weight of one grown man at any point, yet every stick was worn on the top as if from continual climbing up the framework.

Here was work beyond the intelligence of any known animal—yet not strong enough for human use. What could the answer be? Did men labor to make a climbing place for monkeys? And how did anything cross that stream to do the same work on the other side?

We sought for a long time for some means of proceeding, but as none became apparent the doctor decided to come again and bring steel material from the ship with which to construct some sort of a bridge.

On board the *Magpie,* Seego analyzed the mud from the cave. After half an hour's work he came out on deck where Frissian and the rest of us were planning the bridge work. "Anything in the mud?" hailed Frissian.

"Plenty. Arsenic, antimony and sulfate of mercury from the rocks; bacteria enough to pollute the Pacific Ocean, and traces of picrotoxin from cocculus berries, which must have been carried in from the outside. Nature did her worst on that mud, and whoever finished the job certainly was thorough."

FOUR of us were now using the "bird cages" for sleeping, on account of their coolness, and as we threaded our way up the path to the top of the cliff old Siwaloo came out of his royal cave-dwelling with much trouble written in his wrinkled face, inquiring if we had made any progress against the mysterious killers.

"We know little as yet, friend Siwaloo," replied the doctor, speaking the savage's dialect, "but I believe I can overcome the poison of these devils. In three days, or four, perhaps we may find their stronghold and try other means upon them. So, if the weather remain cloudless, as now, your colony may not suffer another single loss."

"Clear weather the gods are giving us," said Siwaloo, "but your goodness has not reckoned with yonder smoke." He pointed across the river toward a small volcanic hill beyond the one in which we had explored. A thin stream of smoke drifted upward from the summit of the hill, and the slow but steady wind brought it across the land, so that the sky was somewhat darkened.

"The smoke has always been with us," explained the old chief, "and we have given it no notice, any more than a thunder storm or a summer rain, for the hill does nothing but smoke. But now, when the wind comes this way, it makes dark nights for the three-moon devils to work in; that is why we dread to see the smoke coming. By the end of another watch the moon will be hidden and—death may come among us again."

Seego pondered this a long time. "Chief Siwaloo, is there any one family more likely to be attacked than others?"

"Yes. It has always been the way of my people for the warriors to decorate the doors of their caves with the teeth of wild animals. This is an honor to our gods, and we can not stop it, even though it guide these demons who come to destroy us. A warrior of Koti would rather die than forego this sign of his bravery. And it seems that the three-moon things notice these signs, for they always strike at my best fighters.

"The four brothers Banota were good fighters and brave, hence they had the largest animal teeth and the most of them. Half a year ago the devils singled them out for death, and now there is but one Banota. And with every dark night—who knows what may happen to him? Every family of fighting men has suffered the same way, until today I am king of a colony of women, and almost without an army."

At this Seego lapsed into English, shutting out Siwaloo from the con-

versation, and briefly translated for us.

"Boys, you can all see as well as I can the kind of intelligence that is doing this killing, or directing it. How they get here, or how they escape, is another story, but no animal ever read the signs on a cave door, nor cared whether it killed men or women. Whoever does this is interested in making the colony powerless; hence their preference for fighting men.

"I'd like to know more about these spooky things, what they are and how they work, before I come to loggerheads with them; but on the contrary there are reasons why I'd like to trap some of them tonight, if it can be done. I hate to see Siwaloo's people wiped off the earth without a chance to save themselves; and half a dozen of his men may be killed tonight. In the second place, it's an absolute certainty that the killers are not armed with guns or any civilized weapons and they can't be dangerous in the least beyond the reach of their claws. We know to a certainty that they use mud out of the cave for poison, and if the worst came to the worst I believe I could save a victim after he had been attacked."

"Well, what's the idea, Doc?" asked Frissian. "Do you propose for one of us to go and sleep with the last of the Banota boys?"

"You're a rotten humorist, Mark," commented the doctor. "No, I don't think brother Banota's cave is any place for safe and sound sleeping on dark nights. But I am game to fix up a net of fine cables and lay for the midnight callers, wherever Siwaloo thinks they may drop in. What do you say?"

"Doc," replied Frissian, "in the eighteen years we've followed this gentle game I don't believe you can look back and recall a time when I've balked at anything because it was dangerous. But I don't believe we're prepared to make a success of your idea tonight. It's late, and we'd have to plan our trap as well as make it, and I don't think we ought to tackle the job."

"On the contrary," said Seego, "I've done most of the engineering in my head already. It's nothing but an extra-strong monkey-snare. And we'll have a big light in the cave to keep the thing from surprizing us."

In the end, of course, the indomitable Swede doctor had his way, and we scurried about as fast as possible to bring up the materials from the ship.

Long before the witching hour arrived, we had fitted out three of the best-decorated caves with nets of fine steel cable, hung so that they could be dropped quickly, and so arranged that should we capture any catlike monstrosity we could keep aloof from its claws and teeth. We also had lights, wired to substantial batteries, which the islanders feared only a little less than the three-moon devils.

The last of the Banotas pleaded for a chance to be in at the finish. He was marked for death, he said, and it was his ambition to die fighting. Seego had no objections except the fear that the gallant Banota might get excited and hurt someone in case of a capture. However, he finally exacted a promise from the warrior not to do anything rash, and we all assumed our appointed places.

The soldiers' caves were all large, as befits prominent men, and we had ample room to stretch out and await what might happen. Dr. Seego and I, with Banota and a black deck-hand from the yacht, took up the vigil in Banota's cave, while Frissian and Phelan made their ambush in another. A third cave had a net with an automatic trip and alarm, but no occupant. As the last fish-oil lamp was put out, leaving us in the humid blackness of a tropical night, the adventure took on a decidedly creepy

aspect, and I doubt very much that the most benighted savages in the colony were any worse scared than I was.

HOURS came and went, hours that we counted by our radium-faced watches, and which otherwise might have been mistaken for centuries. One o'clock came, and no disturbance. Two o'clock dragged by on leaden feet. Sleep tugged at our eyes.

A scratch on the rock landing in front of the cave entrance, and every nerve was on edge. A rustling sound, as of a rubber raincoat. The inky blackness of the door grew denser.

Slowly something moved toward the center of the cave, where Banota usually slept. I could sense the big savage stiffening in his corner for a spring at the intruder—a spring that dared death in its most terrible form. Seego's hand moved, and like a shot down came the weighted net and a blinding flash of white light.

Something blackish gray tore and twisted helplessly inside the net, unable to escape or to reach any of us, for it was secured in the middle of the cave like a fly on a spiderweb.

Clouds of dust, the only enemy we were not prepared for, rose and blanketed the scene at the same time the sudden light blinded our eyes. In the midst of the confusion big Banota, goaded to fury at the proximity of what he supposed to be his enemy, sprang barehanded toward the squirming mass in the net, bent on finishing the matter hand to hand.

The doctor, to save Banota's life, loosened the wire that led toward the back of the cave and attempted to swing the thing nearer to the door until he could crowd between Banota and the captive, for he did not want either one destroyed. But instantly everything went wrong. In the space of a second Banota let out a yell of pain, the doctor made a false move with the cables, and the thing we had trapped jerked itself free and went out the cave door like a black shadow, the rest of us plunging helplessly out after it. But of course it was gone.

Our searchlight did not illuminate the outside, but savages with pine knots and oil torches were swarming toward the scene of action from both up and down the trail, and none had met or seen anything.

The next minute the gallant Banota began to groan, and sank down upon the rocky trail in a deathly sickness. Seego turned the bright light on the man, and there, upon one stalwart black leg, was the sign of the three crescents.

There was no delay now. Whipping out that ever ready first aid kit, the doctor opened and cauterized the wound, and then administered a hypodermic of strychnin, followed by a stiff drink of brandy. Before we left the savage colony at dawn, we had the satisfaction of having beaten the plague on at least one ground, for Banota showed a marked improvement; and his complete recovery in the next three days gave the colony much cause for rejoicing.

We had failed to trap the clawing thing that was destroying Siwaloo's army, we had not learned whether it was beast or human, nor how it made its amazing escapes; but we had analyzed its venom and exposed its place of living, in addition to beating it out of one victim.

These factors all added to our enthusiasm for finishing the job of exploring in that black cave across the river, and we worked like beavers during the next three days, throwing a curious sort of suspension bridge across that tempestuous underground stream. Frissian was a master engineer in tight places, and by nightfall of the third day the steel framework rested firmly on both sides of the stream. The work of exploring the unknown portion was to proceed the next day.

UNCANNY as the project was, there was no restraining a single member of our party from going through the perilous cave next morning. Seego in the lead, as usual, followed by two of our own black men from the *Magpie*, then Frissian and I with two more blacks, and the rest of our party bringing up the rear, we crossed the narrow foot-bridge that had been thrown up, and entered the upper end of the cave, that dwelling place of silent, terrible danger which no man could define.

The passage here led steadily upward, and the footing was dry and not unpleasant. The continuous draft of air from above lessened one's inclination to feel faint, and we were as alert and full of adventure as schoolboys when we finally came upon the first signs of what we sought.

Our bridging work had knocked out a considerable part of the crazy scaffolding we found in the cavern, and here, on the floor of the passageway, we found little piles of hardwood sticks of a size and length suitable for rebuilding the work. Whatever these murderous cavern ghouls were, they had evidently started to repair their handiwork when something interrupted them and caused them to drop the bundles of sticks in the passage.

We all helped ourselves to samples of these sticks, and carried along one or two apiece, trying to learn how they had been cut, and where; and our curiosity in this line proved valuable a few minutes later. Beyond this spot, the passage suddenly opened into a wide underground space that must have covered several acres, for our searchlights did not reach its farthest limits. Daylight, somewhat subdued, came in from somewhere ahead of us, and occasional deposits of phosphorus made a ghostly light in dim corners and crevices, but we still had to use our artificial light to see our way.

The spacious cavern was somewhere near level on the bottom, although uneven and strewn with rock formations of all shapes and sizes. Above was a "ceiling" that varied in height from twenty to sixty or seventy feet, seamed with great fissures large enough for a man to crawl in, and festooned with sickly-looking cave vegetation.

There was no sign of the strange inhabitants as we pressed forward toward that light space ahead, the doctor and Frissian being determined to investigate the source of the light. Finally we came under a large hole in the rocky roof, and after a little calculating learned that this opened above into the bottom of the ancient crater. The bottom of the crater had an area of an acre or more, and this flue, by some agency or freak of chance, was walled about so that the heavy rains could not drain into it, otherwise they would have drowned out all forms of life in a day during the wet season.

The last eruption of that old volcano, which occurred before human history began, had left this subterranean space well concealed and self-guarded from above and below; a fit home for midnight prowlers. But where were the things that dwelt there?

Our answer came soon enough.

We paid but little attention to the rocky formation above our heads, although we kept a sharp enough lookout for the clawing things that occupied the place, when all at once there was a whirring sound behind our backs, and something like a huge vampire bat shot down from a fissure in the roof and darted at the face of the doctor, who stood a little apart from the rest of us, and not so much in the light. He was taken entirely by surprize, and had only time to swing up his hand in self-defense as the thing reached him. A black streak and a rustling sound were all

that our senses perceived, as the thing dashed at the doctor, dropped to the ground and scurried away into the deeper darkness before a light could be trained on it.

The doctor jerked at his first-aid kit with his left hand, shaking his right vigorously. "Give me a hand, somebody—he's gaffed me—see his sign?"

We gathered around somewhat terror-stricken as Frissian, under the doctor's directions, proceeded to cleanse and cauterize the wounds in Seego's right hand—three little crescents that faced each other. "Don't waste the silver nitrate," warned the doctor; "this may not be the last of the trouble."

A general desire to get back toward our sturdy little suspension bridge began to manifest itself all through our party, and presently we started back toward the entrance. Phelan limbered up his automatic pistol and counted his shells ruefully. "Twenty little shots," he said, shaking his head. "Let's hope they don't travel in swarms."

Shuddering in spite of myself at the sight we had just witnessed, I made sure that my own good revolver was accessible, and then suggested that a few of the cave-dwellers' sticks might also come in handy. Following this idea, every member of the party proceeded to load his pockets with stones and select a good, knotty club. We were perhaps twenty yards from the end of the narrow passage that led down and out when the deadly attack came.

With no warning except that faint swishing sound, a fleet of the black things suddenly descended from their hiding places in the fissured roof and charged us. Squealing, clawing, with rubbery wings flapping like huge bats, they sought to inflict their poison trade-marks on our bodies.

The light flashed in erratic circles in an effort to illuminate the scene, but owing to its funnel-shaped hood it was of little use, and we fought in virtual darkness with the death-dealing and inscrutable things. I forgot my revolver, and seizing my club in both hands, I swung it with all my strength toward a shadow that hurtled toward me. There was a gratifying contact with a bony skull, and the thing dropped, still and unresisting, at my feet.

I struck wildly at another that landed just behind the fallen one, and the thing dodged backward with a squeal of rage. Why didn't it fly away, as it had come, I wondered? But, as events took shape, in the perilous minutes that followed, the reason became clear.

The things could not fly—they could only volplane downward. Defying death in his pause of a few seconds, Frissian finally tore the metal funnel off the searchlight, and it threw a comforting glow in every direction. Pistols barked, and flapping, swishing things fell to the ground helpless, or scrambled away, leaving a trail of blood. And still we knew not what they were, nor did we dare stop fighting for a second to learn, for more than one member of our party was already marked for death with those filthy hypodermics. We must reach the passageway before we stopped for idle questions.

At last the things stopped descending, and we guessed that they had all come down. They were still lurking in the dark corners, however, and we did not feel safe by any means. One consolation, however, was ours. On the bottom they could move no faster than ourselves, and they were at the mercy of our clubs. There came a truce, and our two leaders snatched the first-aid kit and called for the injured men. Of the fourteen that composed the party, only five were uninjured by those poisonous claws,

and, treat as we would, there was no escaping the poisonous effects from the very first minute, even though the lives were saved in the long run.

For a full minute not one of the attackers appeared, and for the first time I approached one of the prostrate things for a closer inspection. As I came within reach, however, it came to life enough to reach toward my leg with a muddy claw. In a transport of revenge I brought my empty revolver down with a sounding crack on the head, and had the pleasure of hearing its puny skull split under the blow. Then I turned it over and looked at its face.

It was human! A human bat!

Between its emaciated arms and its bony legs there stretched a membrane of black skin like the wing of a bat, except different in formation, for the bat's wings are on its elongated fingers, while these stretched from arm to leg, like the flaps on a so-called flying squirrel. The rubbery membrane covered two of the original five fingers, leaving three fingers and three toes on each limb available for use. It was hard to draw any distinction between the fingers and toes, for both had those wicked, horny, clawlike nails, which carried the charge of poison for their victims.

I stretched the body out at full length. Although it was nearly five feet tall it could not have weighed more than thirty or forty pounds at the most. The emaciated body was not much larger than the robust doctor's upper arm, while the limbs were mere pipe-stems.

The face was indescribable. The eyes were small and weak, from a life spent in semi-darkness; the teeth were small, discolored and sharp-pointed; and the whole head, from generations of climbing and sailing, was canted upward like that of a bird, which impression was heightened by the long pointed nose. The bat-man's facial expression, if there could be an expression on that wizened and wrinkled barb, was one of pure animal ferocity.

In the sickening revelations of the last few minutes I almost forgot the necessity of escaping rapidly, when Seego's sharp reminder brought us all into line. The doctor was weak and sick from the poison, but his dominant mind was not harmed, and he was fully aware of our danger. With all the wounds treated, we hastened toward the exit, keeping a sharp lookout in all directions.

Evidently the things that had fought with us were in no hurry to renew the combat, for we were not pursued. Just as we were about to enter the narrow passage a ray of light thrown across the rocky ceiling above disclosed one of the largest bat-men hiding in a great crack, hanging on by fingers and toes like an animal. Phelan, walking beside me, waited not for orders. His automatic cracked, and the bat-man fell to the ground, with a jagged hole in one wing. Another leaped from almost the same spot, and for the first time we had a chance to observe how they made such enormous distances. They leaned downward as far as possible, then sprang with their wiry legs; and the force of gravity, thus supplemented, carried them for long stretches.

As the wounded pigmy struck the ground it was stunned by the fall, and Frissian, quick to seize the opportunity, tore off his own belt and proceeded to tie the dwarf's limbs securely; after which he slung the puny thing on his back and we proceeded unhindered down through the passageway.

As we at last emerged into daylight the dwarf "came to" and began to struggle. Frissian dropped it hastily on the ground. "Be quiet, my hearty," he said, addressing the bat-man, "while I manicure your nails." And, drawing the bonds

tighter than ever, he proceeded to empty the thing's claws of mud, washing them out with creek water. The captive offered no further resistance as we marched in triumph back to Siwaloo with our story and our prize.

"Doc," suddenly asked Frissian, as we paused for a minute's rest on our return trip, "what do you think of the old chief's story about the origin of his devils now? Are these the people they thought they exterminated, coming back to get even?"

After a long pause the doctor answered. "It's a fine, plausible tradition, except for one thing. That, if there's any truth in it, it's half a million years old. You'll all have to abide by your own guesses."

THE old savage chief was delighted beyond all words to learn the real truth about his enemies, and he was no slower than we were to understand now how the things had come down from the top of the cliff, done their killing, and then volplaned on downward, crossing the little river at the foot of the cliff before landing. We could all comprehend, too, how they had climbed up the cliff on the side that "guarded itself." Somewhere there was a safe route for the diminutive things to climb to the top, and they were able to experiment until they found it, for what did a few falls mean to men with wings?

As we were planning our departure Seego announced his decision to take the winged dwarf back to the United States with him. "It may be involuntary servitude," he said, facetiously, "to carry a human being around a strange country without his consent, but if he objects to it I shall prefer charges of first-degree murder against him. With a blow-out patch on that punctured wing he will be able to give flying exhibitions at the museums. Maybe we'll have time to go back and bring his wife, if he will identify the lady."

We were sitting around Siwaloo's "council house," a spacious cavern where many people could be entertained, enjoying the old chief's reactions at the opportunity to study his erstwhile enemy from the volcano, while the bat-man, secured to a ring in the wall, sat hunched up and disconsolate amid the merriment, like a diminutive Samson at the Philistine feast.

Siwaloo besought us to remain and destroy the whole colony of poison pests across the river, and shook his head sadly when we tried to explain our prejudice against wholesale murder.

"Let it be as my white friends say, then," concluded the old man, "but at least give us a supply of your medicine, that we may cure our injured men. We would also beg one of your bottled lights, but we have not the knowledge to make it burn, and will have to do without it. And we shall deal with the little men according to the custom of Koti."

He had stepped backward as he spoke, until he was close to the captive bat-man, who had seemed harmless since being deprived of his poison. But now, in a sudden blind fury, the pigmy leaped at Siwaloo's throat, clawing with his three available limbs like a trapped wildcat. It was but the work of a second for the old chief to seize the creature by the neck and snap its puny spine in two, although his face and arms were covered with ugly gashes when the skirmish ended.

Seego, deprived of his unique exhibit, walked to the door of the cave and gazed meditatively across the river toward the old volcano, and we immediately surmised that he was planning another excursion into the cave to replace his lost prisoner. I arose and went out beside him, and

even as we stood thus there came a sickening shudder in Mother Earth, and the cliff on which we stood moved perceptibly. Another eruption was in progress, and what its results might be no one knew.

There was a storm of excitement, Seego snapping out sharp orders, and the savages scattering about like madmen in their fright, for the experience was all new to them. We tore down the winding trail, abandoning everything we possessed in our rush for the wharf and the safety of the *Magpie's* deck. The trembling was not repeated, but as we gained the safety of the vessel at last and looked back toward the hill wherein dwelt the flying men we saw the ancient crater belch forth a great, solid mass of yellow smoke—a deadly gas which no living thing, even a microbe, could survive in; and as we steamed away we knew that, while Siwaloo's people were probably in no danger, the race of bat-men had been wiped out of existence, and Koti would see no more death crescents.

GHOSTS OF THE AIR

A Specter-Tale of Aviation

By J. M. HIATT *and* MOYE W. STEPHENS

MAN long ago peopled the dark with specters that stalked the earth or flitted along close to the ground. And, when he took to the seas, he saw phantom ships and "Flying Dutchmen" and heard the souls of long-drowned sailors crying from the deep. Now that he has mastered the air, is he to have ghosts of the air? Civilization has advanced too far, perhaps. Yet there is a rumor in Europe of skeleton aviators piloting their broken planes far up in the silent heights above the battlefields of France. And there is a wood in Maine, they say, where on stormy nights a cloudy airplane falls and splinters noiselessly among the somber trees.

Easley appeared, none of us ever knew whence, in response to an advertisement for a stunt man to perform in a flying circus at Garland's aviation field. I was employed at the field as a mechanic, but it chanced that I was in the office when the wing-walker arrived. He entered with a slow, heavy tread, like a man half in a dream, and, at the manager's question, started as if roused from some guilty revery. In a few terse, almost sullen words he explained his mission.

The manager looked him up and down. The applicant's clothes were shabby and hung loosely, even on his huge, gorillalike frame. A thick, dirty stubble fringed his jowls, and his dark, greasy hair was tousled and uncut. His broad face, immobile and almost vacant in its expression, was not improved by a pair of broken teeth and by small eyes that glittered occasionally, but were, for the most part, dull.

"So you're a stunt man, eh?" said the manager, rolling his cigar in his mouth. "What can you do?"

"Why not find out?" answered Easley.

Something in the rasping voice suggestive of a sneer angered the employer. He glared and seemed about

to order the fellow out, then threw away his cigar, and barked, "Well, we'll try you out right now. You'll have to sign this waiver, absolving us from liability, and I'll have a plane ready for you right away."

The muscles on the other's face did not move, but I would have sworn that he snarled. Currents of antagonism seemed to flow from the man. Seizing the pen, he scratched a hideous scrawl, "K. Easley," on the dotted line, at the same time smearing the paper with several blots.

Within a quarter of an hour the plane was warmed up and ready. Bert Cottrell, the pilot who had been assigned to take up the prospective stunt man, was curtly introduced to him by the manager, but smilingly extended his hand. Bert was a big blond man of thirty, an old flyer, liked by all at the field. In his easy, domineering way he seemed to have arrived at intimate terms with everybody. Bert laughed uproariously at his own stories and those of others, though it might be said that he was somewhat partial to his own.

Easley shook hands stolidly and peeled off his coat, preparatory to going up. Someone offered him goggles and a leather jacket, the last of which he refused. It was often remarked that he seemed impervious to the elements.

The plane took off, and, in a few minutes, Easley had proved himself a stunt man of rare caliber. He worked his way to the end of the wing, walking along the forward wing-beam outside the wires, hung by his knees from the wing-skid, and stood on the end of the top wing, bracing himself with his knees against the cabane. Then, beginning the unusual and really dangerous part of his repertory, he cautiously traversed the top wing, leaning far over to brace himself against the wind, till he reached the center section. Thence lowering himself on to the fusilage, he got into a position straddling the turtleback in the rear of the pilot's cockpit, and worked himself back to the tail section. After hanging a few minutes from the tail-skid, he returned to the cockpit.

When the plane landed, Easley leaped down with a "Well, how's that?" However unprepossessing the fellow's personality, his abilities and the company's need of them had to be recognized. He was placed on the pay-roll forthwith.

AFTER the flying circus, in which the stunt man acquitted himself well, Garland's kept him to give exhibitions to the Sunday crowds and do some motion picture work for which they had contracts.

But the passing weeks did not improve his standing with the boys at the field. Despite his daredevil courage, which they had to admire, his contemptuous reticence — together with something brutish and, I may say, sinister in the atmosphere of the man—shut him out from their sympathies. Bert, in what he believed his genius for parody, transformed "Easley" into "Beastly." He thus referred to the performer—in the absence of that aerial Hercules.

Indeed, it was big, formerly easy-going Bert who took the greatest antipathy to Easley. He flew the ship in all the wing-walker's performances, and any mention of the stunt man unloosed his anathemas. Pleasant-tempered the pilot could scarcely be termed now, for he, too, had become moody, snappish, and sullen.

"By God, I can't stand him!" he burst out one day. "When he looks at me out of those little pig eyes, I come near to committing murder."

One evening not long after, Bert returned from the studios in a fury. He did not leave us long in ignorance of the cause. First came a crackle of oaths and ejaculations, followed by, "The damn fool! On the way back from Marburg's he climbed out and

started doing his stuff over the city. It's all right for a guy to risk his neck when there's an audience and money in sight, but nobody but Beastly would think of it on a cross-country flight. He deserves to pile up in a heap. If he tries it again, and don't bust his pants—nobody'd cry if he did—I'll bust them for him myself with my shoe."

"Did you say anything to him about it?" asked Shorty Wiggin, one of the mechanics.

"Did I say anything to him about it! I said enough to him, just now when we landed, but all he did was grunt. I was so mad I could have spun the ship and pitched him off."

Realizing, perhaps, the ugliness of his last words, the pilot suddenly fell silent and walked away.

TIME went by, and Bert and Easley made frequent trips to one of the studios, where they were working on a Garland contract. On two or three of the return trips the wing-walker, it seems, was taken with the mood to "do his stuff," well-nigh driving Bert into a frenzy. Their clashing natures seemed to have seized upon this point for a bone of contention. Though none of the pilot's threats, made in our hearing, were executed, the relations of the pair seemed nearing a dangerous place.

At length Bert asked the manager to change him to other work.

"No, Cottrell," was the answer. "I haven't a seasoned pilot I can spare for Easley just now. Besides, all the other boys feel just about the way you do toward him, and, since you've flown for him all along, I guess you can put up with it a little longer. After this carnival at Moylesburg next Sunday, I mean to let Easley go. I've already notified him that we won't need him after that."

"All right," said Bert, and walked away muttering.

Though at a tension, things went smoothly until the following Sunday. Shorty Wiggin and I were warming up the ship for Bert and Easley, preparatory to their taking off for Moylesburg, a town some fifty miles distant. The stunt man was on the program of some carnival, scheduled there that afternoon.

"Now listen," Bert addressed the wing-walker suddenly and sharply. "Don't pull any of this cross-country stuff on this trip. It gets on my nerves."

"Aw, go to hell," was the reply, and Easley turned his back.

Bert's pent-up wrath burst forth. Striding rapidly forward, he grasped the other's shoulder and spun him around.

"Keep your paws off me," snapped Easley, striking away the hand.

Then, before anyone could intervene, there was a shower of savage blows from both men, which ended in Bert's going down in a heap under the plane.

"I'll stunt when I please," said Easley.

Bert sat up wildly, wiping the blood from his lips. "So will I!" he shouted.

He was pulled to his feet in chill silence. His last words really amounted to a threat of murder.

A horrible laugh came from the wing-walker, the upcurled lip exposing the broken teeth.

Here Shorty and I broke in with hurried interjections, patting both men on the back and urging them to forget it. They bundled into the plane and took off. We felt uneasy about letting them go, but there was nothing we could do about it. No one else had seen the incident.

The plane came back late that afternoon, and, with a sickly feeling, we saw it land with but one passenger. Bert climbed out and walked shakily toward us. His face was gray, and the muscles of his cheeks were twitching.

"Where's Easley?" someone asked in a hollow voice.

"Easley started his walking over Pennington Woods on the way home and fell off. I couldn't land to look for him on account of the trees."

Pennington Woods covers a good many square miles, and, though the locality where the pilot said Easley fell was searched pretty thoroughly, the body was not found.

Some of us had ugly suspicions, but we did not air them. Even should Bert be guilty, where was proof?

Cottrell, himself, was a badly shaken man. Obtaining a leave of absence, he went back to his folks in Michigan. Six months later he returned, red-cheeked and smiling, quite his old self. The affair of the wing-walker had largely blown over, and, though for my part I often thought of it, Easley's death was rarely mentioned.

ONE day Shorty Wiggin and I were overhauling an engine in the shop, when Bert walked in. "Say, Shorty," he said, "something's wrong with my motor. She rev's up all right on the ground, but in the air she doesn't seem to turn up at all. Now I've got to fly over to Moylesburg on an errand for the boss. I'd like to have you come along and listen to her. I'd take Pink Eye here"—wiggling a finger at me—"but he gave me the razz on my brand-new joke this morning. The boss says it will be all right."

"Deedle dee do," said Shorty, thumbing his nose by way of leave-taking, and departed.

It began to grow late in the afternoon, and Bert and Shorty had not returned. Somebody phoned to Moylesburg and learned that they had not been there. Accordingly, a plane was sent to fly over the route and look for signs of them.

Darkness halted the search until the next morning, when Bert's wrecked machine was discovered in Pennington Woods. In it was Shorty, not badly hurt, but suffering from exposure and shock. Bert was not to be found. His safety-belt was noted to be broken, but he should not have been hurled far.

In the hospital Shorty was able to throw light on the mystery. He informed us that Bert fell or leaped from the plane some distance from where it plunged to earth. "As soon as they let me out of here," declared the injured machinist, "I think I can lead you to the spot."

Mechanics are a hardy breed, and Shorty was back in a few days.

While the party was getting ready to start for the woods, Shorty led me aside. He had a hesitating, troubled look.

"Say," he said, "I haven't told all I know about this, for fear they might think I'm off my head. Maybe I dreamed this that night I was with the plane in the woods. Maybe I didn't. But I've got to get it off my chest."

"About Bert?" I asked.

"Yes. About Bert's fall. We were over Pennington Woods; I had been listening to the motor, and looked up to signal Bert to throttle her down. Just then he shouted something and pointed toward the end of the wing. I looked, but saw nothing wrong. Bert was in the rear cockpit, of course, and I screwed my head around again just in time to see him tear off his helmet and goggles, evidently for the purpose of rubbing his eyes. The fearful wind took him full in the face, of course, making his long, sleek hair fly in every direction. With one hand over his eyes, he fumbled with his goggles, replaced them, and again screamed and pointed. Horror seemed to have seized the man—horror and frantic fear. After about as long as it might take a wing-walker to get from the end of a wing to the fusilage, I felt a cold, sluggish

breath of air pass slowly by me toward the rear. That is, if such a breath of air is possible at seventy miles an hour. It isn't, of course. Maybe it was fear. Fear of Bert's going crazy and killing us both. He began to strike and struggle as if he were fighting madly. In some way his safety-belt became unfastened——"

"It broke," I put in.

"Well, then, it broke, and Bert jumped out of the plane. I saw him waving his legs and arms and turning slowly over and over. Then he dropped from sight.

"I had my own hands full, for here I was, in an unpiloted ship. She had controls in the front seat, thank God, and I've had some flying instruction. But before long the machine began banking over sharply; she went into a side-slip and then into a spin. I remembered enough to shove forward on the stick and straighten up on the rudder-bar, bringing her out of the spin. But by that time I had fallen so close to the ground that I crashed among the trees."

DESPITE Shorty's directing, we had searched fruitlessly for many hours. Trees and bushes formed a dense entanglement. Nettles and other weeds came knee-high and we stumbled through a thick carpet of plants, leaves, and fallen branches. The dank, thick odor of vegetation pervaded the gloomy shade.

Suddenly a sharp shout at a distance split the chilly silence. I and those with me hastened toward it. There was Shorty, already the center of an excited group.

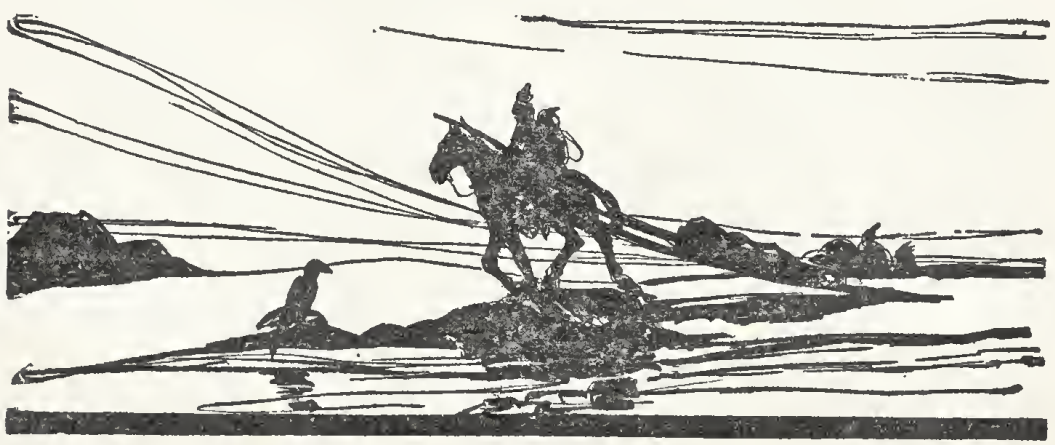
"My God!" he cried to me; "look at that! Look—what did I tell you?"

I looked. There lay the twisted corpse of an aviator, featureless and bloody—Bert Cottrell. But what was that entangled with the body? Whose splintered bones were those impaled in the bloated flesh? That shock of dark hair still adhering to the stove-in skull, those broken teeth now blackened by decay betrayed K. Easley! And the skeleton of Easley was *on top!*

Shorty and I faced each other with an unspoken question.

Before long a fellow who had been staring up into the tree above spoke. "Look, Easley's skeleton must have been hanging in that big tree up there. Cottrell struck it in his fall and fell with it to the ground. Cottrell's body was, of course, the heavier, and naturally went undermost. See, the branches are all broken."

His guess, they judged, was right. There were the broken branches to support it. But I—well, I often wonder.



The Charm That Failed

A Tale of Filipino Superstition

By GEORGE BALLARD BOWERS

IT WAS twenty years ago, when the island of Samar was in a turmoil. The fanatic mountaineers, popularly known as Pulajans, were murdering the coast-people by thousands and burning their nipa-thatched villages while five thousand Filipino soldiers tried to restore order. In that little army I was a captain.

It happened on one of my many fruitless expeditions of pursuit. We had been tramping ten days in the clammy jungle, leaving behind us only a streak of yellow slush flecked with red blood from our leech-bites.

Our path pointed to a distant spot of sunshine beyond the border of the steaming jungle twilight. Across the spot we saw flit the shadow of a man. Ambush? The hunted Pulajans frequently had turned upon us. I signaled a halt. My men obeyed with no more noise than that of a falling leaf. Half of them turned to the right, and others guarded the left. Only two, Sergeant Amuyo and Private Masida, had not heeded my signal. They darted into a dark tunnel in the jungle walls of vines and bramble. We waited in the clammy shadows listening to the pair breaking brush as softly as if two meek-eyed does were foraging.

A low whistle like the cry of a frightened jungle fowl sounded somewhere ahead. That was Sergeant Amuyo's signal that the coast was clear. With fixed bayonets the entire column moved forward almost noiselessly.

Five minutes brought us out of the dripping jungle into a grove of giant lauan carpeted in green grass with patches of fragrant white lilies. The change from the dark, dripping jungle to the light, dry forest with its fragrant lilies made the soldiers noisy. The leeches gathered in the jungle withdrew from numbed, bleeding wounds to escape the sunshine.

The welcome warmth and day-dreams had borne me far from my sordid quest when Sergeant Amuyo's challenge rang out:

"*Halto! Halto!*"

I heard cartridges clicking into a dozen chambers.

"Steady, steady, stand fast," I cautioned as calmly as I could.

A bare-headed Pulajan in scarlet uniform had stepped from concealment behind a tree. He was walking rapidly toward us, appearing oblivious of our presence in his path.

Sergeant Amuyo and Private Masida in front of me watched with ill-concealed contempt. When the Pulajan had come within striking distance of Private Masida he whipped out a secreted blade and lunged. Masida, to avoid the blow, threw himself backward while Sergeant Amuyo lunged forward, striking the Pulajan such a quick blow that it sent his weapon clattering to the ground. Before the Pulajan could regain his weapon, I had swept him into my arms. Masida regained his feet, insane with anger, his only thought to drive his bayonet into his assailant. While I choked my prisoner into submission I shielded him from Masida's bayonet. With the vilest oaths he parried for an opening. The forest rang with uproarious laughter. The sympathy of the onlookers was with me, the jeers for Masida. My men

were confident I'd win. No American captain would have dared to call for help in such a situation. After Sergeant Amuyo's fist had brought Masida back to reason, I dropped my unconscious captive to the ground.

Finally the Pulajan moved. He sat up, glowering at me. This was the signal for another outburst of hilarity. However, no disrespect for me was intended, nor did I so interpret the outburst. Soldiers laugh at anything and at any time.

"*Maganding arao, po*"—a Malayan morning salutation. My remark started another uproar.

The Pulajan ignored me. He jabbed at his bleeding face, blinked and moaned: "*Nalimut aco! Nalimut aco!*"—meaning he had forgotten.

He was in tears. He had forgotten something. I wondered what.

"Captain, sir, doubtless he has forgotten his *anting-anting*, his charm," explained Sergeant Amuyo.

Filipino fanatics, as in the *Arabian Nights* of old, still believe that with magic words, *anting-antings*, they may, at will, became invisible as well as invulnerable.

"Didst thou forget the *anting-anting* that was to have made thee invisible to us?" My tones were kindly.

He nodded.

"I would be thy friend," I added.

The Pulajan grinned doubtfully.

Undaunted I continued: "When thy *anting-anting* returns to thy memory, wouldst thou pronounce to me the magic words?"

"The sacred *anting-anting* to thee, an enemy? Only to slay thee." His face flushed in fury.

At this point Private Masida raised his rifle. I frowned disapproval. He smiled sheepishly, and turned away.

"Kill me now if it be thy will." The Pulajan had understood Masida's desire. "I forewarn thee that at the moment I recall the magic words thou wilt pay as I had intended. Thou hast made me suffer. I shall not forget."

His speech was as amazing as his faith. My pity grew. I decided to help him.

Darkness and night were near. The excitement and the amusement of the afternoon had made us forget the flight of time. We hurried on to find a spot suitable for camp. We came to the brink of a canyon, a chasm with sheer walls more than two thousand feet high. On the bottom a silvery stream led to the distant lowland.

Securely shackled to a ten-foot pole, the Pulajan was settled for the night on a jutting rock overlooking the canyon. Escape without wings was impossible.

NIGHT had fallen. From my blankets I could see through the faint starlight the sullen prisoner peering into the depths below.

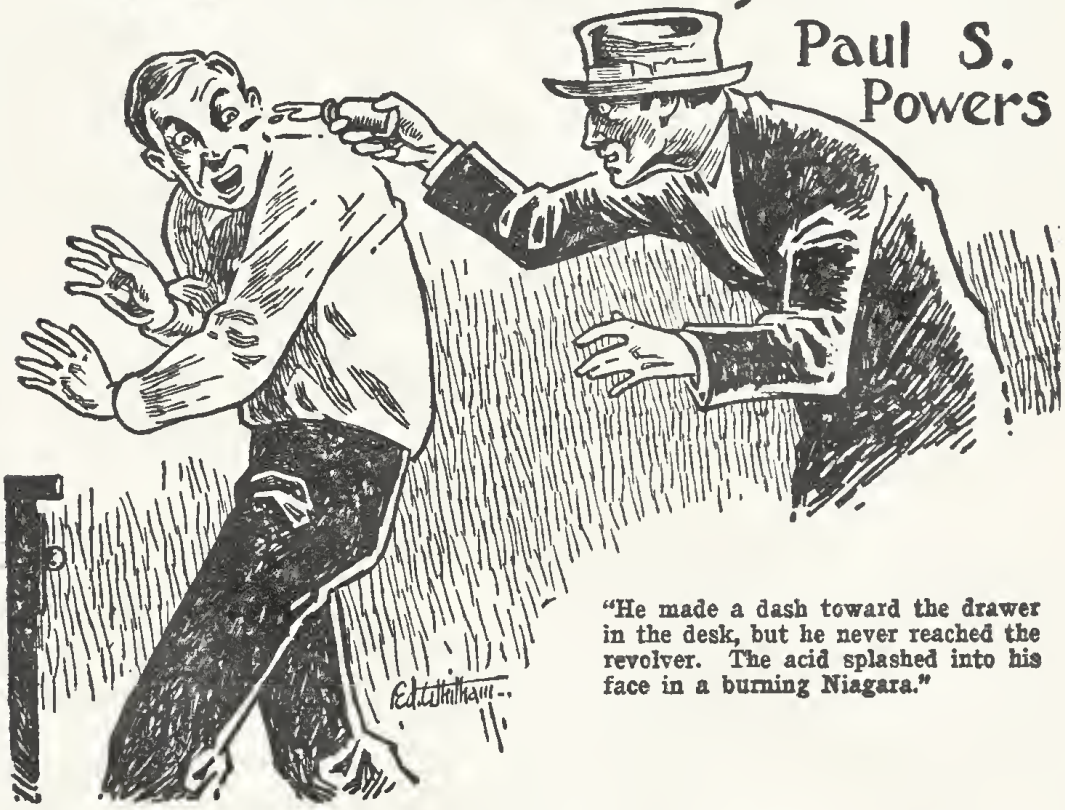
"*Acala na aco! Acala na aco!*" I remember now! I remember now!

He had recalled the magic words, the *anting-anting* he had forgotten. He picked up his imprisoning pole, poised a moment on the brink, mumbled some unintelligible phrases, then leaped out into space. All happened so quickly and unexpectedly that not one of us thought to shout a warning to the guard who at the moment had turned away. Dazed, I scrambled out of my blankets and peered into the chasm. From the shadows below came sounds of crashing branches, then a thud, and weird noises of rolling pebbles, gliding, crunching gravel; and with a final splash the lifeless body came to rest in the stream that glistened in the starlight. While I watched fascinated with horror, I heard a swish of wings and wild swine grunting contentedly. No other sounds came up from the canyon depths.

The Pulajan's charm had failed.

The LIFE SERUM

by Paul S. Powers



"He made a dash toward the drawer in the desk, but he never reached the revolver. The acid splashed into his face in a burning Niagara."

I HAVE found the secret of eternal life, yet my body has been buried for three years. As far as I know I shall live forever, and shall wander through the dim ages of the future when my body is dust. I never died.

Perhaps I am at your elbow as you read, for I am invisible, though I can see you and hear your words. I am able to follow you, even though you close the door at your back. While I can mingle with those who were once my fellows, my shout in your ear would be as useless as my trying to move a sheet of paper on your desk. Fourth dimension? Perhaps. I don't know.

Dr. Biuret would be the most famous man in your world today, had he not died that day. Together we had plotted and calculated until failure seemed impossible, but Death himself stepped into the laboratory unexpectedly, and brought our experiment to a terrible ending. Even now I can see Biuret's horribly discolored face writhing under the agony of the liquid fire. Since then I have wished that his fate had overtaken me also. There are things more awful than death, and it is a strange thing to see your own corpse lowered into the tomb.

About four years ago, a short time after I graduated from medical college, I met Dr. Biuret and soon became his assistant. I had my own way to make; I needed the money; and Biuret was a fascinating man. The work was decidedly complex, and though I understood the task that was given me, I at no time knew what my employer was working upon. He

had hinted that he was after a new anesthetic, and as Biuret had been a specialist along this line I did not ask further. Biuret was very well known to the medical profession, although some of his earlier experiments were so daring that he had become an object of derision among the other physicians. It was known that he was attempting to perfect a so-called "Panacea of Life," and although some of his results were startling, his discoveries were laughed down, and Biuret retired to work out his problem in seclusion. At no time did he violate the ethics of the profession, yet his work was so amazing—so unbelievable—that co-operation with other scientists was impossible. He needed an assistant, and it was in this capacity that I grew to know his methods, even if I never quite understood the composition of the strange chemical he compounded.

Dr. Biuret was very human. Rather shamefacedly, he told me that it was his own very healthy fear of death that determined his lifework.

"Since I was a small child," he said, "I have had a morbid fear of death. And now, after years of study and investigation, I know no more about it than I did. That is the reason it seems terrible to me."

I wonder if he knows more about it now!

The doctor was a trifle past fifty, and he literally lived in his office and laboratory on Thirty-ninth Street. After I had worked with him for a few months, his habits became mine, also, and I turned my back on the world, absorbed in what I knew to be the impossible. It is impossible, isn't it, to tear oneself away from the body? For a long time I thought my wanderings a dream—a rather pleasant nightmare—but now I know it to be true. And Dr. Biuret is dead.

I was skeptical at first. The contents of the scientist's bottles and vials puzzled me, and for a time I thought him mad. What is the use of compounding Indian hemp, the medical name for which is *Cannabis Indica*, chloral, and a host of other narcotic drugs, with extracts of pineal and other brain-glands? I couldn't see the object. The scientist threw haphazardly together enough drugs to poison a city, poured in solutions and powders the nature of which I only guessed, and then started all over again. I was set to work at tasks that seemed foolish to me, and for the first few weeks my time was taken up mixing some of the more familiar chemicals used by the doctor. Some of the materials I was warned not to touch. "Not that there is any special secret attached to them," Biuret said, "but for the reason that some of them are extremely dangerous, even with expert handling."

It was some time before I wormed the object of his search from him. We were sitting at the laboratory table before his test-tubes, when our talk wandered to the subject of the mind.

"You know that it is a strange thing," remarked Biuret, "but it is a known fact that the mind, or consciousness, is a product of the cerebral cortex. You yourself are the child of this part of your brain, as I am the child of mine. Isn't it strange that the product of a living thing should die with it?"

I agreed with him, and added that when death took, he took all. As I spoke the words a strange look crept over the doctor's face, and his lips quivered with excitement.

"That seems to be the case," he cried, "*as far as we know.* We do know, however, that the mind develops through the five senses, and through these senses alone. The baby, when born, has no mind and no con-

sciousness. Can the mind exist after the senses, which are destroyed by death, are gone? There are theories and always will be theories, but I'm going to prove it. I'm developing a drug with the power of tearing the mind from the body—*before death!*"

"What?" I gasped. "You don't mean to say we've been wasting our time on such a wild scheme as that?"

Biuret nervously drew out a cigarette and lit it.

"And why not?" he challenged. "That's the only way to find out, and science has been making progress in solving the unknown since early centuries. I tell you, man, it's important, and we haven't been wasting time."

Important! It was more than that, if he was successful; but I had no idea that it was anything other than a mad and impossible undertaking. I told him so. The idea of Biuret throwing away his energy on a thing like that angered me. I added that I did not care to work at this foolishness any longer.

"I'm sorry," sighed my employer. "You've been invaluable to me, and your knowledge of chemistry and materia medica has made our work run smoothly during the time you've been here. I suppose you thought I was working on a new local anesthetic, if the few hints I dropped did not go astray. I wish I had told you all from the first, and if you'll listen now I'll try to explain something of what I am trying to get at."

He told me something of the composition of the strange drugs he was using. Of course I understood chloral, cannabis, hyoscin and a few more of them, but most of the drugs were new to medical science. Some had, indeed, been discovered before, but their uses were unknown. And the brain glands! At this time the profession was just beginning to know the use and purpose of some of them. I wonder how soon it will be before they know all.

"This compound," summed up the doctor, "which I believe I have perfected, will take the mind away from the body—do what delirium fails to do. Delirium, which of course only deranges the mind, enables it to function abnormally. My compound will detach the mind completely from the body, without distorting its functioning."

"The name for which is death!" I smiled.

"The name for which is eternal life," corrected Biuret. "It is true that an overdose of this would mean death, for most drugs are poisons, but if you will remain with me long enough to see the end of my experiments you'll see for yourself. Tomorrow we will test it out."

My curiosity got the better of me, and I agreed.

THE rest of that day, and the following evening, we worked to devise a chemical antagonist—an antidote. It would be nearer the truth to say that Biuret worked upon it—I helped, knowing scarce more than I had already known. Finally, Biuret seemed satisfied.

"It will work," he said. "Both of them will work. The antidote should be perfect, and we will need it to make the experiments—to call the mind back to the body."

I concealed a superior smile.

"What's the idea of the cannabis, for instance?" I asked.

"That's a curious drug, isn't it?" sparkled Biuret, enthusiastically. "And it has properties unguessed of by most experimenters. Of course the symptoms following a large dose are well known; before its narcotic action takes place and the patient slips into unconsciousness, there is a strange prolongation of time—and a sense of double consciousness. Indian hemp is a well known but little used

drug, and it is an important drug in my compound. When hemp is mixed with other hypnotics, such as chloral and opium in small amounts, the effect is—well, you shall see."

This was interesting, but I was not greatly impressed. Already I had doomed Biuret's wild plan to failure, but I was willing to give him a trial to make good. That evening we talked late, after we had finished dabbling in chemicals, and I thought that my companion was laboring under an intense excitement. We talked of death, that mysterious phenomenon that strikes soon or late, and Biuret spoke of his theories in an awed whisper. Soon I, also, entered into the spirit of the thing and discussed the unknown as easily as he. Biuret told of a happening of a few years ago. He had made an enemy, he said, while studying in Austria. The man, a doctor, had threatened Biuret's life and had threatened to track him across the world. Biuret told me something of the quarrel—there was a woman in it, the other doctor's wife—a fact that astonished me. Biuret had a past, evidently.

"There was really nothing to it," murmured Biuret. "Nothing wrong, I mean. Sometimes I think that Dr. Laster's mind must have become unbalanced. But, be that as it may, I'll confess that I'm afraid. Not that I fear Laster, but that I fear death. Since that day I have led the life of a recluse, and this threat has hounded me. I have a feeling that something is going to happen. Laster has a powerful and revengeful mind, and he will not stop at anything."

I wondered if this was Biuret's reason for wanting to solve the mystery of life and death. Somehow, after I had learned this chapter in his life, the man seemed more human than ever. He had been threatened, and he feared the thing known as death, as a child fears the dark—but then, who does not? There was, however, nothing childlike about his amazing deductions, and to me, his knowledge seemed boundless. Since that evening I believe he had me hypnotized, and unknown to myself, I could not have left Biuret's laboratories had I wished it.

THE next day we spent in looking for a suitable subject for the experiments. As a rule such individuals are not hard to find; almost any derelict will allow himself to be experimented upon for a substantial fee, but we were unsuccessful in our search. I believe Biuret searched only half-heartedly, for in a way it would be a breach of medical ethics to have tried his formula on a human being while its effects were unknown. If anything should happen, Biuret could be held for murder. The same day, Biuret made a proposal.

"See here," he said, after an hour's restless pacing in his office. "You can handle this thing all right. Try it on me—I'll take the chance."

In vain I argued the matter. But there seemed to be no other way, and, as the doctor said, he had enough confidence in his own invention to try it himself. That evening we did try out the formula—cautiously I gave him a few minims of the solution with a hypodermic needle, and waited nervously for the results. There were none. Beyond a feeling of drowsiness and languor, Biuret confessed that he felt no effects at all. The formula was a failure.

"Give me a larger dose," commanded Biuret, impatiently.

I refused. While the effects upon the scientist had been negligible, I knew that the solution held enough chloral and hyoscin to make a larger dose unsafe, and I told him so.

"We'll get that formula right if it takes a year!" muttered the doctor. "There can't be much between failure and success, in this case. I tell

you, it's got to come out right! Bring me the test-tubes!"

I obeyed. It was strange that the thought of leaving him did not at this time enter my mind. For a month I worked with him, and then we seemed no farther along than before. Even Biuret's hopes were beginning to fade and I believe he would have given up the idea, had not a letter arrived at his office one morning.

I saw him open it. Carelessly, a trifle impatiently, he slit open the envelope, which (I noticed) bore a foreign postage stamp. Then I thought I saw his face pale as he took in the contents, which he seemed to read in one hasty glance. For a moment he sat at his desk, holding the paper in hands that trembled a little. He turned to me with a faint smile, and handed the letter across to me.

Just two words: "Congratulations," and "Laster," which seemed to be the signature.

"What does it mean?" I asked in astonishment.

"It means," said Biuret, moistening his lips, "that I must perfect my formula."

He laughed, as if it were a jest, but I noticed that his knees nearly gave way when he rose and staggered toward the cluttered laboratory table. Was this, then, proof for that wild story Biuret had told to me the month before? At the time I had given it little thought, supposing that Biuret had rather overstated the matter, and that the danger from this strange enemy was largely a product of my associate's brooding mind. But this was real. Biuret's fear was not feigned. The danger was there.

"He congratulated me," mused the scientist, picking up the concise letter again. "He must have heard of my —experiment," he added bitterly.

"Do you mean that this fellow actually will take your life?"

"He will if I leave it in his way," smiled Biuret, then his face sobered. "He's a paranoiac, and is dangerous because he is educated. A fancied injury, years ago, made me the object of his insane hatred. But come —let's forget about it, and set to work."

We did so, but I saw that Biuret did not forget it. I believe his dread hastened our work to a successful conclusion. Late that evening Biuret checked up, and his face told me that he was satisfied enough to give his solution another trial. The compound of chemicals and drugs was not far different from the one we had tested before, although they were in different proportions. He had added, also, an extract from the left lobe of the pituitary gland in the brain. Its place in the compound I could not guess.

"We will try it tomorrow—no, tonight!" cried Biuret.

He rolled up his sleeve, and although there was a couch in the next room, stretched himself out on the dissecting table. He seemed willing —nay, eager—that the hypodermic needle enter his tissues.

"Intravenously, this time," he ordered, meaning that I should inject the liquid directly into a vein. "One reason for our failure before was, I think, that the active principle was destroyed in the tissues before it reached the brain."

I diluted the liquid several times and poured a portion of it into a large glass syringe. This I hooked up to a tube with a needle attached, for in operations of this kind extreme care must be taken that the solution does not flow too rapidly into the vein. I also knew that should I allow an air bubble to enter the tube, it might mean instant death to Biuret when it reached his heart. Of course I had been schooled in such things, yet I confess I was not nearly as cool as Biuret, who was reclining at his ease on the dissecting table and actually smoking a cigarette.

"And this is the man who fears death!" I muttered, as I thrust the needle into the fleshy part of the doctor's forearm.

I elevated the syringe and let the solution flow into the vein, which I knew I had pierced, from the spurt of venous blood that had entered the tube. No word or expression of pain had Biuret uttered, and I watched him closely. For a moment or two nothing happened—thirty seconds passed. Then I saw Biuret's body suddenly stiffen. The cigarette dropped from his nerveless hand. His face had become tinged with the bluish danger signal—cyanosis. Before I could stop the injection of the rest of the drug he had become unconscious. His face was a peculiar leaden color, the jaw had dropped to an absurd angle. The eyes remained open and fixed in a peculiar stare that reminded me of the glass eyes of a puppet.

In an agony of haste I gave him powerful stimulants. A hypodermic of strychnin, to support the heart, followed by another. But it was too late—there were no signs of life, and respiration and the heart action had ceased. Dissolution had already taken place. Biuret was dead!

Was this, then, the result of our experiments? Biuret had sought life, and found death. Or was this his plan after all—suicide, to escape the fear that was haunting him? Desperately I sought to bring back life to the doctor's body—with horror I found that it was cold as ice. I tried every test I knew, all the while chanting the hideous phrase: "Biuret is dead and I have killed him." Every test I used told me that Biuret had been dead for some ten minutes, and finally I thought of the telephone—I must notify the police. At that moment I thought of Dr. Biuret's antidote, and as a last resort I injected a large dose at the base of the cerebrum, as Biuret had told me the week before. Hopeless!

It was no use—Biuret was dead. There was no effect—five minutes passed—anxious minutes in which I cursed and prayed by turns. If the fiendish formula would work, why not the antidote? Then, as I watched, a change came over the face of the corpse. It was a miracle the like of which no man has ever seen, for I watched life slowly pulse back into the ghastly face of a cadaver. The eyelids trembled faintly, the blue tint faded away and normal color took its place. I could feel Biuret's pulse warm under my fingers. His heart was beating—Biuret lived! Whether I fainted then I do not know, but with a sigh of relief I groped for the table and found darkness.

When I regained consciousness I found Biuret shaking me by the shoulder. I sipped the brandy he had given me, and stared at him as if he had been a ghost. A few minutes before he had been stretched out in death—his soul had fled—yet here he was, his hand grasping my shoulder.

"Brace up — everything is all right," he was saying.

Biuret was smiling, though still a trifle pale. I could make no answer—the shock I had received still numbed my brain.

"I was standing beside you all during the time you were working over my body," said Biuret. "Worried—weren't you?"

He looked at me with another chuckle.

"For a moment I thought you were going to forget all about the antidote. I saw you rush to the telephone."

"What!" I gasped. "You don't mean to say you—saw me? That's impossible! Why, the telephone is in the next room."

"I followed you there," Biuret murmured.

I was conscious of a headache. Either I was mad, or Biuret was de-

lirious. But how did he know that I had hesitated at the telephone, in the next room, when I had nearly decided to call the police?

"Go to bed and get some sleep," directed the scientist. "Don't puzzle your head over this. I'll explain all about it in the morning—forget it."

I TRIED to take his advice, but the few hours of sleep I snatched from wakefulness were haunted by terrible visions and nightmares. I awoke unrefreshed the next morning, and when I reached the doctor's office I found him there before me. He too, had not slept, he said. Enthusiastic as a small boy with a new toy, he had paced the office floor all night.

At once he went into an explanation, which, however, left me as mystified as before. The drug, he told me, had acted as he had hoped. As he lost consciousness he regained it in a new form and was able to follow me about as he pleased, and could see my every move.

"Yet my body *was* dead," said Biuret. "Not dead in the way of complete physical death—but dead all the same, for the vital forces had ceased. Still my blood did not congeal, though the heart had stopped, nor did rigor mortis set in."

"All the signs I knew pointed to death," I agreed. "Under such circumstances any coroner would sign a death certificate, and any undertaking parlor accept your body."

The more I thought of this miracle —what else was it?—the more fascinated I became. Biuret had come out of it unscathed, why not——

"Biuret," I said, calmly. "I want to try this thing."

The doctor seemed a little astonished for a moment, then he wrung my hand as though I had gained greatly in his estimation.

"That's the spirit, lad," he cried. "I hesitated to ask you—but I wanted to be on the other end of the experiment once. You shall take it—and when you've *returned* you must tell me what you experienced."

But, nevertheless, I was somewhat uneasy. While Biuret was preparing my arm for the needle, I thought of the terrible change that had come upon him the evening before. What if things should fail—this time? However, I kept my fears to myself, and took my place on the dissecting table. I would have much preferred the couch in the other room.

There was a little twinge of pain in the region of my forearm. Biuret had evidently inserted the needle. I resolutely turned my face away and stared at the ceiling. A lone fly was buzzing aimlessly about the skylight.

I could feel my arm swell, as the liquid distended the vein. The tingling sensation reached my elbow, and I was conscious of a desire to rub my shoulder, but refrained. Still, I felt as usual. The fly at the skylight had alighted on the glass and was bathing himself in the morning sun. As I watched it, a strange feeling stole over me. A feeling of content—of sleepy languor. It seemed as if a soft hand had been laid across my brain. This was not bad, at all. I wondered——

Lights flashed before my eyes, yet I did not close them. Sleepy as I was, the act of closing them seemed to require too much effort. The lights floated before me in an endless procession, and as things grew dark, the flashes grew more brilliant.

S u d d e n l y—crash! Something seemed to snap within my skull. It was as if something icy cold had writhed about my brain. I wanted to cry out—to scream, but I could not stir a muscle. Then something seemed to wrench away from my consciousness, and I found myself by Biuret's side, staring down at my gruesome body.

Ordinarily I should have been horrified at such a spectacle, had such a thing been possible; but now it seemed the most natural thing in the world. A novelty, it is true, but a very pleasant novelty. I moved about. I had no body, but I could think—see—hear. I needed no body. That terrible thing on the dissecting table was of no use to me now. I tried to speak to Biuret, but I could make no sound. His eyes were fastened anxiously upon my corpse, and from time to time he felt my pulse and shook his head. I noticed that my jaw had fallen and that the whites of my eyes were showing where the pupil and iris should have been. God! Did I look like that thing—in life? My face was distorted as if in terrible pain, yet I felt no pain. I moved freely about the room and then I—or shall I say my consciousness? — moved *through* the closed door into the adjoining room.

When I came back I saw that Biuret was nervously fingering the syringe containing the antidote. At this time I made an astonishing discovery. Anywhere I wished to go I could go. In a twinkling I was there. I thought intensely of the street below, and instantly I found myself in the avenue outside Biuret's office. People were passing to and fro, yet no one paid the slightest attention to me. They could not see me.

Then, as I wandered in the street, drinking in this indescribable sensation, a blackness, a faintness enveloped me. I was in the dark again, an empty vacuum, and then——

My eyelids fluttered, and I opened them with difficulty. In a haze I saw Biuret bending over me. I was lying again on the dissecting table. My ears were ringing and for a few minutes I was overcome with nausea, but soon I was myself again. I sat up as if nothing had happened—as if I had been asleep.

In a few broken sentences I told the delighted Biuret of my strange experience.

"It worked again," almost shouted the doctor, wringing my hand in excitement. "It will work. We have succeeded. The secret will shock the world!"

"But how do you account for it?" I asked, smiling feebly at his enthusiasm.

"How does one account for electricity—or radium—or the X-ray?" countered the scientist. "We have discovered something new, that is all, and greater than any of them."

We had, indeed. It was unbelievable, yet it was true—I knew it to be no hoax. Biuret had reason for enthusiasm, and I, too, was impatient to break the news to the world.

The rest of the day we spent in the laboratory, where Biuret compounded several vials of his elixir, and also a quantity of the antidote, which was very similar in composition to the new drug itself. However, chemical antagonists to the various drugs in the "elixir of life" were included in the antidote, and the extract of a different brain gland. I wish I could give the chemical formula here for both of them, but I might as well attempt to give you the formula for electricity.

The same evening, Biuret tried the mixture again, I, of course, administering it. The results were the same —the terrible process of death on the dissecting table, followed by what Biuret termed the "return." This time I let a full forty-five minutes elapse before I called him back with the antidote.

However, his awakening was not as rapid as it was the first time. I was compelled to give him several doses of stimulants before he "snapped out of it." He was pale, and I thought there was a tense, haunted look on his face when his eyes finally opened. It

was as though he had just awakened from a terrible dream.

"Are you all right, Biuret, old man?" I asked, when he seemed able to speak.

There seemed to be a look of fear on his face, and he answered with difficulty.

"I saw—Laster!" he cried, staring at me with eyes that seemed to look beyond me.

"Laster!" I exclaimed. "You saw him? Where?"

"I don't know where I had wandered," Biuret whispered in an awed voice. "But it was Laster—he must be here in the city. I saw him quite plainly, and then . . . . . , you called me back. I was safe then, for Laster could not have touched me, could not have seen me."

Biuret glanced nervously out of the window. He seemed to be in a state of extreme restlessness, and although the rather disagreeable effects of the drugs he had taken had not yet worn off, he lit a cigarette and smoked feverishly. Then he turned to me with a sudden idea.

"I say! Put me under that again—will you? I can't have Laster creeping up on me unexpectedly. I must find just where he is, and discover his plans if possible."

I told him that to do so would mean death; that another dose so soon after the other would certainly be disastrous. Biuret agreed, and stared moodily at the floor.

"You must let me give it to you, then," he said finally.

"But how could I find him? Why, I've never seen him!"

"Don't you understand?" snapped Biuret. "When freed from your body you can go where you like and see what you like. I will describe him to you. Then, if you concentrate, you won't fail to find him. That's the way my system works—don't you see? Laster is the one man in the world, as far as I know, with acid splashed over the left side of his face. He's a small man—foreign. And the acid burns—remember those! You will see him, even as I saw him, by *thinking of him*. That's the secret of my drug—if there is any. Quick—to the table!"

RATHER against my will, I took my place on the table. Biuret hastily made ready a solution, and I bared my arm for the second time. I had scarcely time to think before I felt the quick sharp pain of the needle.

He must have given me a larger dose, this time. Either that, or I was becoming accustomed to the drug. The lights danced as before—bells seemed to ring in my ears, and then with a rending noise my brain seemed to collapse. Again I felt that dreadful shock. Again I stood staring down at my lifeless body. I was free.

What was it now, that Biuret had told me about the little man . . . . . the acid-scarred man? Biuret was staring at the thing on the table—the shell that had been myself. Could I find Dr. Laster for him? I tried to propel my being through space, with Biuret's description of him still ringing in my ears, but I could not stir. That was strange. I seemed to be pulled as if by an unseen force toward the office door—then I heard footsteps. Someone was clumping up the stairway!

I looked at Biuret. He had risen to his feet and his face had paled. He stared at the door as if Death himself had laid fingers on the latch. I heard a knock.

"Come in," answered Biuret in a low frightened voice.

The door opened, and at the sight of the man who stood there Biuret uttered a short despairing cry.

"Laster!"

There he was; the man of mystery. For a moment he stood silent, his face distorted in a sardonic smile. With horror I saw that the whole of one

side of his face was hideously disfigured with acid.

"Biuret!"

The visitor closed the door behind him; Biuret seemed rooted in his tracks. Laster smiled again—one side of his face twisting into a leer. Then he advanced into the room and looked about. His glance fell upon my body on the table.

"Ah, I see that we are alone," said Laster. "That is fortunate. I'm sure that the cadaver won't be interested in this little—er—scene."

For the first time I saw that Laster held his right hand in his coat pocket. Biuret made no sound, nor did he move. He stood there like a man of ice—white and rigid. Laster's expression had changed. He, too, had grown pale—but from fury, not from fear.

"Look at my face!" he fairly screamed. "Look at it—it's your work! You made the woman do it—that hag of hell! First she cursed me with her beauty, and then burned my face into that of a beast. And now——"

The hand flashed from the pocket, and I caught a glimpse of a bottle. Biuret saw it too, and with understanding came panic. He made a dash toward the drawer in the desk, but he never reached the revolver. Too late! The acid splashed into Biuret's face in a burning Niagara. Strange to say, Biuret made no sound. With the agony came blindness, for his face was bathed in it, but he stood upright, his hands at his sides. Biuret's face was being slowly cooked. The nitric acid was eating rapidly into his very brain!

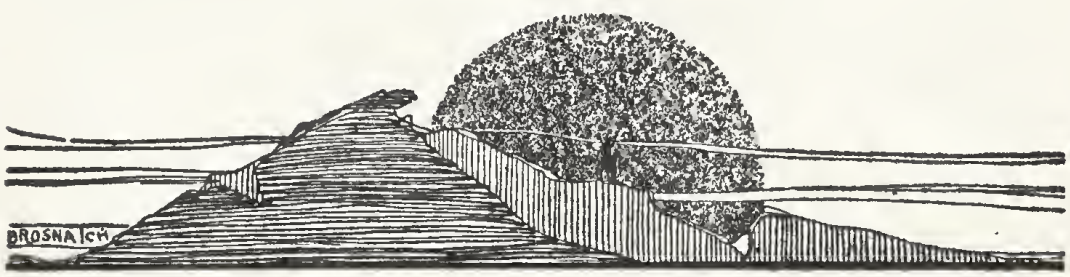
I could do nothing—I was helpless, though I could see it all. Laster gloated at the spectacle as if it were an entertainment, and finally drew a revolver from his pocket. I felt a sense of relief. After all—the man was merciful!

I heard a report—I could not bear to look, and then another. Why two? Yes . . . . . Laster must have been quite insane, for his body lay across that of Biuret, a hole in the temple. They were dead, both dead, and I—yes, I was dead, too.

The coroner said so, and the police surgeon. What a stir that affair caused! It was a mystery that was never solved . . . . . the mystery of the three dead men. But then I am not dead.

The antidote? Dr. Biuret's "junk" was dumped into the sink by his successor, after the excitement had died down. My body has been under ground a long time, now. I'm just a wanderer, and I suppose I shall always be such, even after the men who knew Biuret are dead and forgotten.

For a time I wished that I could go mad. There are things worse than death, and perhaps madness would bring forgetfulness. If I could only have died with my body! At least it would mean peace. It's lonesome to see and hear, and yet remain unseen and unheard. Some day Biuret's secret may be rediscovered, and then perhaps I'll have company. Until then . . . . . farewell.



THEIR LAST JOB

by Robert Lee Heiser

"Nance held out her two skinny arms —at the end of one was clutched a bunch of dirty, filthy paper money. In the other she clutched a long, much worn, sharp-pointed butcher's knife, and it was stained with red."

HE WAS a white-haired, white-bearded, old, old man. One could hardly guess how old he was. He was stooped under the unmerciful years which had passed over him, trembling of hands and chin. His feet shuffled along, under his thin body, throwing the small pebbles of the gravel walk before him as he passed along under the elm trees of the asylum's grounds.

A woman, old—almost as old as the man—and wrinkled, hung on his arm. Like the man her eyes shimmered unsteadily with the light of insanity and her lips quivered as though she were about to cry.

" 'Tain't him, Nance, 'tain't our Jack. Never you mind, Nance, we'll find him," said the old man in a thin voice, a voice which carried tears, although the old eyes remained dry.

"Sure 'tain't him, Toots? Mind, he'd be mighty well growed up by this time," whimpered the old woman.

" 'Tain't him," answered the old man, patting her thin hand.

The person referred to by the old pair as possibly being Jack was a young man, well dressed and evidently having very little to occupy his time, for he was seated on a bench, under a tree, near the gravel walk. He had a book in his hand. Standing near him was a middle-aged man, square-chinned and steady of eye. This last person was Detective Leonard Conron, called "Con" for short.

"Humph!" exclaimed the young man on the bench as his eyes followed the backs of the old people.

Con said nothing. He placed his foot on the edge of the bench, pulled his soft hat down well toward his

eyes and thoughtfully regarded the toe-cap of his shoe.

"Queer pair," said the young man on the bench. "Wonder who Jack could be?"

"Jack was a neglectful son. He's dead."

"Ah!" ejaculated the young man, looking up quickly. "Then, you know them? Perhaps there is a story. It's a shame to see old folks brought to such a pass——"

"No," objected Con. "No, it is self-punishment. Nance and Toots O'Neal, the couple who just passed down the walk, cheated the hangman by going insane—but then I suppose God will have to sit in judgment of their case. What is it the Bible says about judging one's neighbor? Anyway, I'll tell you the story.

"THERE was a time, and it was not so long ago, even as old as they look, when Toots O'Neal was one of the most troublesome crooks in a big coastal city. In those days Toots was a young man. His mother had named him Francis Appleton O'Neal and tried her best to make him attend school, but Francis took to hanging out down on the gas-house corner. He always dressed well and people wondered how he did it, for Francis O'Neal never worked.

"The police on the beat, they knew—ah, they knew that Francis O'Neal was an expert at thievery. He could remove a woman's earrings as she passed along the street and the woman would not know it until she reached home. By that time Francis O'Neal would be telling the boys, down on the gas-house corner, just how he did it and what a wonderful chap he was. He would place great stress on that part which had to do with his prowess as a criminal. He would repeat that part over and over again. That's why they, the other boys, named him 'Toots'—because he was always tooting his own horn.

"Then came a night when Toots branched out into broader paths of thievery, only to get caught. He looked up from his work of sawing the hinge off the safe in the First National Bank to find himself looking down the ugly barrel of Patrolman Allen's pistol.

"'Got you!' grunted the policeman.

"'Got hell!' yelled Toots, 'Bang!' echoed his pistol, and he leaped over the sprawling body of the officer.

"But the shots brought another blue-coat, and Toots O'Neal, just a scant half-square ahead of the law, with the pounding of hickory sticks on the pavement and the shrill police whistles ringing in his ears, leaped up the three rotten board stairs and into the small hallway under the red light of Nance MacGruder's establishment.

"He pounded furiously on the door.

"'Lemme in, lemme in! For God's sake, Nance! Lemme in! I'm just one jump ahead of th' cops and I gotta hole up.'

"'Yeh, and you want to bring 'em down on my place, do you? Get out and get quick!" Nance screamed back at him.

"'For th' love of—say, open th' door or it's the pen for me! They got th' goods on me this time, Nance.'

"So Nance opened the door. What more could she do? Toots was one of her kind and it was not according to the code of the underworld to refuse aid against the common enemy.

"All night long they searched the dives along the waterfront, and early the next morning, when the factory whistles were calling honest workmen, the police pulled Toots O'Neal out of his hiding place while Nance crouched near by screaming threats.

"They sent Toots across for a five-year stretch. Patrolman Allen recovered.

"When Toots came out again he had a cough, a racking cough which seemed to tear his very insides and caused him to hold his hands across his stomach.

"ONLY one person awaited Toots when he came forth. Nance MacGruder — yellow, short hair, pointed chin, too well powdered, close-fitting short skirts and a shabby coat with imitation fur about the collar—slipped her small hand under Toots' arm and started to lead him away.

"'No, no, Nance.' Toots' voice carried a frightened tone in it. 'No, no, Nance, I'm not coming back to the old life. For five long weary years I've paced back and forth in a little steel cage—three steps, turn, and three steps back. I'm done with the old game. I'm going straight.'

"There were tears in the eyes of Nance. She squeezed the ex-convict's arm gently with her small hand and looked up into his face.

"'You poor boy. Why, Toots, I'm not here to take you back. I feared some of the old gang might meet you before I came. I love you, Toots, and you're going home with me. I've the coziest little two-room apartment you have ever seen. I've been working in the dress goods department of Wildberger's Department Store for more than two years. Why, Toots, the cops all tip their hats to me now.'

"It was true. Nance must have fought to accomplish her rehabilitation, but Patrolman Allen himself tipped his hat to Toots' woman.

"The ex-convict went with the girl, talked matters over, called on a doctor about the cough and was pleasantly surprized to find that it was just a cold. Shortly after that they were married—preacher and everything. Half the policemen in the district attended the wedding. Patrolman Allen promised to furnish a new suit for the first youngster if it happened to be a boy.

"Then a wonderful thing happened; Toots had been hanging out about Kindelberger's saloon all afternoon. Looking for work, Toots was, and praying he would not find any.

"He came home and found a man in the living room. The stranger had a black beard and was busily engaged in placing a lot of small bottles and some cotton, wrapped in blue paper, into a small leather satchel which sat in the center of the rag carpet. There was a stench of medicines floating through the hallway.

"'Good evening,' greeted the stranger.

"'How do you do?' answered Toots, looking about for some trace of Nance.

"'Fine,' answered the stranger, snapping the catch on the satchel and preparing to draw on his gloves. 'It's a boy.'

"Toots went wild. He actually went crazy. Why, he even went to work. He got a job. Yes, sir, he went to work. The job only paid ninety cents a day—that's all the railroads paid section men in those days. But, it was work, and the police force concluded that the underworld had lost two of its citizens.

"Time wore on, month after month, year after year, until the boy grew up, went through school and gave promise of fulfilling the hopes of his parents. Toots lost his former identity and was now generally saluted with 'Good morning, Mister O'Neal.'

"They named the boy Jack. Wherever you listened in to a conversation where Toots O'Neal had the floor you would be sure to hear something about that boy.

"Then came a night when Jack failed to put in his appearance at the supper table. The next day and the next he was missing. They searched the city for him, in vain.

"Long afterward a recruiting officer for the United States Marines explained the mystery. Jack had enlisted under an assumed name, in the capacity of a 'Devil Dog', only they did not call them that at that time.

"It wrecked Toots O'Neal's chances of being a good citizen. He became the old man who hung about Kindelberger's saloon, where he swilled stale beer from the empty kegs and cleaned spittoons for the privilege. He never worked any more.

"Mrs. Toots O'Neal, slim unto skinniness and gray of hair, aye, thin gray hair—Mrs. O'Neal sold newspapers in the corner formed by the walls of the Wexshire Building and the First National Bank. You could tell it was Mrs. O'Neal by her cracked, singsong voice, while you were yet a square away. She did not make much money selling papers, but she was a good marketer. She would drop into the butcher shop and——

"'Gimme five cents worth of dog meat, please sir.' And as an afterthought, 'Not too much bone—my dog's teeth are not so good since a long time back.'

"The butcher would hunt up the odds and ends which cluttered his meat block, put them in a paper sack, twist the bag's neck and hand the parcel over to Mrs. O'Neal, who always started out without handing over the nickel.

"'You forgot something,' the butcher would often remind her.

"'Oh, yes, so I did. I'm getting old and forgetful. I forgot to pay you. Here you are.'

"And Mrs. O'Neal, crafty Mrs. O'Neal, who had once been pretty Nance MacGruder, would pull a sock out of her pocket, unroll it carefully, take out a large pocketbook from the toe, open the big one and take out a little purse. She would fumble about in the small one for almost five minutes before gathering together the five pennies, and by this time the butcher would have become discouraged and chased her out.

"Then, that evening, when Toots came home from Kindelberger's he would find an excellent beef stew on the greasy draining board of the kitchen sink.

"'We are growing old, Toots,' said Mrs. O'Neal one evening. 'We are soon due for the poorhouse.'

"'Right you are, Missus O'Neal, I agree with you, I agree with you. It's a dirty shame. A rotten shame. That's what I calls it. Over th' hills to th' poorhouse,' Toots replied, his lips and tongue thick with the stale beer from the empty kegs.

"'Listen, Toots,' and a crafty look came into the eyes of Mrs. O'Neal as she leaned toward her husband. 'I mind th' time when you were mighty handy at pickin' up a bit of money now and then—without work, mind you.'

"Toots looked at his wife in a curious manner while her suggestion was sinking into his rum-soaked brain.

"'That was a long time ago, Missus O'Neal. That was a long time ago. Lemme see——'

"'Never mind that now. We are going to the poorhouse. We are getting old. One more job. Just one more would not hurt. It would make us respectable again and keep us out of the poorhouse. Mind you, Toots, we are gettin' old and I find it hard to work.'

"Toots laughed drunkenly at his wife's suggestion. But late into the nights he would toss on his uncomfortable bed, searching his brain for a plan. He considered a bank, or a paymaster's roll. Toots realized that these were desperate times. Old age was creeping up on him and he, like his wife, dreaded going to the poorhouse, and — horrible thought — he would never get his beer drippings any more.

"ABOUT this time, while the plans were slithering in the brain of Toots O'Neal, Jack O'Neal, soldier of fortune, became tired of following the big iron wagons that go down to the sea. They had carried him into almost every port of the world after he came out of the service. He tried being the ruler of a South American race who live on a bit of land not down on the maps, and after the revolution he came farther north and took a job managing a railroad in Mexico. Then he tried ranching and farming in South Dakota, collected a roll of greenbacks and—thought about home and the old folks.

"Now, Jack was not a bad sort. He was just neglectful. There are thousands of sons like Jack.

"He was nearing forty-five when he eventually pushed the swinging doors of Kindelberger's saloon open and stepped up to the bar.

"Gus Minton was behind the bar. Gus used to sit on the railroad embankment, when he and Jack were boys together, and tell how he was going to be President of the United States when he became a man—but accidents will happen, and here he was, only a bartender in Kindelberger's saloon.

" 'Gus! How are you, old timer?' bawled a big man as he stretched his arm across the bar.

" 'Right good, how are you? I don't believe I've had the pleasure ——' started the bartender.

" 'What'll you have, boys? Come on, all of you.' The stranger waved his arm in token for the gentlemen who were holding up the wall with their backs to come forward and lubricate. The gentlemen in question were not slow in accepting the invitation—and the wall did not fall down.

" 'Me? I'm Jack O'Neal——'

" 'For th' love o' Mike!' A dozen hands came down on his back. 'Where in the world have you been keeping yourself? Would never have known you if you hadn't named yourself.'

" 'How's the folks, Gus? They still live down at the old place?'

" 'Yes, they still live there. They're in a bad way, Jack. It's good that you have come home.'

" 'How about the old man, what does he do?'

" 'Nothin' except, sometimes, clean up around here. He has done no work since you left. It broke the old codger all up. Jack, you'll not know your old man.'

"The long-lost son's face flushed with the shame of it. He reached into his side coat-pocket and produced a roll.

" 'How much do I owe you?'

"The bartender named the price and Jack paid.

" 'Mind, you fellows,' indicating all within hearing, 'I want to surprize the old folks. I've plenty of money and am going to look out for them. But, I want it to be a surprize. Now, I'm going down there, knock on the door, rent a room and play the good fairy. Don't anyone of you tip the old man off as to who I am.'

"Which proves conclusively that Jack O'Neal was really not so hardhearted as one might think. He was just neglectful—unthinkingly neglectful.

"JACK passed through the swinging doors, walked down the street at a brisk pace, turned in at the broken gate and rapped on the door.

"When Mrs. O'Neal opened the door Jack felt a pang of remorse and cursed himself in his thoughts for having forgotten his mother.

" 'Beg your pardon, lady. I'm looking for a place to put up for a few days. I was told at the saloon, above here, that you folks needed money and would likely be glad to rent me a room.'

" 'Well, we ain't got much——'

"'That's all right, lady, perfectly all right. I'm not particular.'

"Jack paid in advance. He peeled a twenty off his roll and pressed it into her bony old hands. Then he went to his room, bare, shabby and unclean.

"When Toots came home he was surprized to find a real meal awaiting him. He noticed that Mrs. O'Neal seemed excited and a bit more nervous than usual.

"'Toots, we got company,' said the old woman. 'Man came a bit ago and asked for a room—he paid in advance.'

"Nance exhibited the change from the twenty-dollar bill. Toots O'Neal did not answer. He was busily engaged in stuffing the first real meal he had had for many a day. His knife was passing in and out between his trembling lips as fast as he could work his elbow.

"'And Toots——' continued Mrs. O'Neal, leaning far over the table until her face was close to that of her husband. 'He has a roll—you hear me, Toots? He has a roll. More'n a thousand dollars.'

"'Maybe he'll stay a long while,' said Toots between mouthfuls.

"'Bah, you fool! What's wrong with your brains? I say he has plenty of money!' And Nance brought her fist down on the table with a thud, causing the few broken dishes to rattle merrily.

"'I heard you th' first time, Nance,' said Toots, holding his knife in one fist and his fork in the other and looking up into the face of his mate. 'What's th' idea, Missus O'Neal?'

"'It is your chance. The chance for your last job.'

"Mrs. O'Neal barely whispered the suggestion.

"Toots looked across the table at the rickety alarm clock for a long time while Nance waited, eyes half closed, skinny hands on equally lean hips.

"'I agree with you, I agree with you, Missus O'Neal,' he said at last. 'But, how will we get it? Suppose—suppose, now, he wakes up and catches me? We are old, Nance, and can't stand a stretch in prison.'

"'Aye, Toots O'Neal, and we can not go to the poorhouse. Think, man, think of it! I mind th' time when you were not so squeamish.'

"'Yes, I agree with you, I agree with you, Missus O'Neal—but, that was a long, long time ago.'

"Nance stretched out a bony arm and picked up the long, much worn, sharp-pointed butcher's knife and slid the weapon across the table.

"'There's only one sure way,' whispered the woman, her eyes glittering like a snake's.

"Toots jerked himself straight, his mouth hung open, his hand, carrying a loaded fork, stopped half-way on its mission and he stared at nothing while the alarm clock clattered, 'clickety-click, clickety-click, clickety-click,' and a gust of wind slammed the shutter before the kitchen window.

"'God!' he exclaimed eventually; 'I can't do that, woman, I'm too old—I've taken long chances in my time, Nance. I agree with you, I've picked up quite a bit of money that did not belong to me, and—and—and once—once I paid the price. Long years of tramping up and down the narrow confines of a steel cage. No, I can't do that.'

"'It is either that or the poorhouse. Choose between the two. You can do it, and who would dare say the stranger had not committed suicide?'

"The argument lasted well into the night. The next day came and found Toots in deep thought. Then late in the afternoon he came to a conclusion.

" 'I'll do it,' he told Mrs. O'Neal. 'I'll do it, but I can never do the work while I am sober. Give me the balance of that money. I'm going up to Kindelberger's, and when I come back I'll be drunk—I'll not know, then, just exactly what happens. I'm going to get drunk first.'

"Toots suited action to his words; he went up to the saloon. Gus Minton, the bartender, was not surprized, knowing what he did, to find the old man had money with which to buy drink. Hour after hour slipped back into nowhere until darkness came, and by that time Toots had filled his body with so much poisonous rum that he had almost forgotten why he started out to get drunk.

"Gus Minton had a secret and the bartender was not a good hand at keeping good news. The information he could give the old man was itching to spring to his lips.

" 'Got company down to your house, they tell me,' remarked Gus, rinsing a glass and sweeping the bar with a towel.

" 'Yes, rich man, right nice sort of a chap. Tells me he's been all over th' world. Wonder what his business is?' Toots was becoming unsteady both in speech and limbs and he held on to the bar railing with some difficulty. It was almost time for him to be going home. 'I got to go down to th' house. I promised Missus O'Neal I'd be home early—you can't always tell about strangers, this chap is liable to commit suicide and—and—th' wife'd be skeered.'

" 'Not that fellow—listen, Toots, I got some news—you won't tell, will you?'

" 'Naw, I won't tell nothin', I won't—but I got to be going home——'

"The bartender pushed the bottle toward the old man.

" 'Have one on me—listen, who do you suppose that chap is, eh?'

" 'Says his name's Carter, or Barter, or something like that, he——'

" 'Nope,' and Gus grinned all over his face; 'nope, that's your son, Jack!'

" 'Th' hell you say!' The whisky glass fell to the bar and splintered with a crash, the old man threw his arms in the air and started to laugh in a hysterical manner, then he cried, and in the end he rushed through the saloon's swinging doors and down the street toward his home.

"Toots did not wait to open the rotten wooden gate, he crashed through the flimsy thing as though it were not there. Springing up the steps he reached for the doorknob, a great gladness racing through his body and soul: Jack, his Jack, was home again!

"Before his fingers could close on the knob, the door opened and Nance O'Neal stood framed in the yellow flicker of the oil lamp's flame. She placed her fingers to her lips as a signal to be quiet and looked back over her shoulder in a frightened manner, as though something back there in the shadows was about to spring upon her.

" 'Nance——' started Toots.

" 'Hush!' whimpered Nance O'Neal, 'I knew you feared to do it, Toots, and I saved you th' trouble—I've killed him. Look!'

"And Nance held out her two skinny arms—at the end of one was clutched a bunch of dirty, filthy paper money. In the other she clutched a long, much worn, sharp-pointed butcher's knife, and it was stained with red."

WEIRD STORY REPRINTS

No. 12. The Upper Berth

By F. MARION CRAWFORD

I AM an old sailor, and as I have to cross the Atlantic pretty often, I have my favorites. Most men have their favorites. I have seen a man wait in a Broadway bar for three-quarters of an hour for a particular car which he liked! I believe the barkeeper made at least one-third of his living by that man's preference. I have a habit of waiting for certain ships when I am obliged to cross that duck-pond. It may be a prejudice, but I was never cheated out of a good passage but once in my life.

I remember it very well; it was a warm morning in June, and the custom house officials, who were hanging about waiting for a steamer already on her way up from the quarantine, presented a peculiarly hazy and thoughtful appearance. I had not much luggage—I never have. I mingled with the crowd of passengers, porters, and officious individuals in blue coats and brass buttons, who seemed to spring up like mushrooms from the deck of a moored steamer to obtrude their unnecessary services upon the independent passenger. I have often noticed with a certain interest the spontaneous evolution of these fellows. They are not there when you arrive; five minutes after the pilot has called "Go ahead!" they, or at least their blue coats and brass buttons, have disappeared from deck and gangway as completely as though they had been consigned to that locker which tradition unanimously ascribes to Davy Jones. But, at the moment of starting, they are there, clean-shaved, blue-coated, and ravenous for fees.

I hastened on board. The *Kamtschatka* was one of my favorite ships. I say "was" because she emphatically no longer is. I can not conceive of any inducement which could entice me to make another voyage in her. She is uncommonly clean in the run aft, she has enough bluffing off in the bows to keep her dry, and the lower berths are most of them double. She has a lot of advantages, but I won't cross in her again. Excuse the digression. I got on board. I hailed a steward, whose red nose and redder whiskers were equally familiar to me.

"One hundred and five, lower berth," said I, in the businesslike tone peculiar to men who think no more of crossing the Atlantic than taking a whisky cocktail at downtown Delmonico's.

The steward took my portmanteau, greatcoat, and rug. I shall never forget the expression of his face. Not that he turned pale. It is maintained by the most eminent divines that even miracles can not change the course of nature. I have no hesitation in saying that he did not turn pale; but, from his expression, I judged that he was either about to shed tears, to sneeze, or to drop my portmanteau. As the latter contained two bottles of particularly fine old sherry presented to me for my voyage by my old friend

Snigginson van Pickyns, I felt extremely nervous. But the steward did none of these things.

"Well, I'm d——d!" said he in a low voice, and led the way.

I supposed my Hermes, as he led me to the lower regions, had had a little grog, but I said nothing, and followed him. One hundred and five was on the port side, well aft. There was nothing remarkable about the stateroom. The lower berth, like most of those upon the *Kamtschatka*, was double. There was plenty of room; there was the usual washing apparatus, calculated to convey an idea of luxury to the mind of a North American Indian; there were the usual inefficient racks of brown wood, in which it is more easy to hang a large-sized umbrella than the common tooth-brush of commerce. Upon the uninviting mattresses were carefully folded together those blankets which a great modern humorist has aptly compared to cold buckwheat cakes. The question of towels was left entirely to the imagination. The glass decanters were filled with a transparent liquid faintly tinged with brown, but from which an odor less faint, but not more pleasing, ascended to the nostrils, like a far-off seasick reminiscence of oily machinery. Sad-colored curtains half closed the upper berth. The hazy June daylight shed a faint illumination upon the desolate little scene. Ugh! how I hate that stateroom!

The steward deposited my traps and looked at me as though he wanted to get away—probably in search of more passengers and more fees. It is always a good plan to start in favor with those functionaries, and I accordingly gave him certain coins there and then.

"I'll try and make yer comfortable all I can," he remarked, as he put the coins in his pocket. Nevertheless, there was a doubtful intonation in his voice which surprized me. Possibly his scale of fees had gone up, and he was not satisfied; but on the whole I was inclined to think that, as he himself would have expressed it, he was "the better for a glass." I was wrong, however, and did the man injustice.

2

NOTHING especially worthy of mention occurred during that day. We left the pier punctually, and it was very pleasant to be fairly under way, for the weather was warm and sultry, and the motion of the steamer produced a refreshing breeze.

Everybody knows what the first day at sea is like. People pace the decks and stare at each other, and occasionally meet acquaintances whom they did not know to be on board. There is the usual uncertainty as to whether the food will be good, bad, or indifferent, until the first two meals have put the matter beyond a doubt; there is the usual uncertainty about the weather, until the ship is fairly off Fire Island. The tables are crowded at first, and then suddenly thinned. Pale-faced people spring from their seats and precipitate themselves toward the door, and each old sailor breathes more freely as his seasick neighbor rushes from his side, leaving him plenty of elbow room and an unlimited command over the mustard.

One passage across the Atlantic is very much like another, and we who cross very often do not make the voyage for the sake of novelty. Whales and icebergs are indeed always objects of interest, but, after all, one whale is very much like another whale, and one rarely sees an iceberg at close quarters. To the majority of us the most delightful moment of the day on board an ocean steamer is when we have taken our last turn on deck, have smoked our last cigar, and having succeeded in tiring ourselves,

feel at liberty to turn in with a clear conscience.

On that first night of the voyage I felt particularly lazy, and went to bed in one hundred and five rather earlier than I usually do. As I turned in, I was amazed to see that I was to have a companion. A portmanteau, very like my own, lay in the opposite corner, and in the upper berth had been deposited a neatly folded rug with a stick and umbrella. I had hoped to be alone, and I was disappointed; but I wondered who my room-mate was to be, and I determined to have a look at him.

Before I had been long in bed he entered. He was, as far as I could see, a very tall man, very thin, very pale, with sandy hair and whiskers and colorless gray eyes. He had about him, I thought, an air of rather dubious fashion; the sort of man you might see in Wall Street, without being able to say precisely what he was doing there—the sort of man who frequents the Café Anglais, who always seems to be alone and who drinks champagne; you might meet him on a race-course, but he would never appear to be doing anything there either. A little overdressed—a little odd. There are three or four of his kind on every ocean steamer. I made up my mind that I did not care to make his acquaintance, and I went to sleep saying that I would study his habits in order to avoid him. If he rose early, I would rise late; if he went to bed late, I would go to bed early. I did not care to know him. If you once know people of that kind they are always turning up. Poor fellow! I need not have taken the trouble to come to so many decisions about him, for I never saw him again after that first night in one hundred and five.

I was sleeping soundly when I was suddenly waked by a loud noise. To judge from the sound, my room-mate must have sprung with a single leap from the upper berth to the floor. I heard him fumbling with the latch and bolt of the door, which opened almost immediately, and then I heard his footsteps as he ran at full speed down the passage, leaving the door open behind him. The ship was rolling a little, and I expected to hear him stumble or fall, but he ran as though he were running for his life. The door swung on its hinges with the motion of the vessel, and the sound annoyed me. I got up and shut it, and groped my way back to my berth in the darkness. I went to sleep again; but I have no idea how long I slept.

When I awoke it was still quite dark, but I felt a disagreeable sensation of cold, and it seemed to me that the air was damp. You know the peculiar smell of a cabin which has been wet with sea-water. I covered myself up as well as I could and dozed off again, framing complaints to be made the next day, and selecting the most powerful epithets in the language. I could hear my room-mate turn over in the upper berth. He had probably returned while I was asleep. Once I thought I heard him groan, and I argued that he was seasick. That is particularly unpleasant when one is below. Nevertheless I dozed off and slept till early daylight.

The ship was rolling heavily, much more than on the previous evening, and the gray light which came in through the porthole changed in tint with every movement according as the angle of the vessel's side turned the glass seaward or skyward. It was very cold—unaccountably so for the month of June. I turned my head and looked at the porthole, and saw to my surprize that it was wide open and hooked back. I believe I swore audibly. Then I got up and shut it. As I turned back I glanced at the upper berth. The curtains were drawn close together; my companion had probably felt cold as well as I. It

struck me that I had slept enough. The stateroom was uncomfortable, though, strange to say, I could not smell the dampness which had annoyed me in the night. My roommate was still asleep—excellent opportunity for avoiding him, so I dressed at once and went on deck.

The day was warm and cloudy, with an oil smell on the water. It was 7 o'clock as I came out—much later than I had imagined. I came across the doctor, who was taking his first sniff of the morning air. He was a young fellow from the West of Ireland—a tremendous fellow, with black hair and blue eyes, already inclined to be stout; he had a happy-go-lucky, healthy look about him which was rather attractive.

"Fine morning," I remarked by way of introduction.

"Well," said he, eyeing me with an air of ready interest, "it's a fine morning and it's not a fine morning. I don't think it's much of a morning."

"Well, no—it is not so very fine," said I.

"It's just what I call fuggly weather," replied the doctor.

"It was very cold last night, I thought," I remarked. "However, when I looked about, I found that the porthole was wide open. I had not noticed it when I went to bed. And the stateroom was damp, too."

"Damp!" said he. "Whereabouts are you?"

"One hundred and five——"

To my surprize the doctor started visibly, and stared at me.

"What is the matter?" I asked.

"Oh — nothing," he answered; "only everybody has complained of that stateroom for the last three trips."

"I shall complain, too," I said. "It has certainly not been properly aired. It is a shame!"

"I don't believe it can be helped," answered the doctor. "I believe there is something—well, it is not my business to frighten passengers."

"You need not be afraid of frightening me," I replied. "I can stand any amount of damp. If I should get a bad cold I will come to you."

I offered the doctor a cigar, which he took and examined very critically.

"It is not so much the damp," he remarked. "However, I dare say you will get on very well. Have you a room-mate?"

"Yes; a deuce of a fellow, who bolts out in the middle of the night and leaves the door open."

Again the doctor glanced curiously at me. Then he lighted the cigar and looked grave.

"Did he come back?" he asked presently.

"Yes. I was asleep, but I waked up and heard him moving. Then I felt cold and went to sleep again. This morning I found the porthole open."

"Look here," said the doctor quietly, "I don't care much for this ship. I don't care a rap for her reputation. I tell you what I will do. I have a good-sized place up here. I will share it with you, though I don't know you from Adam."

I was very much surprized at the proposition. I could not imagine why he should take such a sudden interest in my welfare. However, his manner as he spoke of the ship was peculiar.

"You are very good, Doctor," I said. "But really, I believe even now the cabin could be aired, or cleaned out, or something. Why do you not care for the ship?"

"We are not superstitious in our profession, sir," replied the doctor. "But the sea makes people so. I don't want to prejudice you, and I don't want to frighten you, but if you will take my advice you will move in here. I would as soon see you overboard," he added, "as know that you or any

other man was to sleep in one hundred and five."

"Good gracious! Why?" I asked.

"Just because on the last three trips the people who slept there actually have gone overboard," he answered gravely.

The intelligence was startling and exceedingly unpleasant. I looked hard at the doctor to see whether he was making game of me, but he looked perfectly serious. I thanked him warmly for his offer, but told him I intended to be an exception to the rule by which everyone who slept in that particular stateroom went overboard. He did not say much, but looked as grave as ever, and hinted that before we got across I should probably reconsider his proposal.

In the course of time we went to breakfast, at which only an inconsiderable number of passengers assembled. I noticed that one or two of the officers who breakfasted with us looked grave. After breakfast I went into my stateroom to get a book. The curtains of the upper berth were still closely drawn. Not a word was to be heard. My room-mate was probably still asleep.

As I came out I met the steward whose business it was to look after me. He whispered that the captain wanted to see me, and then scuttled away down the passage as if very anxious to avoid any questions. I went toward the captain's cabin, and found him waiting for me.

"Sir," said he, "I want to ask a favor of you."

I answered that I would do anything to oblige him.

"Your room-mate has disappeared," he said. "He is known to have turned in early last night. Did you notice anything extraordinary in his manner?"

The question coming, as it did, in exact confirmation of the fears the doctor had expressed half an hour earlier, staggered me.

"You don't mean to say he has gone overboard?" I asked.

"I fear he has," answered the captain.

"This is the most extraordinary thing——" I began.

"Why?" he asked.

"He is the fourth, then!" I exclaimed. In answer to another question from the captain, I explained, without mentioning the doctor, that I had heard the story concerning one hundred and five. He seemed very much annoyed at hearing that I knew of it. I told him what had occurred during the night.

"What you say," he replied, "coincides almost exactly with what was told me by the room-mates of two of the other three. They bolt out of bed and run down the passage. Two of them were seen to go overboard by the watch; we stopped and lowered boats, but they were not found. Nobody, however, saw or heard the man who was lost last night—if he is really lost. The steward, who is a superstitious fellow, perhaps, and expected something to go wrong, went to look for him this morning, and found his berth empty, but his clothes lying about, just as he had left them. The steward was the only man on board who knew him by sight, and he has been searching everywhere for him. The man has disappeared! Now, sir, I want to beg you not to mention the circumstance to any of the passengers; I don't want the ship to get a bad name, and nothing hangs about an ocean-goer like stories of suicides. You shall have your choice of any of the officers' cabins you like, including my own, for the rest of the passage. Is that a fair bargain?"

"Very, sir," said I; "and I am much obliged to you. But since I am alone, and have the stateroom to myself, I would rather not move. If the steward will take out that unfortunate man's things, I would as lief stay where I am. I will not say anything

about the matter, and I think I can promise you that I will not follow my room-mate."

The captain tried to dissuade me from my intention, but I preferred having a stateroom alone to being the chum of any officer on board. I do not know whether I acted foolishly, but if I had taken his advice I should have had nothing more to tell. There would have remained the coincidence of several suicides occurring among men who had slept in the same cabin, but that would have been all.

That was not the end of the matter, however, by any means. I obstinately made up my mind that I would not be disturbed by such tales, and I even went so far as to argue the question with the captain. There was something wrong about the stateroom, I said. It was rather damp. The porthole had been left open last night. My room-mate might have been ill when he came on board, and he might have become delirious after he went to bed. He might even now be hiding somewhere on board, and might be found later. The place ought to be aired and the fastening of the port looked to. If the captain would give me leave, I would see that what I thought necessary was done immediately.

"Of course you have a right to stay where you are if you please," he replied, rather petulantly; "but I wish you would turn out and let me lock the place up, and be done with it."

I did not see it in the same light, and left the captain, after promising to be silent concerning the disappearance of my companion. The latter had no acquaintances on board, and was not missed in the course of the day.

Toward evening I met the doctor again, and he asked me whether I had changed my mind. I told him I had not.

"Then you will before long," he said, very gravely.

3

We played whist in the evening, and I went to bed late. I felt a disagreeable sensation when I entered my stateroom. I could not help thinking of the tall man I had seen on the previous night, who was now dead, drowned, tossing about in the long swell, two or three hundred miles astern. His face rose very distinctly before me as I undressed, and I even went so far as to draw back the curtains of the upper berth, as though to persuade myself that he was actually gone. I also bolted the door of the stateroom. Suddenly I became aware that the porthole was open and fastened back. This was more than I could stand. I hastily threw on my dressing gown and went in search of Robert, the steward of my passage. I was very angry, I remember, and when I found him I dragged him roughly to the door of one hundred and five, and pushed him toward the open porthole.

"What the deuce do you mean, you scoundrel, by leaving that port open every night? Don't you know it is against the regulations? Don't you know that if the ship heeled and the water began to come in, ten men could not shut it? I will report you to the captain, you blackguard, for endangering the ship!"

I was exceedingly wroth. The man trembled and turned pale, and then began to shut the round glass plate with the heavy brass fittings.

"Why don't you answer me?" I said roughly.

"If you please, sir," faltered Robert, "there's nobody on board as can keep this 'ere port shut at night. You can try it yourself, sir. I ain't a-going to stop hany longer on board o' this vessel, sir; I ain't, indeed. But if I was you, sir, I'd just clear out and go and sleep with the surgeon, or something, I would. Look 'ere, sir, is that fastened what you

may call securely, or not, sir? Try it, sir, see if it will move a hinch."

I tried the port, and found it perfectly tight.

"Well, sir," continued Robert, triumphantly, "I wager my reputation as a A1 steward, that in arf an hour it will be open again; fastened back, too, sir, that's the horful thing—fastened back!"

I examined the great screw and the loose nut that ran on it.

"If I find it open in the night, Robert, I will give you a sovereign. It is not possible. You may go."

"Soverin, did you say, sir? Very good, sir. Thank ye, sir. Good night, sir. Pleasant reepose, sir, and all manner of hinchantin' dreams, sir."

Robert scuttled away, delighted at being released. Of course, I thought he was trying to account for his negligence by a silly story, intended to frighten me, and I disbelieved him. The consequence was that he got his sovereign, and I spent a particularly unpleasant night.

I went to bed, and five minutes after I had rolled myself up in my blankets the inexorable Robert extinguished the light that burned steadily behind the ground-glass pane near the door. I lay quite still in the dark trying to go to sleep, but I soon found that impossible. It had been some satisfaction to be angry with the steward, and the diversion had banished whatever unpleasant sensation I had first experienced when I thought of the drowned man who had been my chum: but I was no longer sleepy, and I lay awake for some time, occasionally glancing at the porthole, which I could just see from where I lay, and which, in the darkness, looked like a faintly luminous soup-plate suspended in blackness. I believe I must have lain there for an hour, and, as I remember, I was just dozing into sleep when I was roused by a draft of cold air and by distinctly feeling the spray of the sea blown upon my face. I started to my feet, and not having allowed in the dark for the motion of the ship, I was instantly thrown violently across the stateroom upon the couch which was placed beneath the porthole. I recovered myself immediately, however, and climbed upon my knees. The porthole was again wide open and fastened back!

I was wide awake when I got up, and I should certainly have been waked by the fall had I been dozing. Moreover, I bruised my elbows and knees badly, and the bruises were there on the following morning to testify to the fact, if I myself had doubted it. The porthole was wide open and fastened back—a thing so unaccountable that I remember very well feeling astonishment rather than fear when I discovered it. I at once closed the plate again and screwed down the loop nut with all my strength. It was very dark in the stateroom. I reflected that the port had certainly been opened within an hour after Robert had at first shut it in my presence, and I determined to watch it and see whether it would open again. Those brass fittings are very heavy and by no means easy to move; I could not believe that the clamp had been turned by the shaking of the screw. I stood peering out through the thick glass at the alternate white and gray streaks of the sea that foamed beneath the ship's side. I must have remained there a quarter of an hour.

Suddenly, as I stood, I distinctly heard something moving behind me in one of the berths, and a moment afterward, just as I turned instinctively to look—though I could, of course, see nothing in the darkness—I heard a very faint groan. I sprang across the stateroom and tore the curtains of the upper berth aside, thrusting in my hands to discover if there

were anyone there. There was someone.

I remember that the sensation as I put my hand forward was as though I were plunging them into the air of a damp cellar, and from behind the curtain came a gust of wind that smelled horribly of stagnant sea-water. I laid hold of something that had the shape of a man's arm, but was smooth, and wet, and icy cold. But suddenly, as I pulled, the creature sprang violently forward against me, a clammy, oozy mass, as it seemed to me, heavy and wet, yet endowed with a sort of supernatural strength. I reeled across the stateroom, and in an instant the door opened and the thing rushed out. I had not time to be frightened, and quickly recovering myself, I sprang through the door and gave chase at the top of my speed, but I was too late. Ten yards before me I could see—I am sure I saw it—a dark shadow moving in the dimly lighted passage, quickly as the shadow of a fast horse thrown before a dog-cart by the lamp on a dark night. But in a moment it had disappeared, and I found myself holding on to the polished rail that ran along the bulkhead where the passage turned toward the companion. My hair stood on end, and the cold perspiration rolled down my face. I am not ashamed of it in the least; I was very badly frightened.

Still I doubted my senses, and pulled myself together. It was absurd, I thought. The Welsh rarebit I had eaten had disagreed with me. I had been in a nightmare. I made my way back to my stateroom, and entered it with an effort. The whole place smelled of stagnant sea-water, as it had when I had waked on the previous evening. It required my utmost strength to go in and grope among my things for a box of wax lights. As I lighted a railway reading lantern which I always carry in case I want to read after the lamps are out, I perceived that the porthole was again open, and a sort of creeping horror began to take possession of me which I never felt before, nor wish to feel again. But I got a light and proceeded to examine the upper berth, expecting to find it drenched with sea-water.

But I was disappointed. The bed had been slept in, and the smell of the sea was strong; but the bedding was as dry as a bone. I fancied that Robert had not had the courage to make the bed after the accident of the previous night—it had all been a hideous dream. I drew the curtains back as far as I could and examined the place very carefully. It was perfectly dry. But the porthole was open again. With a sort of dull bewilderment of horror, I closed it and screwed it down, and thrusting my heavy stick through the brass loop, wrenched it with all my might, till the thick metal began to bend under the pressure. Then I hooked my reading lantern into the red velvet at the head of the couch, and sat down to recover my senses if I could. I sat there all night, unable to think of rest—hardly able to think at all. But the porthole remained closed, and I did not believe it would now open again without the application of a considerable force.

THE morning dawned at last, and I dressed myself slowly, thinking over all that had happened in the night. It was a beautiful day and I went on deck, glad to get out in the early pure sunshine, and to smell the breeze from the blue water, so different from the noisome, stagnant odor from my stateroom. Instinctively I turned aft, toward the surgeon's cabin. There he stood with his pipe in his mouth, taking his morning airing precisely as on the preceding day.

"Good morning," said he quietly, but looking at me with evident curiosity.

"Doctor, you were quite right," said I. "There is something wrong about that place."

"I thought you would change your mind," he answered, rather triumphantly. "You have had a bad night, eh? Shall I make you a pick-me-up? I have a capital recipe."

"No, thanks," I cried. "But I would like to tell you what happened."

I then tried to explain as clearly as possible precisely what had occurred, not omitting to state that I had been scared as I had never been scared in my whole life before. I dwelt particularly on the phenomenon of the porthole, which was a fact to which I could testify, even if the rest had been an illusion. I had closed it twice in the night, and the second time I had actually bent the brass in wrenching it with my stick. I believe I insisted a good deal on this point.

"You seem to think I am likely to doubt the story," said the doctor, smiling at the detailed account of the state of the porthole. "I do not doubt it in the least. I renew my invitation to you. Bring your traps here, and take half my cabin."

"Come and take half of mine for one night," I said. "Help me to get to the bottom of this thing."

"You will get to the bottom of something else if you try," answered the doctor.

"What?" I asked.

"The bottom of the sea. I am going to leave the ship. It is not canny."

"Then you will help me to find out——"

"Not I," said the doctor, quickly. "It is my business to keep my wits about me—not to go fiddling about with ghosts and things."

"Do you really believe it is a ghost?" I inquired, rather contemptuously. But as I spoke I remembered very well the horrible sensation of the supernatural which had got possession of me during the night. The doctor turned sharply on me.

"Have you any reasonable explanation of these things to offer?" he asked. "No; you have not. Well, you say you will find an explanation. I say that you won't, sir, simply because there is not any."

"But, my dear sir," I retorted, "do you, a man of science, mean to tell me that such things can not be explained?"

"I do," he answered stoutly. "And if they could, I would not be concerned in the explanation."

I did not care to spend another night alone in the stateroom, and yet I was obstinately determined to get at the root of the disturbances. I do not believe there are many men who would have slept there alone, after passing two such nights. But I made up my mind to try it, if I could get anyone to share a watch with me. The doctor was evidently not inclined for such an experiment. He said he was a surgeon, and that in case any accident occurred on board he must always be in readiness. He could not afford to have his nerves unsettled. Perhaps he was quite right, but I am inclined to think that his precaution was prompted by his inclination. On inquiry, he informed me that there was no one on board who would be likely to join me in my investigations, and after a little more conversation I left him. A little later I met the captain, and told him my story. I said that if no one would spend the night with me I would ask leave to have the light burning all night, and would try it alone.

"Look here," said he, "I will tell you what I will do. I will share your watch myself, and we will see what happens. It is my belief that we can find out between us. There may be some fellow skulking on board who steals a passage by frightening the passengers. It is just possible that

there may be something queer in the carpentering of that berth."

I suggested taking the ship's carpenter below and examining the place; but I was overjoyed at the captain's offer to spend the night with me. He accordingly sent for the workman and ordered him to do anything I required. We went below at once. I had all the bedding cleared out of the upper berth, and we examined the place thoroughly to see if there was a board loose anywhere, of a panel which could be opened or pushed aside. We tried the planks everywhere, tapped the flooring, unscrewed the fittings of the lower berth and took it to pieces—in short, there was not a square inch of the stateroom which was not searched and tested. Everything was in perfect order, and we put everything back in its place. As we were finishing our work, Robert came to the door and looked in.

"Well, sir—find anything, sir?" he asked with a ghastly grin.

"You were right about the porthole, Robert," I said, and I gave him the promised sovereign.

The carpenter did his work silently and skilfully, following my directions. When he had done he spoke.

"I'm a plain man, sir," he said. "But it's my belief you had better just turn out your things and let me run half a dozen four-inch screws through the door of this cabin. There's no good never came o' this cabin yet, sir, and that's all about it. There's been four lives lost out o' here to my own remembrance, and in four trips. Better give it up, sir—better give it up!"

"I will try it for one night more," I said.

"Better give it up, sir—better give it up! It's a precious bad job," repeated the workman, putting his tools in his bag and leaving the cabin.

But my spirits had risen considerably at the prospects of having the captain's company, and I made up my mind not to be prevented from going to the end of the strange business. I abstained from Welsh rarebits and grog that evening, and did not even join in the customary game of whist. I wanted to be quite sure of my nerves, and my vanity made me anxious to make a good figure in the captain's eyes.

4

THE captain was one of those splendidly tough and cheerful specimens of seafaring humanity whose combined courage, hardihood, and calmness in difficulty leads them naturally into high positions of trust. He was not the man to be led away by an idle tale, and the mere fact that he was willing to join me in the investigation was proof that he thought there was something seriously wrong, which could not be accounted for on ordinary theories, nor laughed down as a common superstition. To some extent, too, his reputation was at stake, as well as the reputation of the ship. It is no light thing to lose passengers overboard, and he knew it.

About 10 o'clock that evening, as I was smoking a last cigar, he came up to me and drew me aside from the beat of the other passengers who were patrolling the deck in the warm darkness.

"This is a serious matter, Mr. Brisbane," he said. "We must make up our minds either way—to be disappointed or to have a pretty rough time of it. You see, I can not afford to laugh at the affair, and I will ask you to sign your name to a statement of whatever occurs. If nothing happens tonight we will try it again tomorrow and the next day. Are you ready?"

So we went below and entered the stateroom. As we went in I could see Robert, the steward, who stood a little farther down the passage, watch-

ing us, with his usual grin, as though certain that something dreadful was about to happen. The captain closed the door behind us and bolted it.

"Supposing we put your portmanteau before the door," he suggested. "One of us can sit on it. Nothing can get out then. Is the port screwed down?"

I found it as I had left it in the morning. Indeed, without using a lever, as I had done, no one could have opened it. I drew back the curtains of the upper berth so that I could see well into it. By the captain's advice I lighted my reading lantern, and placed it so that it shone upon the white sheets above. He insisted upon sitting on the portmanteau, declaring that he wished to be able to swear that he had sat before the door.

Then he requested me to search the stateroom thoroughly, an operation very soon accomplished, as it consisted merely in looking beneath the lower berth and under the couch below the porthole. The spaces were quite empty.

"It is impossible for any human being to get in," I said, "or for any human being to open the port."

"Very good," said the captain calmly. "If we see anything now, it must be either imagination or something supernatural."

I sat down on the edge of the lower berth.

"The first time it happened," said the captain, crossing his legs and leaning back against the door, "was in March. The passenger who slept here, in the upper berth, turned out to have been a lunatic—at all events, he was known to have been a little touched, and he had taken his passage without the knowledge of his friends. He rushed out in the middle of the night, and threw himself overboard, before the officer who had the watch could stop him. We stopped and lowered a boat; it was a quiet night, just before that heavy weather came on; but we could not find him. Of course his suicide was afterward accounted for on the ground of his insanity."

"I suppose that often happens?" I remarked, rather absently.

"Not often—no," said the captain; "never before in my experience, though I have heard of it happening on board of other ships. Well, as I was saying, that occurred in March. On the very next trip—— What are you looking at?" he asked, stopping suddenly in his narration.

I believe I gave no answer. My eyes were riveted upon the porthole. It seemed to me that the brass loop nut was beginning to turn very slowly upon the screw—so slowly, however, that I was not sure it moved at all. I watched it intently, fixing its position in my mind, and trying to ascertain whether it changed. Seeing where I was looking, the captain looked, too.

"It moves!" he exclaimed, in a tone of conviction. "No, it does not," he added, after a minute.

"If it were the jarring of the screw," said I, "it would have opened during the day; but I found it this evening jammed tight as I left it this morning."

I rose and tried the nut. It was certainly loosened, for by an effort I could move it with my hands.

"The queer thing," said the captain, "is that the second man who was lost is supposed to have got through that very port. We had a terrible time over it. It was in the middle of the night, and the weather was very heavy; there was an alarm that one of the ports was open and the sea running in. I came below and found everything flooded, the water pouring in every time she rolled, and the whole port swinging from the top bolts—not the porthole in the middle. Well, we managed to shut it, but the water did some damage. Ever since that the place smells of seawater from time to time. We sup-

posed the passenger had thrown himself out, though the Lord only knows how he did it. The steward kept telling me that he could not keep anything shut here. Upon my word—I can smell it now, can not you?" he inquired, sniffing the air suspiciously.

"Yes—distinctly," I said, and I shuddered as that same odor of stagnant sea-water grew stronger in the cabin. "Now, to smell like this, the place must be damp," I continued, "and yet when I examined it with the carpenter this morning everything was perfectly dry. It is most extraordinary—hallo!"

My reading lantern, which had been placed in the upper berth, was suddenly extinguished. There was still a good deal of light from the pane of ground glass near the door, behind which loomed the regulation lamp. The ship rolled heavily, and the curtain of the upper berth swung far out into the stateroom and back again. I rose quickly from my seat on the edge of the bed, and the captain at the same moment started to his feet with a loud cry of surprize. I had turned with the intention of taking down the lantern to examine it, when I heard his exclamation, and immediately afterward his call for help. I sprang toward him. He was wrestling with all his might with the brass loop of the port. It seemed to turn against his hands in spite of all his efforts. I caught up my cane, a heavy oak stick I always used to carry, and thrust it through the ring and bore on it with all my strength. But the strong wood snapped suddenly, and I fell upon the couch. When I rose again the port was wide open, and the captain was standing with his back against the door, pale to the lips.

"There is something in that berth!" he cried, in a strange voice, his eyes almost starting from his head. "Hold the door while I look—it shall not escape us, whatever it is!"

But instead of taking his place, I sprang upon the lower bed and seized something which lay in the upper berth.

IT WAS something ghostly, horrible beyond words, and it moved in my grip. It was like the body of a man long drowned, and yet it moved and had the strength of ten men living; but I gripped it with all my might—the slippery, oozy, horrible thing. The dead white eyes seemed to stare at me out of the dusk; the putrid odor of rank sea-water was about it, and its shiny hair hung in foul wet curls over its dead face. I wrestled with the dead thing; it thrust itself upon me and forced me back and nearly broke my arms; it wound its corpse's arms about my neck, the living death, and overpowered me, so that I, at last, cried aloud and fell and left my hold.

As I fell the thing sprang across me and seemed to throw itself upon the captain. When I last saw him on his feet his face was white and his lips set. It seemed to me that he struck a violent blow at the dead being, and then he, too, fell forward upon his face, with an inarticulate cry of horror.

The thing paused an instant, seeming to hover over his prostrate body, and I could have screamed again for very fright, but I had no voice left. The thing vanished suddenly, and it seemed to my disturbed senses that it made its exit through the open port, though how that was possible, considering the smallness of the aperture, is more than anyone can tell. I lay a long time upon the floor, and the captain lay beside me. At last I partially recovered my senses and moved, and I instantly knew that my arm was broken—the small bone of the left forearm near the wrist.

I got upon my feet somehow, and with my remaining hand I tried to raise the captain. He groaned and

moved, and at last came to himself. He was not hurt, but he seemed badly stunned.

There is nothing more. That is the end of my story. The carpenter carried out his scheme of running half a dozen four-inch screws through the door of one hundred and five, and if ever you take a passage in the *Kamtschatka*, you may ask for a berth in that stateroom. You will be told that it is engaged—yes—it is engaged by that dead thing.

I finished the trip in the surgeon's cabin. He doctored my broken arm, and advised me not to "fiddle about with ghosts and things" any more. The captain was very silent, and never sailed again in that ship, though it is still running. And I will not sail in her either. It was a very disagreeable experience and I was very badly frightened, which is a thing I do not like. That is all. That is how I saw a ghost—if it was a ghost. It was dead, anyhow.

A GRAVE

By **LILLA POOLE PRICE**

O, bury me under the soft, blue waves,
'Mid the swirl of the billows free;
Let me find sweet rest
'Neath their foam-tipp'd crest
In the depths of the murmuring sea.

No bell shall be toll'd with its mournful sound,
No funeral pall shall be spread,
But a solemn hush
And a soft, sad rush
As the waters close over my head.

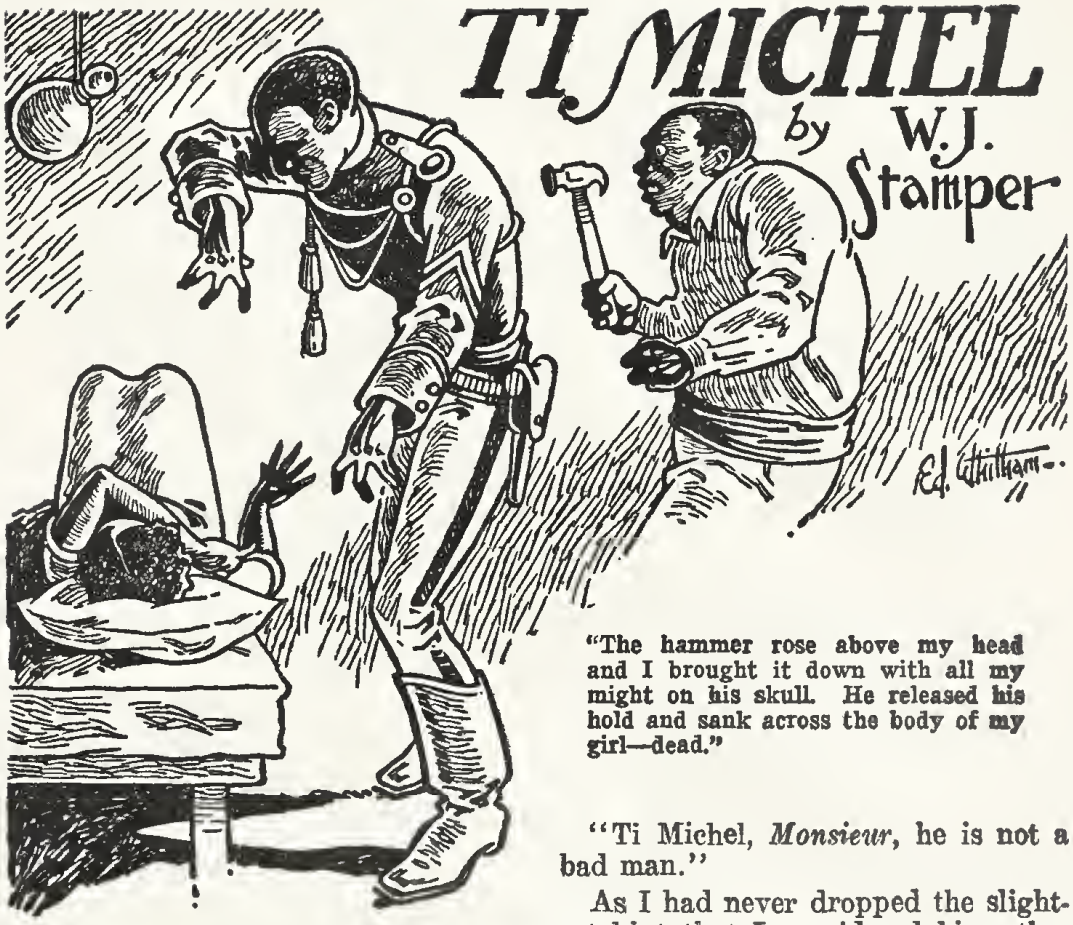
A tangle of seaweed shall be my shroud,
And a mound of coral my bier;
The voice of the sea
Shall my requiem be,
And my sleep will be tranquil here.

No roses nor lilies may deck my grave,
Nor marble shall mark my rest,
But the wonderful flow'rs
Of the ocean bow'rs
Shall lovingly twine o'er my breast.

Then bury me under the sad sea waves,
Where the winds moan soft and low;
Let the tears that are shed
For the deep-cover'd dead
With the shimmering wavelets flow.

TI MICHEL

by W. J. Stamper



"The hammer rose above my head and I brought it down with all my might on his skull. He released his hold and sank across the body of my girl—dead."

FOR two years I had purchased my rum supply from Ti Michel, not only because he gave me better prices than any other of the numerous liquor shops that squat along the waterfront of Port Liberté, but also because there was an air of mystery about the man which I could never quite fathom. In spite of the reputation he had of having been a Caco at one time and of having committed various and bloody crimes, there was about him a gentle and insinuating manner which had won me completely the first time I had visited his shop. He was shorter and blacker than the average Haitian, with a peculiar habit of rubbing his fat hands together rapidly when talking. I do not remember of speaking with him a single time when he failed to rub his hands together and say:

"Ti Michel, *Monsieur*, he is not a bad man."

As I had never dropped the slightest hint that I considered him other than an honest and law-abiding citizen, I was at great loss to understand his reason for repeating this same sentence at our every meeting. I tried to make myself believe it to be a mere mannerism, but there always seemed to be a vague dread or fear in his mind, the reason for which I had not the slightest inkling.

It was late evening of a sultry day when the clouds of mosquitoes swarm up from the marshes to prey upon the inhabitants that I took my jug and sauntered down the squalid street toward the shop of Michel. This was my usual time for going for grog because the fishing craft from outside the reef came in shortly after dark, which meant that Michel's place would be clogged with a type of customers with whom I did not desire to mingle.

He was sitting in a chair outside the door smoking and knocking an occasional mosquito from his fat cheeks when I walked up.

"Ah!" he said suavely between puffs of acrid smoke; "I expected *Monsieur* sooner than this, for it has been three days that he does not come for a jug of Michel's Barbancourt."

He indicated a chair on the other side of the door and invited me to sit down. As soon as I was seated he took his pipe from his mouth, pointed out across the bay with the long stem, and began to speak in a low and reverent voice. The words seemed strangely soft and sentimental for a man who was reputed to have been a member of the murderous Cacos among the wild mountains of Bohouc and Pignon.

"There, *Monsieur,* is the home of Ti Michel. He is not a seller of rum, but a man of the sea. Once I had my own smack, as trim a craft as ever skimmed the bosom of the Caribbean. Many the time I dropped my nets outside yonder reef and whistled through the whole day, crossing the bar at evening with the largest catch of the whole fleet. The *Estrella* was a beauty. I was happy when I held her tiller and felt her leap before the breeze. Now I am useless and must sit here and wait for the boys to come in and buy my liquor. Look, *Monsieur,* look! They're coming in now."

In his excitement he had arisen from his chair. The pipe quivered in his hand and tears stood in his eyes. The reputed murderer was weeping and trembling.

I looked out across the bay where the curling foam rolled over the hidden reef and I saw the fleet moving toward Port Liberté. Out there on the roll of white surf, brightly limned against the red haze of a setting sun, swayed and bellied the gray sails of the tiny fishing boats as they tossed and fought the tide. Then I glanced at the sobbing figure of Michel, something of the mystery of the sea and those swarthy boatmen who wring their living from its heaving depths sweeping over me. The silence was broken by a murmur from Michel.

"Ti Michel, *Monsieur,* he is not a bad man."

"I know you are not a bad man, Michel," I reassured him, as I placed my hands on his shoulders, reminding him that my jug was still empty and darkness was coming on.

I followed him into the long, low building and I noticed that his fat hands were still trembling when he replaced the chimney on the oil lamp. He went slowly through the process of filling my jug from one of the two aged and mossy casks which stood on two square blocks of wood at the end of the room. These casks were of enormous size, holding more than two hundred gallons. He did the very thing I had expected, the very thing I had seen him do scores of times, a thing which had puzzled me ever since I had known him. He filled my demijohn from the left cask. Not once had I seen him draw liquor from the cobwebbed cask on the right, a matter which had caused me much thought and wonderment. My curiosity got the best of me and I questioned him.

"Michel," I asked in as casual a voice as I could command, "why is it you never give me rum from the right cask? Is it not very old and smooth?"

I thought he winced a little at this question, but his answer was forthcoming.

"That rum is for the gendarmes. It is not for my friend, the American. The gendarme is not a smart man, he never asks questions."

Then, as if to explode any theory I might have as to the mystery of Ti Michel and the cobwebbed cask, a uniformed gendarme entered with a jug, which Michel proceeded to fill from

the very cask that had occasioned me so much thought.

"This is very excellent rum," said Michel softly, as the jug filled with a liquid the color of a cloudy amber. As the Haitian demijohn is invariably made of glass, I could see very plainly as the liquor mounted to the top, a seething mass of oily beads, evidence of a fine quality of rum.

I bade the old man good-night and went back to my barracks completely baffled. Why had he never given me liquor from the right cask? Surely it was not poisoned. Before I slept, I hazarded a thousand guesses without arriving at any solution.

IT WAS again mosquito time the next afternoon that a native boy came running breathlessly up the steps and began to tell me something in a rasping patois which I had great difficulty in understanding.

"Michel sick," he said. "He said for *Monsieur, vite, vite!*"

Seizing my hat from the rack, I rushed down the street and into the open door of the shop. I did not see Michel behind the counter, and the oil lamp was still burning, although it was late in the afternoon. The door leading from the bar into the room in the rear, which I judged to be his sleeping quarters, was covered with a sort of curtain or portière. This I pushed back, and entered the room. It was an evil-smelling den, dark and musty. One square hole in the adobe wall admitted just enough light to enable me to see the utter poverty of the almost barren room. In a dusky corner, on a native bed consisting of a few boards covered with straw mats and a vile-smelling blanket, lay the huddled form of Ti Michel. I stepped over to him. His face was contorted with pain, the eyes staring with a strange, wild light.

"A little rum, *Monsieur*," he asked huskily. "I think I am to die very soon and there is much I wish to tell you."

In a moment's time I placed a glass of liquor to his purple lips, and he livened up perceptibly after swallowing it. There was an empty goods-box in the center of the room. Drawing this close up to the bed where I could hear him more clearly (for his voice had a tone I had heard before, the tone of approaching death) I sat down to listen.

"To begin with, *Monsieur*, Ti Michel is not a bad man. If I have ever done anything of which I should be ashamed, it was not my own fault. I grew up along the waterfront with all the other boys that fish out beyond the reef and come to my place at night for their rum. My fondest wish was to have my own boat, and at the age of twenty, by dint of saving and starving, I had enough money to buy the *Estrella*. Ah, the *Estrella* was a beauty, *Monsieur*. For ten happy years I put out to sea every morning and returned at evening with the biggest catch of the whole fleet. Then, at the age of thirty, I married the woman of my choice and bought a little home near the beach where we lived happily until the dread elephantiasis attacked my legs and rendered me unfit for further life at sea. A daughter had been born to us and she was twelve years of age when I decided that I would have to enter some business to earn a living. I bought this shop and we came here to live.

"Then, *Monsieur*, fate began to take a hand, and no more cruel fate ever pursued mortal than that which struck at me from every side. My wife sickened and passed away. I buried her in the cemetery over on the point and returned to this lonely room. My daughter grew to be very beautiful and she tended the bar when I was away in the hills to buy taffia—that is the white, raw rum, before it is aged. The people began to

talk about my trips to the hills. They said I was a member of Norde's band of Cacos among the wild mountains of Pignon, and that I had committed bloody crimes. They were liars, *Monsieur,* just black, black liars. My business began to fail, my customers began to desert me, all except those boys that fish across the reef. They alone believed in me and I love them.

"ONE day I returned from a trip to the hills and dismounted outside the door, expecting to hear the sweet voice of my loved daughter welcoming me home. Instead there came to my ears a scream of mortal terror. I rushed in and looked through the curtain of this door, and what I saw crazed me with fear and anger. She was struggling in the arms of a burly gendarme, a corporal from the barracks up the street, a great black brute, wearing the uniform of my country. She was very strong and he had thrown her across the bed, his powerful hands at her fair throat, strangling her into submission. I saw her tongue protruding from her lips and heard a choking gurgle in her throat. Red was before my eyes. I leaped behind the counter, and digging into a chest of tools, I found a clawhammer. I dashed through the curtain at a stride and made for the uniformed beast. The hammer rose above my head and I brought it down with all my might on his kinky skull. The crash of bones was like sweet music to my ears. He released his hold and sank across the body of my girl—dead. I rolled his body, like that of a swine, off upon the floor, and with the bedcovers wiped the bloody froth from the crimson mouth of my baby.

"My God, *Monsieur,* I rubbed her cooling body with trembling hands and all the time her great, black eyes stared up at me pleading. I saw the ghastly stare that told me I had come too late. I placed my hand on her full bosom. Her heart was still. Madly I clasped her to my heart and pleaded with her not to leave me. Back and forth across the room I carried her, but she hung limp in my arms. She was dead. I smoothed back her tangled hair, laid her out on this very bed, and closed her dead eyes. Sometimes I have lain here at night, *Monsieur,* and imagined she was sleeping beside me. On those nights I was very happy.

"At length I stooped to examine the brute that had murdered my child. I turned him over, and blood was flowing from his nose and ears. A thick stream was slowly stealing across the floor. There was a hole in the top of his head from which issued a waterish fluid and brains. Fury and madness surged through me. I squatted beside the crimson stream and splashed my hands in it even as a child would play in mud. If *Monsieur* will move that grass rug there just a little, I think he may still see the stains."

"For God's sake, no, Michel!" I said. "Go on."

"After what seemed ages, though in fact it was but a few minutes, my reason began to assert itself and I thought to dispose of the body. I could not make report to the Commandant of Gendarmes, *Monsieur,* for he would have hanged me to the tallest tree in Port Liberté. He would not have believed my story. There was no law in those days before the Americans came to our shores, no justice. The gendarme swaggered up to your counter, bought your rum, and spat in your face as payment. He mistreated your family, and if you reported it to the commandant, you were kicked and clubbed for your trouble. Don't you think Michel would have had a chance for a fair trial if you had been here then, *Monsieur?*"

I nodded and he continued.

"Then a scheme came to my mind, and terrible as it may seem to you, I put it into execution. Life is very sweet and I did not hesitate. I reasoned that if the bodies of my daughter and the gendarme were hidden away and I put out the word that she was missing, the people would think they had eloped, for everyone knew that he frequented my place often and was infatuated with my daughter. I therefore rolled his body under the bed, covered my dead child with a blanket and waited the fall of night.

"I cleansed the hammer and placed it in the chest. A little rum sufficed to clean my hands of blood-stains. I replaced the curtain over there and took my place behind the counter as if nothing had occurred. I sold much rum to the fishermen that night. A few gendarmes came late that evening and I remember hearing two of them talk at a table.

"'Guess Bousset is in the back room with Michel's daughter,' said one.

"Bousset was the name of the corporal I had killed, *Monsieur*.

"I was very jovial during the whole of the evening and I treated the crowd many times. At length they began to drift away one by one, and when the clock struck the hour of 12 I was alone, standing above the dead with my oil lamp in my hand. Every sound terrified me, for I was afraid the continued absence of Bousset might be noticed and my shop would be the first place they searched. This room was an awful place that night. The light shone with a pale and sickly glimmer as it played on the staring eyes of my dead girl and the boots of the dead gendarme that protruded from beneath the bed.

"I put out the lamp and the ghastly work began. Beneath the small chicken coop behind the house I dug frantically for a long time and finally a shallow grave was finished. Without a cheering word from the old father that reads from a great book when the dead are buried across on the point in the cemetery, I laid my baby sadly in the yellow clay. I think the dirt was damp with my tears when the grave was filled. With a sigh I replaced the chicken coop and as I did this the cocks began to crow. I could see the lights from the fishing fleet as they put out to sea. I could hear the fishermen whistling and hallooing to one another amid the bobbing flares. Oh, how I wished I were with them as I had been years before!

"DAWN slowly broadened into day. I took no food, and swallowing a glass of rum, made my way to the barracks of the commandant. This official, somewhat the worse for drink, twisted his long mustache and chuckled when I told him my daughter had been missing since midnight.

"Before he had time to answer me, a sergeant hurried up and saluted.

"'Sir, I have to report Corporal Bousset as absent over leave since noon yesterday,' he said.

"'Ah, ha!' laughed the commandant gleefully, 'the wench has skedaddled with a deserter. They will be with the Cacos by nightfall. I can hardly imagine Ti Michel as being angry because his daughter has chosen to live with the very people with whom he has so long been associated. She came by her thieving blood honestly, old man. They are both where they belong. To hell with them.' He strode into the barracks, leaving me staring with amazement at the success of my plan.

"I feigned great sorrow and made as if to follow him. A burly sentinel stopped me with a blow in the face and bade me go home lest he split my skull.

"My child and the deserter became the talk of the town and everybody said that no more could have been

expected of her because she had Caco blood in her veins. That hurt me, *Monsieur,* but I never answered their slurs. The good fishermen never deserted me and I have been able to live. That has all been three years ago now, and I have been lonely in the death room. I was mighty glad when you came to Port Liberté, *Monsieur.* Do you think Ti Michel a bad man?"

"No," I answered, and I think I was weeping. "Would that we Americans had been here then!"

"Now, *Monsieur,* it is getting late and I think the fishermen will be coming soon. Ti Michel will not be at the bar to serve them."

Suddenly he sat bolt upright in bed and I saw the stare of death in his rolling eyes.

"The cask, *Monsieur,* the right cask!" he gurgled, and sank back among the bedcovers—dead.

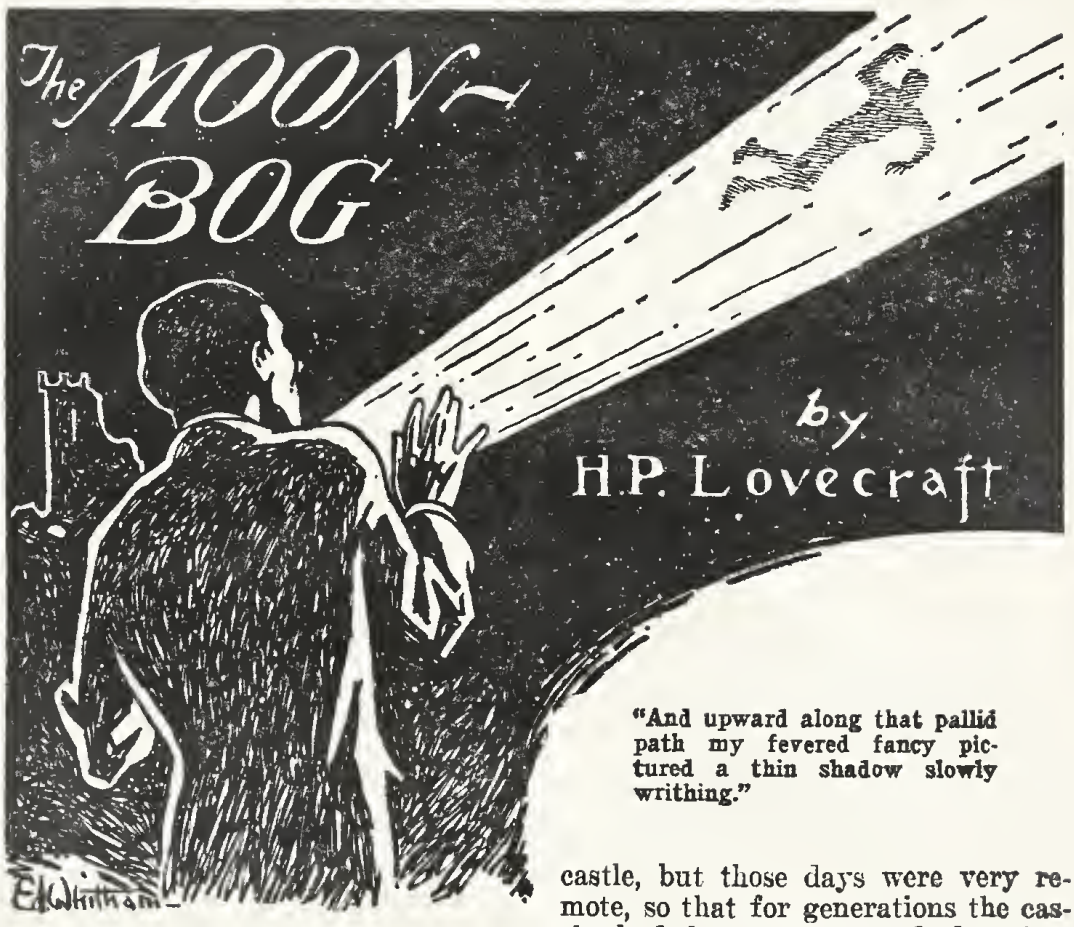
I PULLED the blanket over his face and stepped softly into the bar, carrying with me the box I had been sitting on. Once beside the cobwebbed cask which had been the source of so much curiosity to me, I almost hesitated to examine it. I mounted the box.

With grim foreboding I lifted the heavy oaken lid. It was mossy and dank and my hands trembled as if I had an ague. I pulled. It creaked and loosened. I dropped it to the floor. I looked and the sight curdled my blood with horror.

There, floating in the liquid that was the color of cloudy amber, was the preserved and gruesome body of Corporal Bousset. It hung suspended, arms half bent, face down. In the top of the head, from which the kinky hair had slipped, was a gaping hole large enough to permit the insertion of a man's thumb, and from this there protruded a whitish and ragged wisp of human brain.

I dropped to the floor, overcome with the ghastly sight, and made for the door. I thought I must smother. I closed the door with a bang that sounded weird and ghostly through the whole house.

As I stepped into the street the sun was sinking into the bosom of the Caribbean in a haze of red. The mosquitoes were swarming up from the marshes, and out across the white-foamed bar the fishing fleet was coming home. Perhaps many of those dusky boatmen expected to drink at Michel's counter that night.



"And upward along that pallid path my fevered fancy pictured a thin shadow slowly writhing."

SOMEWHERE, to what remote and fearsome region I know not, Denys Barry has gone. I was with him the last night he lived among men, and heard his screams when the thing came to him; but all the peasants and police in County Meath could never find him, or the others, though they searched long and far. And now I shudder when I hear the frogs piping in swamps, or see the moon in lonely places.

I had known Denys Barry well in America, where he had grown rich, and had congratulated him when he bought back the old castle by the bog at sleepy Kilderry. It was from Kilderry that his father had come, and it was there that he wished to enjoy his wealth among ancestral scenes. Men of his blood had once ruled over Kilderry and built and dwelt in the castle, but those days were very remote, so that for generations the castle had been empty and decaying. After he went to Ireland Barry wrote me often, and told me how under his care the gray castle was rising tower by tower to its ancient splendor; how the ivy was climbing slowly over the restored walls as it had climbed so many centuries ago, and how the peasants blessed him for bringing back the old days with his gold from over the sea. But in time there came troubles, and the peasants ceased to bless him, and fled away instead as from a doom. And then he sent a letter and asked me to visit him, for he was lonely in the castle with no one to speak to save the new servants and laborers he had brought from the North.

The bog was the cause of all these troubles, as Barry told me the night I came to the castle. I had reached Kilderry in the summer sunset, as the

gold of the sky lighted the green of the hills and groves and the blue of the bog, where on a far islet a strange olden ruin glistened spectrally. That sunset was very beautiful, but the peasants at Ballylough had warned me against it and said that Kilderry had become accursed, so that I almost shuddered to see the high turrets of the castle gilded with fire. Barry's motor had met me at the Ballylough station, for Kilderry is off the railway. The villagers had shunned the car and the driver from the North, but had whispered to me with pale faces when they saw I was going to Kilderry. And that night, after our reunion, Barry told me why.

The peasants had gone from Kilderry because Denys Barry was to drain the great bog. For all his love of Ireland, America had not left him untouched, and he hated the beautiful wasted space where peat might be cut and land opened up. The legends and superstitions of Kilderry did not move him, and he laughed when the peasants first refused to help, and then cursed him and went away to Ballylough with their few belongings as they saw his determination. In their place he sent for laborers from the North, and when the servants left he replaced them likewise. But it was lonely among strangers, so Barry had asked me to come.

When I heard the fears which had driven the people from Kilderry I laughed as loudly as my friend had laughed, for these fears were of the vaguest, wildest, and most absurd character. They had to do with some preposterous legend of the bog, and of a grim guardian spirit that dwelt in the strange olden ruin on the far islet I had seen in the sunset. There were tales of dancing lights in the dark of the moon, and of chill winds when the night was warm; of wraiths in white hovering over the waters, and of an imagined city of stone deep down below the swampy surface. But foremost among the weird fancies, and alone in its absolute unanimity, was that of the curse awaiting him who should dare to touch or drain the vast reddish morass. There were secrets, said the peasants, which must not be uncovered; secrets that had lain hidden since the plague came to the children of Partholan in the fabulous years beyond history. In the *Book of Invaders* it is told that these sons of the Greeks were all buried at Tallaght, but old men in Kilderry said that one city was overlooked save by its patron moon-goddess; so that only the wooded hills buried it when the men of Nemed swept down from Scythia in their thirty ships.

Such were the idle tales which had made the villagers leave Kilderry, and when I heard them I did not wonder that Denys Barry had refused to listen. He had, however, a great interest in antiquities; and proposed to explore the bog thoroughly when it was drained. The white ruins on the islet he had often visited, but though their age was plainly great, and their contour very little like that of most ruins in Ireland, they were too dilapidated to tell the days of their glory. Now the work of drainage was ready to begin, and the laborers from the North were soon to strip the forbidden bog of its green moss and red heather, and kill the tiny shell-paved streamlets and the quiet blue pools fringed with rushes.

After Barry had told me these things I was very drowsy, for the travels of the day had been wearying and my host had talked late into the night. A man-servant showed me to my room, which was in a remote tower overlooking the village, and the plain at the edge of the bog, and the bog itself; so that I could see from my windows in the moonlight the silent roofs from which the peasants had fled and which now sheltered the laborers from the North, and too, the

parish church with its antique spire, and far out across the brooding bog the remote olden ruin on the islet gleaming white and spectral. Just as I dropped to sleep I fancied I heard faint sounds from the distance; sounds that were wild and half musical, and stirred me with a weird excitement which colored my dreams. But when I awaked next morning I felt it had all been a dream, for the visions I had seen were more wonderful than any sound of wild pipes in the night. Influenced by the legends that Barry had related, my mind had in slumber hovered around a stately city in a green valley, where marble streets and statues, villas and temples, carvings and inscriptions, all spoke in certain tones the glory that was Greece. When I told this dream to Barry we both laughed; but I laughed the louder, because he was perplexed about his laborers from the North. For the sixth time they had all overslept, waking very slowly and dazedly, and acting as if they had not rested, although they were known to have gone early to bed the night before.

That morning and afternoon I wandered alone through the sun-gilded village and talked now and then with idle laborers, for Barry was busy with the final plans for beginning his work of drainage. The laborers were not as happy as they might have been, for most of them seemed uneasy over some dream which they had had, yet which they tried in vain to remember. I told them of my dream, but they were not interested till I spoke of the weird sounds I thought I had heard. Then they looked oddly at me, and said that they seemed to remember weird sounds, too.

In the evening Barry dined with me and announced that he would begin the drainage in two days. I was glad, for although I disliked to see the moss and the heather and the little streams and lakes depart, I had a growing wish to discern the ancient secrets the deep-matted peat might hide. And that night my dreams of piping flutes and marble peristyles came to a sudden and disquieting end; for upon the city in the valley I saw a pestilence descend, and then a frightful avalanche of wooded slopes that covered the dead bodies in the streets and left unburied only the temple of Artemis on the high peak, where the aged moon-priestess Cleis lay cold and silent with a crown of ivory on her silver head.

I HAVE said that I awaked suddenly and in alarm. For some time I could not tell whether I was waking or sleeping, for the sound of flutes still rang shrilly in my ears; but when I saw on the floor the icy moonbeams and the outlines of a latticed gothic window I decided I must be awake and in the castle at Kilderry. Then I heard a clock from some remote landing below strike the hour of two, and knew I was awake. Yet still there came that monotonous piping from afar; wild, weird airs that made me think of some dance of fauns on distant Mænalus. It would not let me sleep, and in impatience I sprang up and paced the floor. Only by chance did I go to the north window and look out upon the silent village and the plain at the edge of the bog. I had no wish to gaze abroad, for I wanted to sleep; but the flutes tormented me, and I had to do or see something. How could I have suspected the thing I was to behold?

There in the moonlight that flooded the spacious plain was a spectacle which no mortal, having seen it, could ever forget. To the sound of reedy pipes that echoed over the bog there glided silently and eerily a mixed throng of swaying figures, reeling through such a revel as the Sicilians may have danced to Demeter in the old days under the harvest moon beside the Cyane. The wide plain, the

golden moonlight, the shadowy moving forms, and above all the shrill monotonous piping, produced an effect which almost paralyzed me; yet I noted amidst my fear that half of these tireless, mechanical dancers were the laborers whom I had thought asleep, whilst the other half were strange airy beings in white, half-indeterminate in nature, but suggesting pale wistful naiads from the haunted fountains of the bog. I do not know how long I gazed at this sight from the lonely turret window before I dropped suddenly in a dreamless swoon, out of which the high sun of morning aroused me.

My first impulse on awaking was to communicate all my fears and observations to Denys Barry, but as I saw the sunlight glowing through the latticed east window I became sure that there was no reality in what I thought I had seen. I am given to strange fantasms, yet am never weak enough to believe in them; so on this occasion contented myself with questioning the laborers, who slept very late and recalled nothing of the previous night save misty dreams of shrill sounds. This matter of the spectral piping harassed me greatly, and I wondered if the crickets of autumn had come before their time to vex the night and haunt the visions of men. Later in the day I watched Barry in the library poring over his plans for the great work which was to begin on the morrow, and for the first time felt a touch of the same kind of fear that had driven the peasants away. For some unknown reason I dreaded the thought of disturbing the ancient bog and its sunless secrets, and pictured terrible sights lying black under the unmeasured depth of age-old peat. That these secrets should be brought to light seemed injudicious, and I began to wish for an excuse to leave the castle and the village. I went so far as to talk casually to Barry on the subject, but did not dare continue after he gave his resounding laugh. So I was silent when the sun set fulgently over the far hills, and Kilderry blazed all red and gold in a flame that seemed a portent.

WHETHER the events of that night were of reality or illusion I shall never ascertain. Certainly they transcend anything we dream of in nature and the universe; yet in no normal fashion can I explain those disappearances which were known to all men after it was over. I retired early and full of dread, and for a long time could not sleep in the uncanny silence of the tower. It was very dark, for although the sky was clear the moon was now well in the wane, and would not rise till the small hours. I thought as I lay there of Denys Barry, and of what would befall that bog when the day came, and found myself almost frantic with an impulse to rush out into the night, take Barry's car, and drive madly to Ballylough out of the menaced lands. But before my fears could crystallize into action I had fallen asleep, and gazed in dreams upon the city in the valley, cold and dead under a shroud of hideous shadow.

Probably it was the shrill piping that awaked me, yet that piping was not what I noticed first when I opened my eyes. I was lying with my back to the east window overlooking the bog, where the waning moon would rise, and therefore expected to see light cast on the opposite wall before me; but I had not looked for such a sight as now appeared. Light indeed glowed on the panels ahead, but it was not any light that the moon gives. Terrible and piercing was the shaft of ruddy refulgence that streamed through the gothic window, and the whole chamber was brilliant with a splendor intense and unearthly. My immediate actions were peculiar for such a situation, but it is only in tales that a man does the dramatic and

foreseen thing. Instead of looking out across the bog toward the source of the new light, I kept my eyes from the window in panic fear, and clumsily drew on my clothing with some dazed idea of escape. I remember seizing my revolver and hat, but before it was over I had lost them both without firing the one or donning the other. After a time the fascination of the red radiance overcame my fright, and I crept to the east window and looked out whilst the maddening, incessant piping whined and reverberated through the castle and over all the village.

Over the bog was a deluge of flaring light, scarlet and sinister, and pouring from the strange olden ruin on the far islet. The aspect of that ruin I can not describe—I must have been mad, for it seemed to rise majestic and undecayed, splendid and column-cinctured, the flame-reflecting marble of its entablature piercing the sky like the apex of a temple on a mountain-top. Flutes shrieked and drums began to beat, and as I watched in awe and terror I thought I saw dark saltant forms silhouetted grotesquely against the vision of marble and effulgence. The effect was titanic—altogether unthinkable—and I might have stared indefinitely had not the sound of the piping seemed to grow stronger at my left. Trembling with a terror oddly mixed with ecstasy I crossed the circular room to the north window from which I could see the village and the plain at the edge of the bog. There my eyes dilated again with a wild wonder as great as if I had not just turned from a scene beyond the pale of nature, for on the ghastly red-litten plain was moving a procession of beings in such a manner as none ever saw before save in nightmares.

Half gliding, half floating in the air, the white-clad bog-wraiths were slowly retreating toward the still waters and the island ruin in fantastic formations suggesting some ancient and solemn ceremonial dance. Their waving translucent arms, guided by the detestable piping of those unseen flutes, beckoned in uncanny rhythm to a throng of lurching laborers who followed doglike with blind, brainless, floundering steps as if dragged by a clumsy but resistless demon-will. As the naiads neared the bog, without altering their course, a new line of stumbling stragglers zigzagged drunkenly out of the castle from some door far below my window, groped sightlessly across the courtyard and through the intervening bit of village, and joined the floundering column of laborers on the plain. Despite their distance below me I at once knew they were the servants brought from the North, for I recognized the ugly and unwieldy form of the cook, whose very absurdness had now become unutterably tragic. The flutes piped horribly, and again I heard the beating of the drums from the direction of the island ruin. Then silently and gracefully the naiads reached the water and melted one by one into the ancient bog; while the line of followers, never checking their speed, splashed awkwardly after them and vanished amidst a tiny vortex of unwholesome bubbles which I could barely see in the scarlet light. And as the last pathetic straggler, the fat cook, sank heavily out of sight in that sullen pool, the flutes and the drums grew silent, and the blinding red rays from the ruins snapped instantaneously out, leaving the village of doom lone and desolate in the wan beams of a new-risen moon.

My condition was now one of indescribable chaos. Not knowing whether I was mad or sane, sleeping or waking, I was saved only by a merciful numbness. I believe I did ridiculous things such as offering prayers to Artemis, Latona, Demeter, Persephone, and Plouton. All that I recalled of a classic youth came to my

lips as the horrors of the situation roused my deepest superstitions. I felt that I had witnessed the death of a whole village, and knew I was alone in the castle with Denys Barry, whose boldness had brought down a doom. As I thought of him new terrors convulsed me, and I fell to the floor; not fainting, but physically helpless. Then I felt the icy blast from the east window where the moon had risen, and began to hear the shrieks in the castle far below me. Soon those shrieks had attained a magnitude and quality which can not be written of, and which make me faint as I think of them. All I can say is that they came from something I had known as a friend.

At some time during this shocking period the cold wind and the screaming must have roused me, for my next impression is of racing madly through inky rooms and corridors and out across the courtyard into the hideous night. They found me at dawn wandering mindless near Ballylough, but what unhinged me utterly was not any of the horrors I had seen or heard before. What I muttered about as I came slowly out of the shadows was a pair of fantastic incidents which occurred in my flight; incidents of no significance, yet which haunt me unceasingly when I am alone in certain marshy places or in the moonlight.

As I fled from that accursed castle along the bog's edge I heard a new sound; common, yet unlike any I had heard before at Kilderry. The stagnant waters, lately quite devoid of animal life, now teemed with a horde of slimy enormous frogs which piped shrilly and incessantly in tones strangely out of keeping with their size. They glistened bloated and green in the moonbeams, and seemed to gaze up at the fount of light. I followed the gaze of one very fat and ugly frog, and saw the second of the things which drove my senses away.

Stretching directly from the strange olden ruin on the far islet to the waning moon, my eyes seemed to trace a beam of faint quivering radiance having no reflection in the waters of the bog. And upward along that pallid path my fevered fancy pictured a thin shadow slowly writhing; a vague contorted shadow struggling as if drawn by unseen demons. Crazed as I was, I saw in that awful shadow a monstrous resemblance—a nauseous, unbelievable caricature—a blasphemous effigy of him who had been Denys Barry.

The STRANGE CASE of PASCAL

by Robert Eugene Ulmer

"Swollen fingers gripped the hilt, and a leaden arm swung the knife. The monster turned and I felt again the sting of its foul fangs."

JUST how I stand in the sight of God, I do not know, for the affair of twenty years ago is still an unsolved mystery in my own mind and in the minds of others. I offer no defense, for I have no idea as to how the terrible deed was done, or whether I am directly or indirectly responsible for it, if at all. Neither shall I attempt to explain, for I can not. Rather, I shall relate it all, just as it happened, and the significance thereof, if any, must be sought in your own conclusions.

I have borne it long in silence, for fear has sealed my lips; but now I desire to reveal that which has tormented body and soul, and made an old man of me before my time, so that the world may judge for itself. The weight of my misery can be supported no longer, and I thank God the end is in sight.

Neither excusing nor explaining, then, I shall begin.

MY NAME is David Pascal; profession, doctor of medicine. As a young man I held an enviable reputation in my chosen field, and was credited with the virtues of ordinary respectability, a law-abiding nature, and abhorrence of the brutal. I was an average citizen.

At the time of which I write, I had a partner, Blenheim by name, a man of singular personality, intelligence, capability, and, when I first met him, of most charming character. His countenance, however, filled me with a nameless fear and disgust. Its features were bloated and leering. This

I could well afford to forget, in view of his splendid capacities, and I prided myself upon affiliating with me such a splendid fellow; but it was not long before he developed into a most skilful criminal who, by means of wily machinations, involved me in a net of shady operations, conducted by him in my name and over my signature, of which I was wholly unaware and entirely innocent. I will not go into details, for they are of no significance, but suffice it to say, when I finally came to my senses I was forced into silence in order to save my name from utter ruin. Had I been wise, I would not have delayed the inevitable. Blenheim slowly absorbed my interests, and I became a mere figurehead, he the actual head of the firm, while with each passing day I sank deeper into the mire, until in my own eyes I was a convicted criminal. More than once, emboldened by desperation, I resolved to denounce him, but fear of the terrible cost always restrained me at the crucial moment.

All this I might have suffered to the grave; but when Blenheim poisoned against me the mind of the girl I loved and had resolved to wed, and stole her affection, I rebelled. Grieved and desperate, I rushed upon him one day and publicly denounced him, while he stood by in smiling contempt, with Margaret, deceitful beauty, clinging to his arm, regarding me in cold disdain.

Blenheim fulfilled his threats. In a few days he brought forth incriminating documents and other evidence, signed by myself. I was accused, but he had cleverly shielded himself from possible prosecution in all matters, questionable as well as legitimate. I was utterly damned.

The result was that I was tried, found guilty, and sent to prison for fraud to serve five years. I came out, broken in health, embittered, but determined to avenge myself by finding Blenheim, if he yet lived, and forcing him to public confession of his guilt and my innocence. Here let me state that my thoughts, although bitter, did not take the terrible form they later assumed, but confined themselves strictly to the course mentioned.

During my five years' incarceration, Blenheim's cruel and avaricious face had obsessed me; waking and sleeping, I beheld his repellent features, obese and dissipated. It was through him I forfeited my reputation, respect, and all hope of rehabilitating my life. My name was forever besmirched, a subject for disgust and ridicule. Professionally, I was lost; self-esteem was gone; my love shattered by my enemy. Altogether the state of my mind was maddening, and I often wonder that my thoughts did not pursue a more violent course.

When again I saw Blenheim (he was easily found, as his name was widely spoken), he was established in luxurious quarters, surrounded by all material evidence of the respect and favor that had once been mine. Margaret, his wife, had reared a family, but was now like a rose that had withered—a sorry vision of former beauty.

I FORCED my way past protesting clerks into Blenheim's private sanctum and stood silently in the doorway, watching him at his desk. He had not changed; still crafty, leering, as always, though his hair was slightly tinged with silver.

"Well?" he demanded curtly, swinging around, and glancing up at my general ill-favored aspect.

I approached him.

"You don't know me, Blenheim?"

He peered earnestly into my eyes for a few seconds, and then I saw him start and turn pale.

"Pascal!"

"Yes," I echoed grimly, "Pascal."

Then I warned him, promised that I would have vengeance for the wrongs he had done me, that he had

best enjoy his prosperity while he might, and left him, a somewhat shaken, fearful man; but his natural boldness and quick recovery soon restored him, I am sure, and after I left, I believe he forgot me, at least temporarily.

That night, lost in visions and plans of revenge, I retired, seing as usual my old partner's leering face before me; but I could not sleep, and began to pace the floor in a state of great agitation. Tiring at length, I sank wearily into a chair, while my senses slowly slipped away from me; the room, I myself, seemed unreal, as if viewed from a distance by my detached self, and a queer mist obscured my mental faculties. I nodded sleepily, my eyes drooped heavily, and closed; and the only impression I carried into unconsciousness was a vivid, unforgettable one—the face of Louis Blenheim.

I dreamed.

My bed seemed to have fallen silently away from me, and I hung suspended and alone in the silence, darkness and loneliness of infinity, the only living thing in that black void, supported by I know not what strange influence that prevented my crashing into bottomless depths; but, while waiting, I became conscious of a subtle presence, unseen, unheard, but growing more tangible each moment, until the darkness in front of me was relieved by a ghostly, phosphorescent glow that emanated from a monstrous structure whose exact nature I could not determine. Growing more distinct, it developed into a colossal web, octagonal in shape, the wings and fibers of which were lost in the all-enveloping gloom, and so vast that they seemed to fill the universal void. Its clinging, silken threads vibrated as if stirred softly to and fro by some agitation of the atmosphere, unfelt by me, fascinating yet filling my soul with terror. In the grip of the unnamable attraction toward the heart of the web, its filaments seemed hungry to receive me, and slowly, but irresistibly, I was pulled forward, struggling with all my bodily and mental powers; nothing availed and, as if impatient with my reluctance, the vast web began to glide toward me, growing more overwhelming the nearer it drew, until I felt as an ant before an elephant, or as a man in the face of nature's might—utterly impotent, pitifully infinitesimal, at the mercy of overpowering force. A sense of suffocation developed; my struggles were renewed, and I cried out; but my wild utterances sounded oh, so weak! in that infinitude out of which had come this colossal fancy, so terribly grotesque that the most vivid imagination can never conjure up the conflict that raged within me. Straight to its heart I was drawn, until the web loomed before me, vast, unfathomable, filled with invisible horrors and a fate I could not divine. In a breathless rush, while I cried and frantically fought its fascination, I hurtled through the intervening space and into the web, which then, with every clinging fiber, began to close upon me, entwining my arms and legs, choking my cries, stealing my breath, paralyzing every muscle in my body.

I battled impotently against my doom. The soft, silken film clung tenaciously to my fingers; I was enveloped in a shroud of the gauzy stuff, until lips, eyes and nose were buried; it matted upon my hair and throttled my breath; but I was able still to see, though dimly, and realize what was occurring; and with mortal horror I beheld layer upon layer, sheet upon sheet of that endless web fold themselves about me remorselessly, silently, until I was helpless, unable to utter even the slightest sound; but I wondered vaguely what would next occur, and why the demon of this mighty trap did not come

running out upon its binding strands and with poisonous tentacles cover my body with its repulsive self, and bear me away to its hidden lair of dread. At the thought I shivered anew and agony's perspiration trickled from my brow, for I was convinced that each succeeding instant would be my last, and breathing was accomplished with the greatest torture. I lay entirely blanketed in a shroud of gossamer fiber from which there was no escape; but still the dreaded monster did not appear, though my soul was alive to the ever-present fear of its advent. Was I to die thus, a prisoner in this fantastic trap of horror, slowly, with maddening torture?

A sudden rushing roar, beating against my muffled ears, answered the unspoken thought, and with a terrifying swoop the entire monstrous web engulfed me. A feeble attempt to scream was choked in my throat; my struggles ceased as I succumbed and lay still.

Then, a new sensation; a strange vibration upon the strands, and looking up I beheld what I dreaded most—a monstrous spider, at least six feet long and three high, gliding swiftly over the network of his trap. A horrid creature with fat and bloated body, covered with stiff black spines, and legs, dozens of them, long, powerful, and bony and patched over with a scrawny layer of black down. In places, the glistening hide was exposed, and as the thing drew nearer I saw that it exuded a gummy fluid of pronounced sulfuric odor, covering the beast from head to foot and clinging to the fibers of the web in glittering globules. The head was huge, but more horrible because I perceived, with a thrill of revulsion, that it was a human head.

The features of the countenance were almost livid, in stark contrast to the jet of its body, and the face was that of Louis Blenheim, infinitely more cruel and repulsive than in life. Two long fangs hung from the drooling mouth, through which was shot the deadly venom of its bite; and the great eyes, protruding and yellow, glared on me with such greed as turned my soul faint and made me long for the end.

The hideous thing drew nearer, and I reeled from its stench, while its breath fanned my cheek hotly, the fangs glistening in its foul mouth, gaunt claws expanding and contracting like those of a cat, while the body seemed to pulsate and swell to twice its bloated size before my revolted gaze. The disgusting creature was upon me, covering my own with its vile bulk, crushing out my life and settling searching fangs in my flesh; but when the gleaming eyes came so close to mine, and I felt the sticky fluid oozing from the monster on to my own skin, quivered under the cutting pain of that bite, and revolted at the touch of the clammy brute, I renewed all my struggles with tenfold vigor, for visions of being dragged away to the monster's abysmal den, there to be feasted upon and subjected to the agonies of a rending death, flashed before me. The hideous face was grinning fiendishly, and with a superhuman effort I dragged weighted hands from the mesh of gossamer and buried their fingers in the slimy body, shuddering; but my efforts were as the breaking of a ripple against a mighty sea-wall, and in the end I fell back panting, exhausted, and was carried swiftly to the web's yawning maw.

There the spider paused to take firmer hold upon my body; but as it halted, I gazed into the black depths of the awful threshold before me and instantly trembled with unspeakable terror. My mind flew to the knife I always carried, and with a wild thrill of desperate hope I prayed God that I might grip the blade, and suddenly, to my unspeakable joy, I beheld the

weapon in my hand. Whence it came I knew not. It was there, my one hope of deliverance. I wrenched an arm free from the momentarily relaxed grip of a talon and dragged the steel upward.

Swollen fingers gripped the hilt, and a leaden arm swung the knife. With a snakelike hiss, the monster turned and I felt again the sting of its foul fangs. Once, twice, thrice I struck, burying the steel in the hairy body. In those few anguished moments I lived through ages, blindly cutting, slashing, tearing madly, while with each fresh wound I inflicted, a spurt of the nauseating fluid would cover and almost strangle me; but I fought on and on. Agonized rage distorted the features of the man-spider, and my hate of Blenheim rose to superhuman heights. Another bite of venomous fangs and I cried; but continued to plunge my sticky and dripping knife into the bloated beast. With each incision of its teeth, I felt a rending pull within, leaving me weakened and gasping; but I battled to the last, covering the monster with ragged, gaping wounds. At last the body staggered on unsteady legs, and inwardly I sang with fierce triumph, for the death-wound had been inflicted; but how short-lived was my triumph! Of what avail the struggle of man in death's grip? I, too, was surrendering to the inevitable; but my failing arm made a final swoop, and then—annihilation.

My last impression was of Blenheim's face, with spider's body, gloating over my dead form in his final victory, like a hideous, brooding incarnation of the horrors of hell.

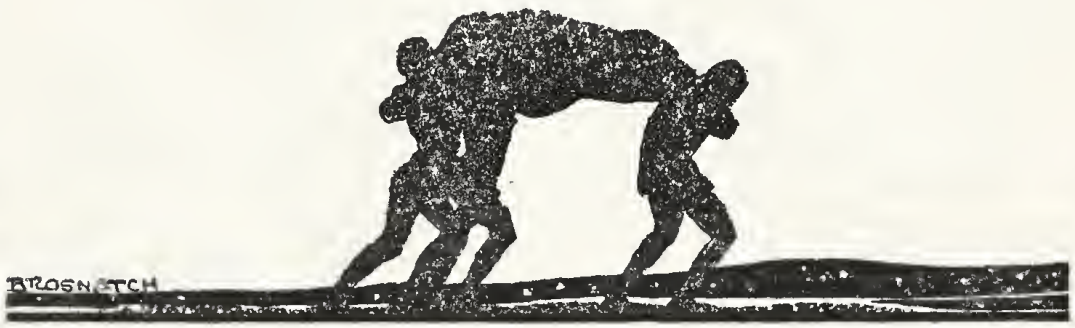
MY DREAM ended abruptly, vividly, and I awoke to find the morning well advanced and daylight streaming in through my window. I leaped to my feet with a vast sigh of relief from that mental experience, but determined to seek Blenheim and a settlement that very morning.

As I hurried from the house, a newsboy's cry halted me. Some instinct, I know not what, prompted me to purchase a paper. The next moment I was gazing spellbound at the flaring headlines:

"LOUIS BLENHEIM MYSTERIOUSLY MURDERED!"

Following is an excerpt from the account:

"— and Blenheim was found dead in bed early this morning, after his family had heard cries of distress and sounds of a violent struggle in his room. The body was bleeding from numerous dagger wounds. No clue to the murderer has been found, but there are several inexplicable circumstances surrounding the tragedy that color it with an element of the supernatural. The deceased was covered by a strange gummy fluid which exuded a pronounced sulfuric odor, while in another part of the room were found what appeared to be remnants of a great web, some of which were clinging to the body."



A Story Replete with Thrills

THE DEVIL-RAY

By JOEL MARTIN NICHOLS, JR.

The Story So Far

GEORGE FERRIS, master thief, with two companions in crime, is seeking to rob Castle Blennerhof, in Austria, of the jewels reported to be kept in the castle safe. The peasants complain of a beam of purple light, which swept down out of the clouds and killed all living things over a path three feet wide, withering the vegetation and killing a cow in the pasture.

Ferris had lost his memory five years before from a sudden blow on the head as he plunged through a mirrored door in pursuit of a thief; and had taken the name "George Ferris" from the name on a card in his pocket. He has no recollection of who he really is, but some faint chord of memory is touched in him as he looks through a tower window of Castle Blennerhof at an old man held a chained prisoner there.

Startled by the roar of an approaching airplane, Ferris and his companions desist from their attempt to break into the castle, and dive into the lake. A beam of purple light sweeps from the plane, passes near Ferris and touches one of his pals, called the Spider. The airplane passes into the hangar at the castle; but the body of the Spider floats face up in the lake. The beam of light has slain him.

CHAPTER 4

THE GIRL

IT WAS not Ferris's habit to attempt explanations for past experiences while there was still work to be done, and for that reason he dismissed from his mind, at least temporarily, the strange happenings at the castle and the tragic culmination of their trip across the lake. That there was some sinister connection between the incident of the dead cow in the open field and the airplane at the castle he was quite sure. Obviously the same destructive force that had slain the Spider had killed the cow and left that streak of yellow grass. But pondering was a waste of time. He made a few discreet inquiries among the peasants of the little village in the valley where he was staying, but they knew as little of Blennerhof as did he and seemed to have no thought save for those things which surrounded their own simple existence.

Ferris had had enough of the castle for the time being, so he decided to turn his attention to the villa, hoping thereby to establish beyond doubt whether the jewels were in the villa or the castle. The thing to do, he concluded, was to learn more of the habits of the inmates. The opportunity to do this came a little sooner than he expected and in a manner that added nothing to his satisfaction.

Two days later he was strolling down the road which led from the mountains into the village, when he came upon the girl at a bend in the road. It was little more than a bridle-path hugging the cliffs on one side and dropping off into a precipice on the other. Just what had happened before he rounded the corner Ferris had no way of telling, but it must have been an altercation of some sort for he was just in time to see her raise her riding whip and cut it sharply across her companion's face. It was the baron's ward, and she had struck the big German whom the natives knew only under the name of Colonel Von Schaang. Then, wheeling her animal, she dashed up the narrow path toward Ferris while the man, his face livid with anger, spurred on behind.

There had been a slight frost the night before, but the morning sun had already thawed the surface of

the ground, leaving a thin smear of slippery mud. Whether, owing to the earliness of the season, she had neglected to have her mount shod, or whether the sharp curve was too much for him, would be hard to say. Ferris, who had dodged behind a shrub in the hope of remaining undiscovered, saw the beast's hind legs slip out from under him, throwing his head against the pebbled cliff. Some of the gravel and stones brought down by the brushing impact must have frightened him, for he began rearing and plunging madly, drawing ever nearer to the chasm which yawned on the other side of the path.

The livid rage on the face of her pursuer turned to ashen fear when he saw her impending danger. He leaped from his own horse, then stood as if rooted with terror.

Ferris's photographic mind had registered every detail of the proceeding. Realizing instantly that the animal had been maddened by the plunge of sand and gravel about his ears and eyes and that the next moment might see horse and rider toppling over the precipice, the American rushed forward and seized the bridle. He had forgotten that his principal object in life during the past few weeks had been to keep out of sight of just these people.

"Loose the rein!" he shouted to her as the horse tried to rear and strike at him. He saw that in her terror she was pulling back with all her strength on the heavy Spanish bit, forcing the sharp steel deeper and deeper into the beast's sensitive mouth. Blood-flecked foam spattered over him.

She seemed not to hear him. Horse and rider edged nearer the chasm. Another backward plunge like the last, and both of them would be over the cliff. Seeing that she was powerless to act, Ferris dropped his hold on the rein and leaped to her stirrup, seizing her about the waist. With his free hand he pulled the leather from her nerveless fingers. She had fainted—luckily. But would her left foot become entangled in the stirrup before he could drag her clear? Even now the beast was toppling on the brink! Thank God, her foot had come free! Ferris threw his body backward with all his strength, to find himself staggering and swaying over the abyss. Even as he regained his balance a reddish bulk struck the rocks far below. There was a thud which even he could hear—the horse kicked once, and lay still.

Strangely nauseated, Ferris stumbled across the pathway and placed the girl down against the cliff. The dark masses of her hair had slipped out from under her hat, framing her bloodless face in soft outline. He was just about to prop up her head with his coat, preparatory to chafing her hands, when he felt a hand on his shoulder. He had forgotten the presence of the man, Von Schaang, though his mind still bore the picture of him hesitating there in the background while her life trembled in the balance. Oddly enough, he paid no attention, shook off the hand and without so much as a glance upward began to chafe the woman's wrists.

The hand on his shoulder tightened, tried to twist him roughly about. At the same instant he felt the sharp sting of a riding whip across his shoulders. He turned on the instant and glanced up. The startled look on the colonel's face told Ferris he had been recognized at once as an outlander. Even as the two men faced each other, one crouching, the other standing, the colonel's hand moved swiftly to his hip. Ferris knew he must move quickly, and move quickly he did. In one motion he let the girl's head sink back against the coat, and with but a slight shift of his legs he sprang at Von Schaang.

The dull impact of his fist on the chin of the German and the clatter of a blue steel automatic on the hard gravel of the path came almost as one. Von Schaang's knees wobbled and he sank heavily to the ground. With scarcely a second look at him Ferris picked up the pistol, glanced at it contemptuously and then tossed it over the cliff. Without further ado he turned his attention to the girl.

He found a spring near by and dashed some of the water into her face. Slowly the color came back into her face and she moved her head into the hollow of his arm. An idle breeze fanned the loose strands of her hair across his cheek, the subtle perfume of it filtering through his nostrils and sending the blood pounding through his brain. Another sigh, a flutter of the long lashes, and she looked up into his eyes. The first dazed look of incomprehension shaded to one of startled bewilderment. She said something to him in a tongue he did not understand.

"You'll be all right in a moment," he ventured, in English.

Her eyes opened in amazement and then something akin to fear. "You are American?" she asked. He knew by her accent that she must be very familiar with English as spoken in his country.

"What are you doing here?" she demanded. And then she saw the prostrate form of Von Schaang. "Have you killed him? Is he dead?"

Ferris shook his head, smiling. "No such luck," he said. "Just tapped him on the chin. He hit me with his riding whip and then when he saw I wasn't a peasant, he reached for his gun. I had to do something, you know," half apologetically.

She got up and moved toward Ferris, clutching his sleeve. "It would have been better had you killed him —better for all of us. Oh, I wish I might have gone over that cliff with poor Rollo! But you can't stay here. See, he's stirring a little. I'm afraid —I'm afraid when he comes to himself——"

Ferris misunderstood her. His eyes had narrowed to small slits and he felt the blood pounding through his temples, felt the throb of a hate he did not understand. "Madam," he said, "there is no need for you to fear him longer. A little push over the cliff and he'll be down there with your horse." His short metallic laugh rang out in the stillness. The coldness of it caused her to draw away from him. She looked again into his face and gave a low cry. Even as her lips parted he turned from her and strode toward the helpless German. Through the blur in his eyes he saw that all the world was red.

"Red—red—red," he muttered. "God, how my head throbs! Everything red. I ought to kill him. I've got to kill him."

He had not gone half the distance to the prostrate man when a small, white-faced fury hurled itself against him. Through the red film which seemed to smother him he felt the clutch of her fingers on his arm. "Red—red—red," he muttered.

"Are you mad?" he heard her cry. "Would you murder a helpless man?" The red film gathered tighter about his throat, choking, smothering. He brushed her aside. Two more steps and he stood over the German, his fingers opening and shutting convulsively. Even as he reached down to grasp him, he felt the cold muzzle of a pistol pressing against his temple. Her voice, now clear and calm, rang in his ears.

"If you touch him, I'll kill you!"

Just as a delicately regulated pump begins working automatically when the water reaches a certain level, so the hair-trigger instincts of the American telegraphed to every nerve center of his body that another step toward that recumbent figure would mean his end.

He paused, straightened up. The red, choking film seemed to melt away before his eyes. That tight strangling sensation at his neck loosened. He backed away, startled at the burning scorn in her eyes. He heard her low voice—miles away.

"It would be better, perhaps, for all of us if this—this man were dead," she was saying, "but I can not see him killed in cold blood. It is best that you go now, before he awakes. I can promise you there will be two of us against you then."

The red had gone entirely now. The throb in his brain, the throb across that scar on his forehead, was passing. He felt a great shame, an all-absorbing desire to slink away. And so, while she was bending over the other man, he hastened around the corner and down the slope, the fresh morning air fanning to dryness the great beads of perspiration which had arisen on his brow.

CHAPTER 5

A LONE HAND

AN EARLY autumn thunderstorm, an uncommon thing in those mountains, had piled its black warning into the sky as the afternoon wore on. Ferris in his room at the inn sat with his head buried in his arms. Of the distant peals of thunder, the glowering twilight that presaged the storm, he was oblivious. At a quarter after 5 a servant brought in a candle and stirred the fire. For only a minute or two its flicker threw grotesque shadows on the wall and then died low. Ferris did not seem to notice the coldness of the room.

Two hours later the servant, re-entering with his victuals, found the American still musing. By this time fitful gusts of wind were tearing at the shutters and whistling among the gables. Livid flashes of lightning threw pallid gleams into the murky interior. Again the man stirred the fire and again it leaped into the chimney, seemingly angry at being thus disturbed. A moment later it had subsided to a dull, sulky glow beneath a covering of half-burned wood and somber ashes.

On the heels of a heavier crash than usual, one of the wooden shutters suddenly flung open, letting in a swish of rain and a riot of galloping wind. The candle on the table flickered and died, its feeble gleams dwarfed to insignificance by the blue flare which flooded the room from the open window. Before he could control himself, Ferris was on his feet in the far corner of the room, his fingers clutching the cold butt of his automatic, his eyes glaring in the direction of the swinging shutter. But there was nothing but wind and rain.

"Nerves, nerves," he muttered. "Losing my nerve at this stage." He pressed the tips of his fingers together, felt them tremble with the throb of his heart and the twitch of tensed muscles. "Couldn't roll a tumbler tonight with these fingers," he murmured.

He strode to the table and took a long draft of the wine. It seemed to brace him. He walked to the window. The whirling torrent had subsided for the moment. He gazed out into the night, heard the galloping thunder of the storm out beyond in the smother of darkness. A light flickered here and there in the village. A wild night for even these hardy peasants. He pulled the shutters together, then he lit the candle with a lighted sliver of wood from the fireplace, sensing inwardly that the sullen, glowing embers hated to yield even this tiny flame. As he turned away they lashed out at him in unwonted brightness. He started, stepped back, cursed himself for a fear-bitten fool. A fat pine-knot suddenly breaking into flame—that was all.

"Nerves, nerves," he muttered.

Presently he drew up his chair to the fireplace and slumped into its hard depths. Sleep he would have welcomed, but the uncanny rattle of windy fingers snatching at the shutters kept him wide-eyed. Ever and anon he turned about in his chair and peered into the room behind him, scorning himself inwardly for his lack of self-control.

At 11:30 by his watch he arose, went to his portmanteau and drew from it a thin woolen sweater, a pair of rubber-soled shoes, a flashlight and a thin bar of steel, hammered down to the thickness of a wafer at either end. In a few minutes he had changed his shoes and pulled on the sweater. In the outer pocket of a waterproof coat which he put on he placed his automatic; in the other was the bar of steel, a blackjack, and the flashlight. After all this was done, he shot the ponderous iron bolt in the door leading from the chamber and extinguished the candle. A moment's careful peering through a crack in the shutter before he opened it, and then the five foot drop to the ground outside. In ten minutes he had left the village behind and was well on his way into the hills.

CHAPTER 6

THE MIRRORS OF VILLA BLENNERHOF

FERRIS stumbled up the last slope to a promontory overlooking the lake. Here he paused for a moment, watching the towers of the castle, all but indiscernible now through the gloom and murk that hovered over the waters. The castle had always fascinated him, even more than did the jewels within the villa. Even now as he watched it he fancied he caught the gleam of dancing lights about the gloomy battlements.

But there was other and sterner work to be done, so he turned his footsteps toward the villa just beyond. The place was in absolute darkness. He feared for a time that the hounds in the kennels at the rear would hear and awaken the caretakers and servants, who were housed in an adjacent building, but the rush and swirl of wind and rain, the almost incessant peals of thunder, drowned under an avalanche of sound the soft tread of his rubber-soled feet across the gravel.

With expertness he chose one of the lower windows, and pulled himself up to the narrow ledge by the sheer power of his steel-springed wrists and fingers. Clinging there on his precarious perch, he inserted the jimmy beneath the window sash and with gradually increasing pressure forced it upward. It gave with a metallic click, audible even above the storm. He waited a moment, crouching there in the darkness, knowing it must have been heard within should any remain awake.

A glittering flash of lightning lit up for a brief moment the polished furniture and gleaming tableware within. It was the dining room, then. Very good. He swung his feet inside and slid noiselessly to the floor. With this movement, his pistol butt, protruding from his pocket, caught on the window ledge, and the weapon fell out into the night. He debated with himself whether he should go back and risk the chance of being heard by the hounds, but thought better of it and closed the window softly behind him.

Out of his long experience he had concluded that the safe, being cylindrical, would have been concealed within one of the walls. There was small likelihood of its being in the dining room, so he crept cautiously across the floor to the open doorway, his flashlight made unnecessary by the bluish flares of lightning which lit up the interior at every third step. He crossed the hallway carefully on his hands and knees and found him-

self in what he took to be a drawing room. The shades had been partly drawn, so he took out the flashlight and let a guarded beam shoot across the room to the opposite wall. He had only to search a little when he realized with a propitious pounding of his heart that he had found it. Long experience under similar circumstances told him that behind that peculiarly hung picture and drapery was the little polished knob he had been seeking.

Scarcely glancing about him he hastened across the floor, stumbling as he did so on an intervening chair. The subdued clatter of it he ignored. Was there not already enough sound in the air to muffle all else?

He reached the picture and groped around it until he discovered the spring that released it. As it swung outward he thrust his hand behind and felt, with a glow of satisfaction, the small round knob. Then carefully stuffing his left ear with cotton, he laid his right close to the small steel door and began to twirl the nickeled disk. It clicked once and he twirled the other way. A second tiny impact within told him it had clicked again. The gods were indeed favorable. The disturbing nervousness of the afternoon was gone; his hand was as steady as a rock, his hearing well-nigh perfect.

Had his hearing been a trifle better he would have heard the girl as her satin-shod feet came down the great staircase in the hall. At the foot she paused and reached for a button on the wall. A slight click and the great chandeliers above him poured down a flood of rose-colored light.

Ferris sprang to his feet, his hand moving instinctively to his hip. It never reached there. He never even saw her. Instead, he found himself glaring into a heavy pier-glass hanging close at his left hand. From head to foot it reflected his image, his crouching hunched shoulders, his face, white, haggard. Eyes drawn to pinpoints glared back at him, seemed to enlarge, to engulf him. A livid flash from the storm without threw his features into bold relief.

A choking, struggling cry, a spasmodic shudder, and he had sunk to the floor. Just a bundle of limp flesh and inert muscle. He held his hand before his eyes trying to shut out the light. Then something seemed to snap in his brain, he felt himself hurtling through miles of black space. Out of the night faces danced and mocked him, waved at him in derision—then faded mercifully away. He closed his eyes in welcome oblivion.

THE girl gave a little low cry and hurried to him, found him limp and shuddering on the floor. She raised his head, placed it on the silken lap of her night-robe. He opened his eyes.

"This — this," he murmured; "what's all this? Where—where am I? Who are you?"

She looked at him intently, thinking he might be feigning. But what need was there for feigning? She was a woman, helpless; he was a man, powerful. She knew that. And then his eyes. They were not the same bloodshot orbs she had looked into on the cliff that morning. She began to understand a little.

"You are at Villa Blennerhof," she said, soothingly. "I suppose it was the jewels? You were not the first to try. But they are gone—weeks ago. Rest quietly now for a moment and you'll be all right."

"No, no, no!" he cried. "I must be out of here! Father, father, where is father? God, I don't know why I came here! What day of the week is it? Saturday? Then I have been here since, since——" He paused, a look of half-understanding coming into his eyes. "Yes, I remember now, I was chasing a thief—somewhere.

There was a crash—but what month is it? February?"

"It is October," she answered, quietly.

"October?"

"It is October—it is October, 1926."

He groaned and hid his face in his hands. "I guess—I guess I understand—now," he exclaimed. "I'm mighty sorry—sorry to have disturbed you in this way. Can't—won't attempt to give any explanation. But you said this place is—is Blennerhof? Where is Blennerhof?"

"Austria," she answered.

He might have cried out again but he only shook his head. "Poor father," he murmured. "I guess I'm too late now. Five years—five years!"

"Try to rest quietly," she admonished. "You'll make yourself ill."

He started to sit down in the chair she had offered him, when he stopped and put his hand over his eyes. "And yet," he said, slowly, "and yet I saw him, saw him not three days ago. Saw him somewhere behind a barred window. Is my brain still playing tricks on me? But no—he was there. Let me think a moment." He sat down and buried his head in his arms. "Yes, it comes back to me a little now. Just as sure of it as I sit here looking at you, I saw him not two days ago. There was—there was somewhere—a purple light——"

He did not notice how she paled.

"There was a purple light—we were swimming in black water. That light—it swept over us. The—the Spider went down."

She laid a trembling hand on his arm. "Tell me," she said, "was there a purple light and a castle?"

"Yes, yes!" he answered. "That was it. A purple flare. I saw it. It killed him."

"Oh God!" she cried; "then it must be true! And I thought Von Schaang lied. But, no, no, no—it is impossible, he must have lied——"

He started to get up. He had not heard her. "I must be getting out of here," he said. "There is no time to be lost. In which direction lies this castle?"

He felt her hand clutch his. "Listen," she whispered.

The wind and rain without seemed to hold up in hushed expectation. As he listened he heard the faint purr of a heavy motor swinging along the road near the lake. For a moment the faint yet powerful drumming filled the air and then died away amid a renewed roar of the elements.

Her face blanched and she made as if to step toward the stairs. At that moment they heard a door in the vestibule open and slam shut. Again he felt her fingers on his arm, felt the terror trembling through them.

"It must be Colonel Von Schaang," she whispered. "He and Baron Blennerhof were to have gone down to Haverbrouck before the storm, but they must have deceived me. I know his step. I have forbidden him this house. He is here to no good purpose. Quick! He must not find you here!"

For a moment he hesitated, still in doubt. Suppose she were to betray him. Was this a trick?

"Listen," he whispered. "I am Lindley Fenshaw, the son of the man they have imprisoned at the castle. If they know who I am they will no doubt move heaven and earth to kill me. And if this is a trick of yours—why should I trust you? You may be one with them."

"For God's sake, go!" she answered in a panic. "Have you not guessed it yet? I am as much American as you are. My father was of Austrian birth, a nephew of Baron Blennerhof. He left his home in America and went back to fight for Austria against the Russians. He was killed. My mother was a nurse—she was killed behind the American lines in a bombing raid. Is that not

enough? Can you not trust me? Quick, he is coming!"

Somehow, he believed her, and yet he hesitated. From the corridor beyond they heard the swish of waterproofs and the thump of heavy boots. "Quick," she whispered; "there is no time for you to go now. Behind this portière."

She had just time to thrust him behind the hanging when the burly figure of Von Schaang entered the room. He had discarded his hat. His face was flushed with excitement. The woman drew herself together with a supreme effort of the will.

"You call at an unseemly hour, my lord," she said in English.

He ignored the remark, seemed not to hear. "Ah, you await me!" he cried, his face flushing with obvious gratification. "It is even as the great masters have said—in the hour of victory—the warrior—the woman——"

"You will leave the villa immediately." Her cool, clear tones cut across his with the sharpness of steel.

He shrugged his shoulders, deprecatingly. "You are inhospitable, *Fräulein*. I had come to accept your congratulations for a work well done. You are the first woman in the world to know what has happened this night."

Lindley Fenshaw felt her tremble through the curtain.

"Before the dawn our hour will have struck," the German continued. "Within twenty-four hours we shall have arisen out of the dust. We shall send the rest of the world to its knees. Ah—but now it will be worse than before. They have taught us how not to be lenient."

As he raised his arm she saw that under his coat he was in full uniform with his decorations. "His Imperial Highness," he continued proudly, "meets the baron at dawn. Ah, the fools, the fools! They let him out of exile because they believed him harmless! Harmless!" His laugh rang out in the room.

"It is a monarchist uprising, then?" she gasped.

He laughed again. "An uprising if you will, Fräulein Reinhardt." Then coming a step nearer so that she could see the glint in his eyes: "But what an uprising! The nobility of three nations! Monday's sunset will see these republican swine strewing the streets of three cities. Three days more will see us in Paris! Two more, in England! A week beyond that and America will be at our feet!"

Her lip curled. She was fighting for time. "My lord has been overlong at the wine, I fear. And the means of all this victory?"

He bent toward her so that even Lindley, behind the hanging, could hear the hiss of his breath. "You scoffed when I told you before," he said, "but now you shall see for yourself. It is the Leipische ray—the light of vengeance — the purple death!"

"You lie." Again her tones cut across his.

He laughed sardonically. "Tomorrow, then, shall prove it to you. We have had it perfected for weeks. We have tried it out on the lake and over the fields while others slept. It kills as it touches. Neither man nor beast nor plant can stand before it. We have unleashed the very fires of hell. And the American—these fool Americans can thank their compatriot, the great Fenshaw, for placing in the hands of their enemies that which will destroy them. Not half an hour ago the baron and Dr. Leipische went southward carrying the apparatus in an especially designed car."

There was a stir behind the curtain, and she gave a little cry, but the colonel did not notice it. She was beautiful to him, standing there under the rose-colored light from the chandeliers. She was his. He had been promised it. Why hesitate?

Even as he reached for her, the curtain was thrust aside and Lindley Fenshaw stood before him.

VON SCHAANG, with an oath of astonishment, reached for his pistol, but as he raised the weapon Lindley struck it from his hand. There was a flash of blue steel, the crash of breaking glass, and they heard it clatter to the ground outside the window.

They were facing each other with nothing but their hands.

Hatred had chased the lines of lust from the colonel's features. The girl backed away and the two men began to circle warily. The German did not rush in as his heavier and stronger frame would have warranted. Instead he backed away toward the wall. Lindley wondered if he were trying to reach the door and was about to ward him off accordingly when the girl behind him cried out a warning.

"The sword on the wall! He's after it!"

The warning had come a second too late. On the very instant of it Von Schaang, without taking his eyes from the American's face, reached up behind him and snatched from its bracket on the wall a heavy rapier. It was a stout blade with a strong basket handle, a relic of cavalier days. He gripped it tightly and approached the American.

"One of you more or less will make very little difference," the German snarled. "I know not how you came here but I know how you will leave. And by heaven, she shall pay for this! Violence with women has ever been repugnant to me, but she shall pay for this."

Lindley's fingers had closed on one of the chairs. It was the lightest one in the room but it was too heavy for a weapon which must be swung swiftly and lightly. Behind him the girl had slipped out of a door into the adjacent library. Without taking his eyes from Von Schaang's face, Lindley's other hand tightened on the chair back. Von Schaang feinted with his blade and the chair crashed against the wall beside him. He had avoided it easily. The American would have followed it, hoping to break through the colonel's guard, but just as he was about to spring he felt the girl's hand on his arm, felt the handle of another blade pressed into his hand. By the weight of it he knew immediately that it was one similar to that in the hands of the German.

The colonel smiled sarcastically. "It will delay the reckoning but a little while," he sneered. "A green American!"

They went at it under the rose light of the chandeliers.

Von Schaang's scarred face told Lindley that he was up against an experienced swordsman. He wondered if his skill in college fencing would stand by him now. The first clash gave him courage. He had not forgotten, at least, how to engage his opponent. But this was a deadly business, with no padded vests and protected throats to ward off the lunges.

The German feinted and lunged, slipping his blade around the point of the other, hoping to drive it home. It was parried, the American slipping easily out of the way. Von Schaang was surprized. He had expected to end the fight with that. Instead it was avoided, and he was sore put to it in pulling his heavy frame out of the path of a return thrust as deadly as his own. The clash of the steels told him he had met a wrist as strong and as supple as the best. Again he was obliged to avoid a thrust that, had it gone home, would have been his undoing.

The girl stood a little to one side, her face bloodless now. Once she thought Lindley gone and she gave a little half-smothered scream. But he had only stumbled on the edge of a

rug. He was up again, following the German's lunge with a strong parry.

Four, five, six minutes passed.

Von Schaang's breath was coming now in short gasps. Over his right breast there was a widening smudge of scarlet soaking through the gray of his tunic and dulling the gleam of his decorations. For Lindley there was a small trickle under the left arm, less obvious because of the somber hue of his woolen jersey. He realized, now, that this was to be a game of endurance. They were too evenly matched. This must go on until one of them, a trifle weak from loss of blood, would raise his blade a fraction of a second too late. Then——

He began to wonder which of them it would be. Once or twice in their circling he caught sight of that white, appealing face in the background. He read the fear and anguish there and his heart cried out for her. Once when he stumbled on the rug he saw her cover her face with her hands. But he was up again. A moment later, while he carried the fight to another corner of the room he saw her step out and drag the rug out of the way. Gad, he thought, she surely was a thoroughbred.

But could he last? It had been many years since he had touched the foils, and then it had been only in sport. Von Schaang, he knew, must have been an experienced duelist with a reputation. The scars on his face told that. And the stakes for both of them were tremendous. His own father was imprisoned somewhere in the castle. For what reason? His contributions to science? His researches with the X-ray? Had his father given these men something which had made possible this new and terrible engine of destruction, this devil-ray? He knew that there had been fear among the nations that one or the other of them would hit upon the thing. It had been only a question of time and research. Had his father made this possible? Von Schaang had said it. But how could they have wrested this secret from his father? Torture? Perhaps. Yet he could not believe that his father would have consciously succumbed to any coercion. If he had given it to them they must have tricked him into it!

The thought of it enraged him, gave him new strength. He believed them capable of it—torture. And now they had the purple ray. Back to him came that murky scene in the lake, the whirring airplane overhead, the purple splotch on the waters, the still, dead face of the Spider. Von Schaang must be speaking the truth! And now they who had it were speeding away into the night ready to strike at the given hour. Had he not heard the purr of heavy motors as they went down the road on their terrible mission? It had been that giant car he had seen in the castle. Bit by bit, while he fought, he pieced the thing together as it came back to him. God, what was he to do? Kill the German! He must do that for the girl, if nothing else. After that, Armageddon!

The thin trickle of scarlet under his arm had weakened him. He was parrying those glittering thrusts with increasing difficulty. One of them, turned aside a moment too late, would mean his end. He gritted his teeth. He was going on his nerve now. This endless thrusting and lunging! God, would it never end? There was a mist gathering before his eyes. Dimly through it he saw the colonel with his free hand wipe a fleck of white foam from his lips. His blood-soaked sleeve left a red smudge across his cheek. He had become a fighting, foaming beast.

Had Lindley been nearer, had his vision been a little clearer, he would have seen that Von Schaang's eyes were glassy with exhaustion. He would have heard the hoarse whistle

of the German's breath between his teeth; for him it was nearing the end, he knew it. But Von Schaang would not die thus! Not he! He measured the distance to the chandeliers with his eye. There were three of them, separated by several feet and high in the ceiling. No one blow could extinguish them all. Ah yes—that little black button in the wall! One turn of that, and the room would be in darkness. Then a window—and safety.

Von Schaang edged toward the wall, permitting himself to be driven slowly backward. With one foot he kicked an intervening chair aside. Would this fiendish American notice his purpose? Apparently he did not. Just one backward step and Von Schaang could reach the button with his hand.

With the last bit of his strength he rallied and drove Lindley back. A few steps between them were necessary to give him time for his lunge toward the window. Desperately he struck at the American and then, turning swiftly, sprang toward the button.

There was a sharp click. The girl screamed. The room was submerged in darkness.

Lindley, without knowing just why he did it, shifted his weapon and drove it spear-wise into the darkness where he had last seen the German. There was a dull impact—a loud groan. Another cry from the girl. Even as he stood there, swaying, a beam of moonlight, released for the moment by the dispersing clouds without, shone through the French window opposite. It cut a clear pathway across the floor to the opposite wall. As they stood there, the man and the girl, they saw the heavy bulk of Von Schaang sink slowly to the floor. Under his left shoulder the handle of Lindley's blade wobbled in horrid grotesqueness. That last despairing lunge had found its mark.

As Lindley watched in fascination, the night about him grew blacker and blacker, engulfed him in its sable folds. He did not hear her cry out as she hurried through the gloom toward him nor did he see how, with her hand over her eyes to shut out the sight, she forced herself to step over that still figure near the switch and turn the rose-colored flood back into the chandeliers.

Colonel Von Schaang's lips moved slightly.

"You are too late!" he croaked, his mouth trying to form a malicious grin. "The purple ray is already on its way to his Imperial Highness. The armored car left nearly an hour ago."

A stifled rattle of the throat, and he was dead.

Fenshaw's meeting with his father, and the thrilling pursuit of the armored car, are grippingly told in the closing chapters of this story, in next month's issue

A Frightful Tale of Terror That Held a Great City in its Grip

Hurtling Horror

By EARL W. and MARION SCOTT

IT WAS midnight. Gray fog hung low over Lake Michigan, curling up dark canyons of deserted streets. Rarely a figure slipped through the gloom, a taxi skidded round a corner, but mostly, the city slept.

Salisbury Quinn cursed and drew his heavy coat closer.

"Damn, why didn't I come in the car?" He paused in the shadow of the Elevated where it topped the street, and glanced furtively around, striving to pierce the sticky gloom. His fastidiously dressed figure offered a striking contrast to his surroundings. The gleam of a half-carat stone on his delicate hand caught the light as he settled the silken muffler around his throat.

A feeling of uneasiness stole over him. He was unused to lonely spots at night. The echo of hurrying footsteps reached him, then from somewhere in the heavy framework above came a low whining sound.

Suddenly he was horribly afraid. His hands fumbled toward a pocket where he had secreted an automatic, he had a notion of running from the spot, he tried to laugh but the sound died in his throat, the gun stuck stubbornly—then like an avalanche it struck him.

His stunned senses registered a horrid wheezing inhuman thing crashing onto his shoulders from somewhere in the dark regions of the Elevated above, then he went down, striking vain blows, clawing, twisting in the shadow pool on the pavement.

He felt consciousness going—he turned a blood-stained, congested face upward as he fainted. For a terrible moment his horrified eyes gazed at the Thing above him, flashes of fire darted across his numbing brain, there was a long shuddering cry and his rumpled ravaged figure lay alone in its pool of shadows and blood. A fog whistle rustily split the night. Salisbury Quinn was dead!

Chicago was stirred, especially in banking circles, at the murder of one of its most respected members. How had the man met his horrible death? What was he doing in the unsavory district of Thirty-second Street at that time of night?

Robbery was out of the question. A well-filled bill-fold, a magnificent diamond ring, a valuable watch, all were found in place when Officer Flynn discovered his still warm body under the Elevated crossing. There was no trace of his murderer, no clue as to the manner of his killing except the torn throat and lacerated face.

Chicago was shocked; Chicago was horrified. A respectable gunning, a plain case of sand-bagging, an ordinary knifing—yes, that could be countenanced — but what criminal killed his victim in this *outré* way and left everything of value upon him?

There were two explanations possible: revenge—or insanity!

Someone had hated Quinn, someone had followed and leaped upon him from the dark—someone had delighted in mutilating his body—or else——

A very careful survey of all hospitals for the insane was made. It was possible that a dangerous madman was at large, lurking in hiding through the day, striking at night, without reason.

Nothing came of it. There were various shadowed chapters in Quinn's life, but nothing to warrant such a deed. The hospitals had nothing to report. On general principles, crooks were corralled, stool-pigeons third-degreed, hang-outs of well-known underworld characters were combed—all to no avail.

Then again the Horror struck!

This time it was on the North Side. Flossie Wren, sophomore at Northwestern University, was returning to her rooming place on Fullerton Avenue. She had quarreled with her fiancé and insisted on returning home unescorted. Leaving the dance, warm and furious, she had taken the Elevated and dismounted at Fullerton station alone. It was late and she was the only passenger except a shabby youth who hugged himself into a corner and watched the girl.

As she entered the shadow at the foot of the Elevated stairs, she drew back with a slight shiver. Never afraid of darkness, she vaguely wondered at this sudden timidity. There was a suggestion of evil emanating from the black passageway. Then with a toss of her bobbed golden hair she plunged into the gloom.

At once the feeling of danger deepened. For a moment she hesitated, considered turning back, then the blackness dissolved into lighter murk, and she saw the passageway absolutely empty.

With sharply drawn breath and clicking teeth she started to run. Her steps echoed bleakly on the pavement, a cold wind swept through the tunnel-like opening—Flossie choked back a little cry, the exit was just before her——

Her sharp scream was cut short as she was crushed against the stones by a terrible hissing weight. Stunned almost to unconsciousness, she still managed to struggle feebly for a few sickening moments, her thick fur protecting her throat; then resistance left her, like steel hooks something fastened into the soft flesh, her wide blue eyes mirrored an agile writhing shape above her, then with a tiny whimper she quivered and relaxed.

Above, the Elevated train roared and shrieked to a stop. Fred Fulmer, hurrying down the steps and under the platform, stumbled across something soft and still. A hastily struck match sent him back with a gasp of horror.

"Flossie Wren!" he gasped, gazing at the pitiful figure; "she roomed on the floor above me."

THE papers flared the second murder, this time a girl, a student at the university. What was the matter with the police? This young girl's life snuffed out in a respectable quarter of the city!

All evidence led to the same cause as the death of Salisbury Quinn. The conditions were virtually the same. What was to be done? Double the police force—increase the vigilance.

The city was alarmed. Some unknown menace threatened its dwellers. Warnings were issued against solitary pedestrians returning home at late hours. Northwestern University placed a ban against all dances and parties, the students must stay indoors at night. People returning home from the theaters by way of the Elevated, entered the passageways warily, and usually in groups.

Two days passed. The police worked doggedly—on nothing.

Captain Lynch frowned at the morbid pictures of the murdered girl, her helpless body lying on the sidewalk —there was a small inset of her in tennis togs, golden bob confined by a broad band of ribbon—he glowered at her lovely smiling face.

Space was given to her grief-stricken parents just arrived from a small town out West. Her funeral was subject for half a page. Captain Lynch bit so viciously on his cigar that the chewed end snapped off. He not only writhed under the gibes of the papers, but in his heart was a bitter anger against this unknown Thing that had already taken its remorseless toll.

There was a quick tap on the door. Lynch growled admittance. A young man entered, and the glum face of the captain relaxed. He grinned and kicked out a chair.

"Hello, Larry—what's the row?"

Larry O'Toole was one of the latest additions to the detective force, the captain believed in him, but up to this time he had had little opportunity to show what he could do.

He eased his long length into the chair. "Well, Captain, it's about this 'L' business — this Horror scare."

"Sure, everything's about that. Look here." The captain flicked a stubby finger at the morning paper.

Larry nodded sympathetically. "Yes, and the *News* is worse. Well, I've got a clue."

Lynch's face brightened. "Sure?"

"Surest thing you know. I know what caused the two deaths—all I got to do is to find the Thing."

"Thing?"

"That's what I said. Didn't think it was a man, did you? Not on your amiable existence—it's a beast."

Lynch leaned forward. "You mean——"

"Yes—I do. An ape. I said so from the first."

Lynch settled back, the scowl in place again. "Aw hell, Larry, you been readin' that guy Poe, with his big noise about those Rue Morgue murders. Where'n time could an ape come from in Chi?"

"I'm coming to that. The manner of Quinn's death was so unusual that I could not imagine a human being responsible for it. You saw the wounds?"

Lynch nodded distastefully.

"Well, Doc Amhurst told me they resembled rents made by the claws of a wild beast—not such a creature as a lion or tiger, for if it were possible for such a thing to leap out from the shadow of the 'L', he would most likely use his teeth and the whole throat would be torn out. In this case the flesh was torn to ribbons, as if ripped by sharp knives, but Amhurst said that in his opinion death came from choking, the throat-tearing being done after life was extinct."

"What makes him think that?"

"Oh, it's technical, of course, but he explained that in death from strangulation, circulation to and from the brain is impeded; as a result the face is pallid, the eyes are usually prominent, the tongue sometimes protrudes and the hands are generally clenched. These symptoms were all present in the case of Quinn. In the girl, the only one lacking was the protruding tongue, possibly due to the fact that she went out easier—hence strangulation."

"And after choking them to death the devil deliberately tore their throats? Ugh." The big officer, accustomed for nearly twenty years to scenes of violence and death, rose abruptly, jamming his hands into his pockets, and began a restless pacing of the room. "My God, Larry, it's awful! Well, where does this ape stuff come from?"

"As I told you, the idea of an animal's being responsible for the deaths struck me from the first. I straight-

way started out to find the animal. It took some work, but there's a dinky little circus in winter quarters out beyond Lake Bluff and today I found them.

"The manager's a Dago and he was scared to death. Couldn't get a thing out of him at first, but finally I bluffed him into spilling. Seems that a big ape escaped from them a week ago, just a day before Quinn was killed, in fact. This Dago chap had been trying to locate him, as he's valuable, then when the news of the crime came out, he was so scared he just shut up, the poor dumb-bell, instead of coming and telling us and letting us catch the thing.

"He says the animal has never been vicious, but its keeper got nasty and beat the brute badly, so it cunningly worked apart the bars of its cage and slipped out. He says if frightened and hungry it would most likely become dangerous and might take its anger out against anyone who happened in its way.

"I've got the boys scouring the city, and any minute I expect word that they've located it—then, a quick bullet and the terror by night will be gone."

Lynch took a deep breath. "Good Lord, Larry, I hope you're right. I don't know much about the brutes, but it does seem to me that it would have taken to the trees instead of wandering into the heart of the city—miles and miles——"

Larry grinned. "Aw, come on, Lynch, you're crediting the thing with too much sense. How's an ape to know that pavement and street cars mean city? He runs away—the first way that presents itself."

"You say it's been out a week? Darned funny no one has seen it."

"Someone has seen it. Two little girls out that way. Scared out of their senses by a great hairy brute walking up and taking their bananas away from them. It bared its ugly fangs at them and ran away, behind a billboard on an empty lot—some of the men went out with guns but couldn't locate it—it was near dark."

"Funny they didn't say anything about it."

"They did. It was one of the men that told me, and I found the circus from that. It's all right, Captain, that's the culprit."

"I hope you're right." The telephone whirred sharply. Lynch jerked down the receiver. "Hello. Who? O'Toole? Sure he's here."

He stood back impatiently while Larry spoke swiftly and excitedly, then turned with a satisfied grunt.

"It's all over, Captain. Henry and Flannigan got the thing cornered in a vacant building. They're tryin' to take it alive, but will shoot before running any risks. I'm going out. Hooray, the big case is over! Too bad it couldn't have happened before——"

He was out the door before the sentence was finished.

OFFICER FLANNIGAN stood with smoking revolver looking down at a huge ungainly beast that lay in an ugly welter of blood on the floor of a deserted barn.

"Well, there it is, Larry. I'll say we did a good day's work. That Dago Tom came and tried to get the thing peaceable but it was no use—it screamed and fought like a devil and we had to shoot it."

Larry shuddered involuntarily as he gazed at the big form. It must have stood nearly as high as a man, with long powerful forearms covered with coarse hair. Its ugly receding forehead, small eyes and ferocious teeth made it a gruesome spectacle.

He pictured the fury landing on the helpless shoulders of Flossie Wren—her pitiful struggles against such a thing, even athletic Salisbury Quinn did not stand a chance. He drew a deep breath and turned away.

"Thank God we got him!" he muttered, then he saw the small, obsequious figure of Dago Tom. The man's face was screwed into a ludicrous mask of grief. He bent beside the big monkey, patting the hairy shoulder, and Larry saw with amazement that the man was crying.

"Oh, my poor Bozo," he mumbled, "he go for to get de shoot—de poor Bozo—he never mean before. Sinee he a little boy I know him—he shake de hauds with me each morning—he take de banan' from my fingers—he never mean before—de poor Bozo—he no more shake de hands."

Even after the terrible depredations of the giant Bozo, there was something pathetic in the man's grief. Used to animals, he knew their peculiarities, their good points and bad, and Larry considered, as he turned away—he doubtless loved the awful thing.

Well, the big case was over!

Chicago breathed deeply in relief. The terror was gone—the menace removed. People were free to go and come as they willed, with only the necessity of guarding against gentlemanly hold-up men and well-mannered thugs. That was the daily—and nightly—problem of Chicago dwellers, to be expected, a danger recognized and understood. But the unknown, the bizarre, the Thing that lurked in shadows and leaped in the dark—that was gone.

Chicago stretched and yawned. What was the next excitement?

THE dismal October evening darkened toward early night. Crowds from the Elevated surged off at each station as the local roared westward toward Austin and Oak Park, finally leaving its high position to take to the ground as they neared the end of the run.

Patrolman Daly strolled easily along the street watching idly the homeward-bound crowds of city workers. He felt satisfied and at peace with the world. Daly had been detailed to watch the Elevated station since the two sensational murders, but with the explanation of them that very day, he realized that need for increased vigilance was over. He need no longer walk his beat with tensed nerves and watchful eyes.

A heavy fog was rising; he shivered and pulled his coat closer. On such a night Salisbury Quinn had been killed and also that poor girl. That devilish ape seemed to pick foggy nights—but now it was dead! He had viewed the giant beast—the danger was gone. A self-respecting policeman could attend to his duties with gentlemanly leisure.

It was a devilish night, he decided, near 11 o'clock, when the outlying district had all the appearance of a well-behaved country town. He sauntered past a candy kitchen in which a few boys and girls were drinking chocolate, past the darkened bank, the windows of a curio shop.

He narrowed his eyes and peered through the fog. It made things look unreal—the street light striking on the black window of that curio shop, lighting vaguely a grinning idol thing—ugh! Daly shivered. He was getting notions. He knew old Lee Chong well, most of his curios came from Halsted Street. Suddenly the officer turned, for in the stillness he thought he heard stealthy steps, though the dimly-seen street showed nothing. He went on.

Again he got the unpleasant impression of being followed. He turned and walked quickly back over the way he had come. A belated pedestrian came into view before him, a small shabby figure of a man hurrying on about his own business, a cheap suitcase in his hand. The officer passed him with a quick greeting!

The clock from the bank corner tolled midnight. Daly yawned, glad that he would soon be relieved. The

town was asleep—through the fog trees looked like giants, the shadowy pillars of the Elevated loomed grotesquely. Something brushed against his feet, and he jumped back with a startled curse. A small black kitten seeking company!

The big man growled deep in his throat, surprized to find that his heart was beating furiously. Disgusted with what he considered unpardonable weakness, he drew well within the shadow of the Elevated to steal a forbidden drag on a cigarette.

With the suddenness of death he was dealt a terrific blow on the back of the head. He staggered, dulled senses registering the shocking fact that again the Horror had struck. This time, however, it was a different proposition. Accustomed to violence and rough-and-tumble fighting, Daly put up a powerful resistance.

Reaching above his head in spite of the terrible clawing fingers at his face and neck, he seized two long stringy arms—God! they were covered with hair. He tore the gasping, stuttering thing from his back and dashed it to the pavement, but before his reeling senses could assist him it was back, seeming to be possessed of superhuman strength—burrowing in between his blows, sinking sinewy fingers at his throat—uttering guttural grunts and cries.

His gun was useless, but he fought with the frenzy of desperation to keep the Thing from his throat. Blood was streaming from his torn face, and always those awful fingers prodded, clutched. With almost his last conscious breath he seized his whistle and sent a long shivering cry through the foggy night. With a final tear at his jugular vein, the menace leaped for the stanchions above his head.

"Ape—gorilla——" gurgled Daly with his dying breath to the second policeman, O'Reilly, bending over him five minutes later.

CHICAGO was stunned! Its fancied security was gone—the Horror was loose again—the death of the ape Bozo had not checked it. People talked of it on trains, men discussed it at luncheon, the police roused from their short complacency. Most of all was Larry O'Toole struck dumb.

"My God, O'Reilly, couldn't you see a thing?"

The men were crowding around him at headquarters the next morning.

"Well," O'Reilly took up his story, "I heard the whistle just as I was turning the corner above the 'L' station, by the corner drug store. Sure and I hurried over and found poor Daly all bloody and dyin' just gaspin' of his last. He muttered somethin' about gorilla or ape and that was all."

"Wasn't there anyone about at all?" Larry put in hopelessly.

"Naw. Ye see it was midnight and —b'gosh, there was, a little wizened feller wid a paper suitcase hurryin' up the 'L' steps as I drops poor Daly and scouts around the corner. Mild-eyed lil' feller he was—said he was a-takin' the last train in to the city, vaudeville performer he says he was, just finished his trick at the Alcazar —asks me what's wrong."

"'Officer murdered here,' says I.

"'My God,' says he, 'can I do anything?'

"'Naw,' I says, 'that damned Horror has struck again, after we thought he was dead.' I was glad of his company for the minute. I'd already turned in my call and soon help comes. Sure and it's an evil spirit —a banshee——."

"What became of the little man and what did he look like?" O'Toole asked impatiently.

"Oh, he was a slightish feller, funny dazed-lookin' eyes—and nervous hands. Wore a frayed gray suit and talked kinda thick. Nothin' doin'

there, Larry, that chap couldn't a killed a cat."

Larry nodded, a speculative look in his eyes, and soon left the station. He smoked countless cigarettes and wandered aimlessly for hours, thinking.

He was dazed. The explanation of the escaped ape had so fitted into things. He had felt proud of his work, so confident that the menace was laid, then out of the peace and security came this third crime striking down a man like Daly—a giant of a man, versed in ways of violence. Larry groaned in disgust, then straightened to attention.

Ahead of him in the crowds of State Street he caught sight of a slinking figure that he knew. He also had seen the nimble fingers steal to a comfortable-looking purse on the wrist of a fashionably dressed woman, and come away, the purse neatly clipped from its chain.

Unconsciously the lady went her way. Larry slipped through the throng, following the man until he turned down a side street, then he caught up with him.

"Wait a minute, Lifter, I've got you covered."

With a whine the man turned. His narrow whitish face leered into O'Toole's. He squirmed, trying to hide the purse, but Larry laid a hand on his sleeve.

"At it again, can't be decent, can you, Lifter? Well, we'll put you away for a stretch this time."

"Aw, say, O'Toole, have a heart—I'll give it back."

"Cut it! We've fooled with you enough."

He collared the man and started off briskly. Suddenly the fellow jerked his coat. "Say, Larry, listen, if I kin turn you a bit of info will you let me go?"

"Not on your pretty face, Lifter."

"Somethin' big — somethin' you want to know?"

"I know all I want to."

"Not about this—about that Horror business."

Larry glanced quickly at his captive. "What you tryin' to pull, guy?"

"Nothin', hones' to Gawd. I got some dope; come to my dump and I'll spill, if you'll let me go——"

Larry considered, eyes narrowed. He knew the value of crook dope, knew how these denizens of the underworld gathered information for which the authorities might search unsuccessfully. It all depended on whether the man was stalling.

TWENTY minutes later he was facing the Lifter, across a dirty, littered table in his cell-like room on lower Halsted Street.

"Hones' to Gawd, O'Toole, that's straight. I was a-stalkin' the dame 'cause I see she was alone and had a nifty poke. I got on the 'L' when she did, and when she got off, I did too. I kept out of sight and she never knew I was there—all I was a-goin' to do was lift the thing and beat it—see? Not hurt her or nothin'."

He blinked in self-righteousness. "It was the same with Nickel Dick—he was a-tellin' me about it. He trailed that guy from that house where he'd been for two hours, layin' for that sparkler he wore."

"All right, go back to the girl. You followed her off——"

"Sure, I heard her go down the stairs ahead of me. I leaned over to sort of figure things out and see if a bull was waitin'—I see her kind of dim. She started to go in, then stopped and pulled back like she saw somethin'—I was about to beat it down, when, hones' to Gawd, Larry, I saw somethin' slipping down the rails. I thought it was a shadow—but down it went—Gawd, it was awful!—big cat it looked like—I'm tellin' you, man, it had long hairy arms, and once it looked up—didn't

see me but I'm tellin' you I never want to see those eyes again. I was kind of struck dumb, thinkin' Red-Eye Pete's likker was actin' bad, when all of a sudden it jumped—I heard her squeal—heard that thing growl——"

The shifty eyes dropped.

"I suppose you rushed straight to the rescue?" Larry remarked.

"Ah, hell, no, what could I do? I was scared to death. I hunched down and listened till it was over, then I heard the 'L' comin' and thought if anyone found me they'd think—anyway I beat it down the stairs and had to go past that girl, to keep out of the light——"

"What became of the Thing?"

"I dunno. It wasn't there, but I found this." He pulled from a drawer a queer shining piece of metal. "I thought it might be silver," he added apologetically.

Curiously Larry examined it. It was about an inch and a half long, curved like a talon with sharp edges. At the base was a solid ring. Absently he slipped it on his finger, then stared fascinated.

"Good night!" he said softly.

The Lifter nodded, satisfied that he was earning lenience.

"An' Nickel Dick, he'd been trailin' that guy for ten blocks, but it was always too light or there was a damned bull around"—he glanced swiftly at his auditor to see if the slip had counted against him—"and then the guy stopped under the 'L' and Dick was about to pull his stunt, when somethin' dropped out of the framework—Dick heard it squeal and grunt—then he beat it—he didn't wait like I did."

LARRY sat before the fire in his room staring at the bit of steel he had come by so curiously. He was at the end of his deductive ability.

Two thugs on different occasions had seen two people set upon, in widely differing parts of the city, by a dark hairy thing leaping from the shadow of the Elevated, and one of them had retrieved this ring.

His fine theory had blown up. Poor Bozo had doubtless been sacrificed in a useless cause. He probably had hung around the vicinity where he was killed, frightened and hungry, until the officers had finished him off, and the Horror, whatever it was, human or fiend, continued its maraudings.

Larry sighed. He knew the precautions that had been taken, the lighting of all Elevated crossings, details of extra policemen, but in his heart he doubted if it would work. For all their watching, the Thing would strike again—and again. He got up impatiently. He was growing morbid.

Near midnight an idea struck him. He jerked the telephone to him, gave a number, received a sleepy answer and ten minutes later was speeding southward in a taxicab.

There was one man who Larry thought might help him. Alan Henry Moore, professor of psychology at the University of Chicago, had been a friend of the young Irishman since the days when they had sold papers together on Chicago streets.

Moore received him wonderingly, clad in pajamas and dressing gown. He was a tall, thin young man with a tumbled mass of blond curls and particularly gentle gray eyes, yet Larry knew that in his large, well-formed head was lodged a brain that had few equals for acuteness, power and penetration.

He snapped on an electric stove and started coffee, then sat down and listened intently to what his friend had to say, nodding slowly as Larry unfolded his theory.

"You think, then, it's a man, subject to spells of mental aberration, committing these crimes while temporarily insane? This thing——?"

He pointed to the metal object Larry had obtained from the Lifter.

Larry nodded excitedly and slipped it on his finger. "Look at the devilish thing, Alan. Suppose you wore ten of them—they do not interfere with your gripping—see? You could choke a man to death, then lacerate his throat."

Alan was smoking furiously, eyes narrowed. "You're getting into deep waters, Larry, my boy. We all know the old stories about the werewolf, the creature that at night assumed the form of a wolf and practised horrible rites. You've read of the leopard people of Africa—how they clothe themselves in the skin of the beast and leap from a tree upon the unsuspecting. Those things are shrouded in mystery, of course, but out of the tangle of myth and superstition we find a fairly straight thread of mental disorder, whether in savage or civilized man. That such a person lurks in this city is, of course, not impossible. The only person who has been mentioned as being sighted near the scenes of any of the crimes was that small chap with the suitcase, but he was seen only once."

Larry interrupted. "No, Nickel Dick saw him—the Lifter missed him. I looked into that vaudeville business and there was no such performer on the bill at the Alcazar that week. Still I don't quite see——"

"You don't see how a small inoffensive creature like that could overcome a man like Quinn or a chap like Daly. Well, that's a good point, but you must remember that a person under the influence of insanity, so to speak, is noted for his physical powers, at all times disproportionate to his size. I have seen a fragile woman who ordinarily could not lift a bucket of coal with ease, tax the strength of three men, and a man that under normal circumstances is of little strength, in insane fits, requires a straitjacket—you know that. I'm not voting in favor of your small gray man, but don't cast him aside as impossible."

Larry sighed. "Well, it's all theories. How am I going to sift through the better than two million souls in this burg and find the small gray man, even if he is the one I want?"

Alan rose to pour steaming coffee. "There's always someone who knows more than we do, Larry, and I know of one man who might help you. When I was a kid studying psychology in the same temple of learning where I now hold forth, he was head prof. A remarkable man, one whose mental powers are limited only by his weakened physical resistance. Professor Menjou was forced to retire on account of ill-health and now lives out on the North Shore alone. I don't know exactly what he could do, but I am sure he would be interested in your theory. He has all sorts of ideas about mental disorders, believes strongly in pre-natal influence, a theory which, as you probably don't know, is more or less frowned upon today. Even if he can't offer any working theory you ought to talk to him. Let's call upon him tomorrow. I'll make an appointment—I'll have time before my first class—10:30. Hit the hay with me and we'll drive out."

Worn out with his fruitless puzzling, Larry agreed and tumbled thankfully into bed.

PROFESSOR MENJOU received them cordially. He had a lovely home nearly twenty miles from the city—a sort of small estate on which he lived, enjoying his flowers and birds. He was a gentle soul, hair nearly white, thin shoulders stooped, hands delicate and fine, eyes merry and wise behind large spectacles.

He made his visitors take breakfast with him before consenting to hear a word of their difficulties, then tipped

back before the fireplace and gave them his entire attention.

Larry could see he held his attention from the first. He tapped nervously on the arm of his chair, ruffled his white hair, uttered quick exclamations, oddly animated from the gentle old man who had received them, into a small bundle of nervous vitality.

"Fine," he muttered, "fine—good theory—excellent—quite plain. I believe you have it—but now to find him—to find him—I must think——."

Suddenly he wheeled on Larry. "Young man, you have shown remarkable powers of reasoning, quite above those of the average policeman." He smiled acidly. "Excellent fellows, I assure you, but lacking, not imagination as is frequently charged, but knowledge, definite scientific knowledge.

"Now I must think. There must be some way to locate this poor suffering creature, for he is suffering, remember that, if in his moments of sanity he realizes what he has done—he must suffer." He tapped his fine fingers idly, then looked up abruptly. "Young man, give me time—come back this afternoon—no, that is too soon. Wait—leave me your telephone number. I will ponder the problem, and when I have reached a conclusion I will call you."

With that they had to be content. Larry felt that all the thinking Professor Menjou could put on the subject would not lay the Horror—he was considerably disappointed.

"He regards it just as an abstract problem," he complained to Alan as they were driving back. "I dare say he'll get the fundamentals all worked out, but as to catching the bird—that's another thing."

"Give him a chance," Alan comforted. "He's got a remarkable brain. He sits there in that big chair and thinks out some queerer things than you or I could in a life-time—give him a chance—that's all."

LARRY loafed through the long day. He was sick of the sight of newspapers with their glaring headlines, he hated the screaming questions about what the police would do. He considered his theory, which had looked so promising under the light of midnight, as freakish and impossible at noonday. Even if it were not—how would he find the man? He cursed feelingly and lounged back to his room.

It was near 9 that evening when the telephone rang sharply.

Professor Menjou's crackling voice came over the wire. He requested the young man to come out at once—yes, that time of night—he could take the Northwestern Railroad to Lake Cove—the professor would meet him there.

The night was bad—a drizzling rain, black clouds scudding across a wracked sky. It was a little after 10 when Larry stepped off the puffing local and found Menjou muffled in a great coat, awaiting him with a closed car. They covered the three miles to the professor's house in short time.

The library looked cheerful and inviting. A light lunch was waiting them and the professor would not talk until they had eaten. Then he leaned back and fitted the tips of his fingers together.

"Now, young man, I have an idea, but it will not work out at once. It requires time and I want you here where I can consult with you without the necessity of chasing into the city every time I want to ask you a question.

"I have been thinking deeply, and I am inclined more than ever to agree with your theory, wild as it may sound to some. Now, in the course of my long life, young man, I have collected many strange facts and stories.

"I will tell you one and you shall judge if poor Thomas Meeker, whom I knew nearly twenty years ago, might be the man you want. He was a child of strange parentage. His father was what is commonly called a mind-reader—his mother was a medium.

"Now while both branches are usually practised with fraud and tricks, both the Meekers possessed unusual powers and traveled over the world giving demonstrations. It is natural that their child should be a bit out of the ordinary. I knew him as a small retiring chap, forever worrying about something, given to strange fancies—a little 'off', we called him, and not without reason.

"What I tell you now I have from the son, who in turn got it from his mother. They were living in Chicago—it was before the boy's birth—and one night they went to a vaudeville show where an old acquaintance of theirs, one Arlo Saxon, was showing with his giant wrestling baboon.

"It seems that a few seasons before this, this Arlo and Meeker the elder had had words, a showman's quarrel about appearance on a bill, I believe, anyway it came to blows—and the baboon suddenly attacked Meeker, who was getting the best of the fight, and Mecker, a very strong man, nearly killed him with a club.

"The two men patched up their trouble, but the baboon bore a grudge against Meeker, and on this night in question, with the cunning of his kind, he escaped from Arlo and followed the Meekers from the stage door."

Larry was bending forward in interest. The professor talked quietly, occasionally gesturing delicately with his hands.

"The beast hid in the steel uprights of a building then under construction and unexpectedly leaped upon the man, and after a terrific struggle killed him.

"Poor Mrs. Meeker was a witness to the thing. When she saw her husband dead and the baboon vanished—she fainted. That night, in an emergency hospital, Thomas Meeker was born, prematurely."

The quiet voice stopped. Larry was conscious of the keen eyes watching him. "Is it any wonder that Thomas Meeker was strange, that he entertained peculiar notions all his life, that when he and I in our youth once visited the zoo, he betrayed unusual emotion at sight of a huge baboon?"

"Then you think——?"

"Nothing. I dug this story out of the cluttered storehouse of my widely diversified knowledge. It may have no connection, but the thing strikes one."

"But where is Meeker?"

The professor's face clouded. "He is still in Chicago. Up to a year ago I had his address—I saw him only a week ago. I think he would answer an advertisement from me." He sighed. "I hate to do a thing like that, but if he is innocent no harm will be done and if the poor chap has gone insane and in some horrible way is causing these atrocities—he must be checked." He smiled. "I want you to stay the night with me. I didn't call you out here to send you back. I just reconstructed the story and it couldn't wait. I'll show you your room. In the morning we'll write out the advertisement."

Larry rose impatiently. "Oh say, let's frame it tonight. I'll 'phone it in and get in an early edition—this can't wait."

Menjou smiled slightly. "Very well, as you will. This one I have drafted—what do you think of it? 'Will Thomas Meeker kindly communicate with his old friend Philip Menjou, who has news for him.'"

He toyed with the slip of paper. "That last is not true, of course. I am sorry to be the means of trapping

the poor chap, but when I think of the awful things he has done, if indeed he has—I sincerely pray I may be wrong."

He shook hands with his guest and left him in the pleasant fire-lighted room on the second floor.

LARRY awoke from a troubled sleep. The fire had died down and long shadows hung grotesquely from the walls. He realized that his hands were cold, his heart hammering and a damp ooze of perspiration chilling him.

Irritated, he settled again to sleep, but the moment consciousness dimmed, wild fancies leaped upon him. He was walking along a wooded path, the green stillness so intense that he could hear his own breathing—some frightful menace lurked in the unbroken curtain of leaves—then without warning something leaped upon him—great hairy arms encircled him——

Shaking violently, Larry struggled up. The rain had ceased and the only sound was the dismal scraping of a branch against the partly open window. He lighted a cigarette and lay back. He would be glad when the cursed case was over—unhealthy kind of thing——

The burning stub fell from his fingers! Terror, like nothing he had ever known, crept over him. Outside the window, something was moving! He forced himself to lie still, staring at that gray patch—then across it slipped a shadow—long arms—reaching——

Under an impulse of frenzy, Larry leaped from his bed, reached the window, jerked it open. The cool rain-washed air touched his face, the cottonwood moved softly with the light wind—that was all—or had he glimpsed a black form on the ground beneath the tree? He leaned out, eyes straining. Nothing but the faintly checkered shadow of the moving branches.

He went back to bed, feeling easier for the cold handle of his revolver within reach.

"Damned fool," he muttered. "The old boy's story got me to seeing things. He'll give me the ha-ha when I tell him."

After a time he slept. It was near 3 o'clock when he woke again. The moon had given up all attempts to break through the clouds, and darkness like the bottomless pit filled the room. For a time he lay still, thinking disconnectedly, wondering at his inability to sleep—then with the shock of a cold plunge, he realized that he was not alone in the room. In the far corner something was stirring.

Again he forced himself to lie rigid. For a time nothing occurred, then he became conscious of a faint disagreeable odor. Noiselessly he raised to an elbow. He could make out little beyond the bulk of the furniture—and the light glow of ashes in the grate—then slowly, unmistakably, something came moving across the floor—he heard the light scratch of—what? Claws—that was it!—the scratching of animal claws!

Cautiously he raised higher, clutching his automatic—then with difficulty he repressed a cry. Gazing at him from the darkness were two round unwinking golden eyes—he caught the odor strongly, heard a low hissing breath, and the Thing leaped!

At the same moment, Larry fired. Seemingly the shot went wild, for the hairy shape landed squarely on him, powerful arms wound about him like steel, he felt hot breath on his cheek, caught the gnashing of teeth—fought with all his splendid strength, tore one arm loose, buffeted the awful unseen face, crashed into the hairy chest, but like doom the Thing was gaining—he was helpless in its grip. He never had dreamed such strength

existed as those stringy arms possessed.

Once he cried out, then cruel talons sought his throat. He felt the deadly pressure, realized that blood was pouring over him—breathing became agony—then with one last effort he tore at the murderous fingers—for a blessed moment they gave—then came a tearing sob from the creature—he felt again hot blood pouring over his hands—limply the Thing collapsed!

For minutes Larry could not move. He was fully conscious, felt the loathsome Thing across the lower part of his body—heard the gasping breath. Only when all sound ceased did he attempt to rise.

Instinctively he shut his eyes from what the light revealed—then staggered closer to the bed. The huge form of a baboon, but the skin looked strangely loose and flabby. Conquering repulsion that amounted almost to nausea, he turned the Thing over—from the hairy folds of skin he saw the delicate features of Professor Menjou. He was quite dead!

"YES, man, it was awful." Larry, swathed in bandages, sat comfortably on a narrow cot in the general hospital, while around him crowded Lynch, one or two men from headquarters, a palpitating reporter, and Alan Moore.

"He told me the story so calmly and convincingly I swallowed it whole. It was only when I found his confession on the library table down stairs that I got it: he was Meeker.

"He said he knew he'd get caught sometime, but that he could no more help these 'reversions to type', as he called them, than he could help breathing. He realized he committed terrible deeds during the dark hours disguised in the skin of a baboon which he carried in his suitcase.

"Of course, we know the poor devil's mind must have been wrong from that night he was born. He mentioned in his letter how for the last year he had been bothered with strange pains in the head and a growing frenzy to kill.

"The strange part of it is, Bozo really started it. Menjou had been walking and caught sight of the beast climbing through the trees. He says something seemed to snap within him, he was crazed with the desire to kill, and that night the terrible plan was evolved—we know the tragic results.

"I don't know whether he intended to kill me or not when he asked me out there—or why he told me his story. Perhaps he realized it would soon have to end and wanted someone to understand. He may have just given in to his insane obsession when I was there, or it may have been deliberate. Anyway"—he shuddered—"oh I want to forget it," he said.

"Say, what does this mean?" Tommy Wilkins of the *News* cut in, pointing to a line of type in the Personal column. "It's like this: 'Will Thomas Meeker kindly communicate with his old friend Philip Menjou——'"

Wearily Larry motioned the paper away. "Oh Lord, fellow—take it away—I've had enough!"

Chally's Pity for the Man With the Wet Brain Led Him to a Heroic Course of Action

NERVE

By CHARLES FREDERICK STANSBURY

PRELUDE.

DE MAUPASSANT tells us, inimitably, of an officer who was afraid to fight a duel, to avoid which he killed himself before the hour for the conflict arrived.

Doubtless you never heard of a certain warden of the Tombs prison, who had his nerve with him all the time. He died not long ago.

There was a prisoner in the Tombs under indictment for an atrocious crime. He was tagged and thumb-printed bad, and bad he was. Why his hatred for the warden, I know not. But he had sworn by the eternal God to kill him, if chance paved the way—and doubtless he meant it.

The warden sat in his office. He touched a button and sent for the barber. He had the barber lay razors, and other tools for shaving, on the desk. Then he dismissed him.

The warden touched another button and sent for the bad man. The man was brought in handcuffed. He looked as though he had just broken loose from hell.

"Take off the bracelets and leave us," said the warden to the keeper who had brought the thug in.

The warden and the man who had sworn to kill him were the sole occupants of the room. The former went to the door and locked it on the inside. He handed the key to the convict, who took it somewhat sheepishly. The warden took an automatic pistol from his pocket and placed it on the desk near the razors. He then removed his coat, waistcoat, collar and tie, while the prisoner eyed him with dazed intenseness.

The warden sank easily into his desk chair, leaned back his head, placed his feet upon the edge of the desk. He appeared to be quite at ease; the grim ghost of a smile traced itself in the small wrinkles about his mouth.

"Shave me," he ordered.

* * * * *

IT WAS called a "sanatorium," such appellation being *de rigueur*, "sanitarium" sufficing for the needs of the proletariat.

It was set in the midst of a glade as beautiful as any spot in nature. A purling brook meandered through groves of silver maples, aspen and oak, fringed with orchards deep-laden with glowing, luscious fruit. In front of the building there stretched an extensive group of firs, beech and oak, the ground carpeted with pine needles and murmuring, golden leaves. Bright birds peopled the grove. Some of them sang sweetly and others talked confidentially—at least they talked to the gentleman with the wet brain, whose barred window looked out upon the pleasant wood.

The gentleman with the wet brain was locked in Room No. 7. To analyze or explain a wet brain would tax the ability of a greater alienist

than any now extant. The delicate, laminated, gelatinous membranes enveloping the brain and cushioning it against the walls of the skull become highly inflamed. They assume an individuality of their own and talk to the brain proper. They tell tremendously interesting lies, keeping the patient awake as they tell them. The brain proper believes these lies, whereupon gentlemen yclept alienists say that the patient is suffering from delusions. There are delusions of grandeur which make the patient happy, and delusions of persecution which make him melancholy or suicidal. Now what do the alienists do to this creature with the inflamed brain? Soothe him, of course. They soothe him by injecting Crotalin into his veins. Crotalin is the venom of the rattlesnake—*Crotalus horridus.* It turns the blood to water, and when it fails to kill, it evokes loathsome sores.

So much for the alienists and the gentleman with the wet brain. Locked in a room without books or a light at night, left alone with his delusions, congestion, inflammation and rattlesnake poison combined, tended to make him unruly at times. The hell of indignation broke loose within him. To stay the paroxysms of these tempests of the brain, they had him beaten—no easy process when dealing with a brain on fire with envenomed blood.

A word about Chally. In addition to serving as attendant or orderly in the sanatorium he acted as chauffeur of a car the name, or make, of which suggested the nickname of "Chally". His real name, I trust, is over his grave, wherever that may be—but I doubt it. Chally possessed the indefinable quality of lovableness, of which possession he was totally unaware. A bright-faced boy with an engaging smile in which there could be traced a tinge of melancholy, doubtless the result of sensibility of temperament.

Chally sometimes brought No. 7 his breakfast or saw to his bath. A strong feeling of attachment grew up between the normal lad and the morbid patient. Chally would have cheerily committed crime to assuage the agony written on the wan face of the elder man, but he could not encompass the impossible or neutralize the irony of fate.

The wet-brained one had been manhandled before, but Chally had not been commandeered for the bout. The chastisement had been administered by two husky young assistants, one a tough lad of the stuff of which gunmen are made, the other a dreamy young giant when normal, but an accomplished devil when under the influence of heroin, to which drug he was an addict.

Night had fallen on the glade, bringing insufferable depression of soul to the patients there environed. The bird voices were hushed, and the little brook murmured to itself in the darkness, possibly in protest at man's inhumanity to man. The locked-in one had developed a meticulously abnormal acuteness of hearing—an effort of the ears to do duty for the eyes. Groans, stertorous breathing and hysterical laughter reverberated through the corridors and then the eager listener heard the vehement whispered protest of Chally, who had been ordered to assist in the punishment of unruly No. 7. Chally implored—said he had never done such a thing—didn't know how. Yet even in his misery he was too astute to claim fondness for the man who was listening behind the door. His protests were in vain. He was peremptorily ordered to join the other lads and do the job. Why he did not run away at this juncture will never be known. Perhaps he, too, was a prisoner by night.

The wet brain was prepared for the worst, but determined to put up a fight. He pressed his ear to the crack of the door, listening intently. When he was convinced that the two other lads had left Chally alone in the corridor, "Thank you, Chally," he called through the door. The boy must have heard but, doubtless, could not trust himself to reply.

An hour passed in which the silence was as dense as the darkness. Then a sound as of muffled sobbing. Then running water in the bathroom, but a few feet away—a stifled groan as the bathroom door closed.

They found Chally's body in that room. He had filled the bath and held his head under the water until he was stone dead. They found him so.

For hours, that seemed eons, the imprisoned man continued to listen in the darkness. He felt that he was in the toils of mystery insoluble. Then he heard furtive whispering in the passage. He heard the soft *sad-sad* of felt slippers—a soundless noise like that made by black trackers in the dark Australian forest. He heard anxious murmuring and the swish and plash of water in the bathroom. They were washing the body.

More hours passed. In the presence of tragedy, No. 7 had evidently been overlooked, or forgotten. The silence was broken now only by the stertorous breathing of a sufferer. The wet brain was getting wetter. The man crept to the window and tore his hands in a wild effort to wrench the steel bars apart. Suddenly a brilliant light flashed through the trees in the grove fronting the house as the twin acetylene reflectors of a motor-hearse illumined the dark aisles as it wound its silent way through the roadless wood and stopped in front of the house of hopelessness. The position of the stars told the watcher that it was between 2 and 3 o'clock.

A sound of chanting soft and low. The doors opened and a radiant light flooded the roadway in front of the main entrance of the building. The hearse reflected it with ghastly brilliancy. By pressing his face against the bars and straining his eyes in a sidelong glance, the tortured soul in No. 7 could see clearly all that occurred. Two Sisters in wide-winged white coronets came forth and stood on the porch in an attitude of prayer. They were followed by two men, alert and businesslike, who bore between them a metal box that looked like a steamer trunk. They clicked it into place sidewise at the rear end of the hideously up-to-date vehicle. The Sisters retired and the closed doors left a black void pierced only by the bright eyes of the death wagon, which retraced its noiseless way, like a guilty thing, throwing a ghastly light upon the tree stems until its diminishing glimmer faded into infinite darkness.

With an icy sinking of the heart, the overstrained observer of this horrible function fell to the floor. There they found him next day.

Chally was seen no more of men.

A Story of Mystic Horror

ASPHODEL

By ARTHUR J. BURKS

THE old man's hair, apparently ignorant of a comb's caress, hung in wisps across his cadaverous face. I took him at first to be a crazy hermit of some sort, who had come to this little secluded valley in an effort to shun his fellow beings of the world outside. But when a vagrant breeze swept into the valley and blew the hair from before his eyes, I noted the high white forehead which I have come to recognize as the mark of the scholar. It did not take the stedfast, gently questioning regard of his eyes to tell me that this man was not insane.

For several moments he stood before me and stared into my face.

I imagine that he found much in that face to call for questioning. For I am a man who has seen much of the seamy side of life; who has suffered tortures such as stay-at-homes never experience; and, I whisper it, I am not a man whose conscience is entirely clear.

I wonder if the old man did not read all of that in the few moments during which he stared unblinking into my face.

In any case he nodded shortly as, turning, he beckoned me to follow whither he led.

As I strode along at his heels I stared about me at this little Utopia into which, fleeing from the law, I had inadvertently stumbled. It was a natural amphitheater, the encircling walls forming an almost perfect oval. Its floor was lush with verdure and with many kinds of trees which, hitherto, I had encountered only in the tropics, of which this little known valley potently reminded me. Certainly the Master of nature, looking down upon this place, must have smiled a sort of benediction—for its natural loveliness surpassed anything I had ever seen before.

And the old man seemed a very part of his secluded home. As he strode along I noted that his hands wandered now on this side of the path and now on that, and that his bloodless fingers seemed to caress the petals of the flowers and the lush blades of grass with which they came in contact. It was almost as though he sent them some message of love which I, being of the world outside, could neither understand nor interpret. It was as though this man was the veritable master of this vale and that these, his voiceless pupils, knew him and understood what he would have told them. As this quaint conceit came to me I felt suddenly very much out of place, as a beetle-browed burglar must feel when he blunders into the boudoir of a princess.

I wished to ask him many things, wished to talk and thus free myself of the burden of silence which had so strangled me since the beginning of my flight from my justly outraged fellows; yet I found myself unable to think of a single thing to say to this gentle old stranger.

I DON'T know just when I first felt the overpowering aura of menace. But it was sometime before we emerged from a gloomy aisle through

a patch of woods. I felt a chill of dread pass over me like a dash of cold water, and shivered slightly. Yet I find myself unable to explain adequately. The feeling was like no other I have ever experienced. I know what it is to feel an enemy's eyes upon my back; I know what it is to be shadowed through gloomy alleys when I haven't the slightest idea of the exact location of the shadower; I know instinctively when I stand in a cemetery, even though it is so dark that I can not see the headstones. But the feeling which struck me with the force of a blow was like none of these sensations, yet partook somewhat of them all.

Without understanding why, I bent forward slightly and strove to see past the old man. There was nothing but a longish rectangle of bright sunlight which signaled the opening of this tunnel through the woods. Not a sign of a living person. Not a sound that could have caused dread to fasten about the heart of the vilest murderer. Yet I found my steps slowing as we neared that rectangle of light!

Long before we reached it, however, my nostrils began to twitch because of a strange odor which was presently borne down the tunnel toward us. I knew it to be the odor of flowers, and though it was like no perfume I knew, it nevertheless made me think of funerals I have attended!

This, then, I believed, was the aura which had so upset me! A faint, elusive suggestion of the presence of death!

When we finally quitted the tunnel through the woods I stopped short with a cry of astonishment. For we had entered a vast clearing in the center of a wood, and the clearing was alive with waving lilies! The odor which emanated from them was overpowering, intoxicating, causing one's senses to reel with a strange exhilaration. Lifting one out of one's self, transporting one, filling one's soul to bursting with beautiful thoughts which no tongue may utter, no pen truly portray. I had no desire to run and throw handsprings—it was not that sort of intoxication. Rather I had the desire to seat myself quietly, to still even my breathing lest it disturb the lilies in their divine distillation of heavenly perfume; I felt like a worldly materialist who, for the first time, enters a vast cathedral unawares and finds himself stricken dumb with a voiceless feeling of reverence. The old man, too, had stopped; had he not done so I truly believe that I would have felled him to the ground for unbalancing a picture such as I had never dreamed existed.

He did not remain motionless; but the movements of his hands, as they went forth to caress the petals of the nearest flowers, seemed to wave and undulate in unison with the gentle nodding of the waxen beauties.

Through all these thoughts, such as I have not known since my mother first taught me prayers at her knee, there still coursed the strange aura which had so upset me, though I strove to drive it from my mind as not belonging in a place so beautiful, so permeated with the obvious love and care of the Master Gardener.

But even though I strove to forget this aura, wipe it from my consciousness, it persisted in raising its head, like an invisible serpent, to threaten my peace of mind. What was it? And why did it make itself felt so plainly in this spot which I found so beautiful?

My God! That I had never lived to have these two questions answered! For those answers have filled my sleep with ghastly nightmares; have robbed me of all the peace that might ever have been mine! I know that, having answered them, I shall always feel the icy chill along the spine

which I felt in this little clearing the first time I entered it; shall always remember, when what I wish most is to forget entirely!

Finally I broke the almost holy silence with a scarcely audible question: "What are they, venerable stranger?"

I started violently as he whispered the answer.

"They are asphodels!"

Asphodels! Famed in song and fable as the floral symbols of death!

Arrant nonsense, you say? I grant you that. Yet why had I experienced that eery, almost intangible feeling of dread even before my startled eyes had gazed upon this clearing in all its surpassing beauty? And why was that feeling, however I strove to subdue it, momentarily growing stronger within my very soul? As though it were something outside of and beyond myself—something which my inner being saw and recognized for what it was?

Slowly I turned my head this way and that as I measured the clearing with my eyes. I searched the great field of waving lilies foot by foot throughout its whole extent, striving to see if there were not some other kind of flower in this place to relieve the waxen monotony of the picture.

There was not another kind of flower that I could see! Nothing but row on row of asphodels, rank upon rank, each rank pressing forward against the one ahead, like a parade of tiny nuns in faded robes—the heads nodding, nodding, nodding, as though the voiceless beings strove to lift their heads above those of their fellows to see what lay ahead of the motionless march along the path of the breeze. Is that incoherent? I make no apology, for there is no man in all this world who can sit quietly amid such splendor and make his thoughts follow the usual grooves!

The old man arose slowly, as though he feared to startle his beautiful little symbols and, with the motion blending easily into that of rising, he beckoned me on again. We were almost across the clearing before I noted that I was walking softly on the very tips of my toes!

His house was beyond the clearing, in a second and smaller clearing, and it was a veritable bower of beautiful blossoms. Surely this old man was a great lover of beauty! As though, despairing of finding true beauty among human beings, he had brought himself hither to select such beauties of nature as pleased his eye and the unexplainable longings of his soul. He opened the door of his little house and motioned me to precede him. I found myself in a tiny room that was furnished luxuriously, that was a riot of sunlight which came through two windows in one side of the room. Once more, even though the place was as small as a doll's house, I felt as the materialist must feel when he wanders, unawares, into a mighty cathedral. The cathedral was there, the feeling was the same; but I was a Gargantua enjoying it. Thus only can I account for the feeling in a place so small.

The old man motioned me to a seat and took another facing me. He had closed the door, shutting out the elusive odor of the asphodels; yet, even though I caught no odor at all, within my mind, limned on the retina of my consciousness, I seemed still to see that clearing of pallid asphodels waving in the breeze, and as the picture grew and took tangible form, moment by moment, I smelled the odor as plainly as though I had actually still been sitting in the midst of the waving army of loveliness!

Still with that strange effortlessness of movement, the old man arose at last and stepped to one of the windows, sliding it back silently on its ways. Instantly the scent of the asphodels came into the room, more

overpowering than ever before—bringing with it that aura which caused the chill to settle anew along my spine.

Yet I found myself unable to move hand or foot! I still had that feeling of wishing to hold my breath lest a single fragment of the divine emanation escape me. I did not note the movement of the old man until he stood before me with his body bent forward until his eyes stared stedfastly into mine. Then it was too late!

I would have cried out, had that feeling not still been upon me. I would have risen to my feet had not invisible hands seemed to hold me in my place. My eyes saw the vague movements of the old man's hands as they arose gently from his side and began to move back and forth before my face; yet my mind seemed to register nothing. There seemed to be nothing in all this which was not as it should have been; it was as though it were the most natural thing in the world for the old man to be standing before me, his eyes gazing into mine, his hands making weird passes before my eyes. I could not have moved, even had I believed that those who had been pursuing me these many days past stood at the door, waiting for me to come out.

I do not know where waking merged into sleeping. What happened next I remember only as a strange transition which, at the time, I made no effort to explain.

MY NEXT conscious memory is of finding myself once more in the midst of that clearing of the asphodels, looking up at a sky all studded with the twinkling stars of nighttime. The odor of the flowers of death was all about me, covering me like a cloak, strangling me as it rushed into my quivering nostrils, bearing me down like a great invisible weight, beating against my brain like a host of unseen wings; pouring over me like a flood which I had no desire to resist.

Mingled with the odor, permeating it, dominating it, forming its very soul, was that intangible aura which had thrilled me so strangely and dreadfully when, afar off in the mouth of that tunnel I could barely discern in the darkness, I had first caught the odor of the asphodels.

I looked around me for the explanation. Would to God I had not found it!

Emerging from the pathway which I knew led to the house of the snowy-browed old recluse, came the old man himself, bearing a precious burden in his arms. Even that far away I recognized his burden.

It was a beautiful girl he carried cradled. A girl dressed in white that seemed to have the sheen of new snow in the moonlight. Her golden hair hung downward, brushing the petals of the asphodels as the old man bore her along. Watching the old man closely I saw his lips move ceaselessly, as though he prayed. The girl's eyes were closed as though she slept gently. One arm hung limply, while the other lay like wax across the gentle slope of her white-clad bosom. Her feet were bare, and as delicate as the petals of the flowers among which I sat to watch—they seemed like the waxen feet of some goddess, bloodless, fragile—feet that it were sacrilege for the hand of a commoner to touch.

Before the old man would have reached me with his burden he turned abruptly aside and plunged into the very thick of the waving flowers. Presently he stopped. He never looked in my direction. With his beautiful burden still in his arms he raised his eyes to the stars and his lips moved for many minutes. Then, gently, he lowered the apparently sleeping girl to the ground. All I

could now see of the two was the bowed back of the old man.

Presently I saw an arm upraised in the moonlight—an arm and a white hand. And gripped in that white hand was a slender something that gleamed like silver where the rays of the moon fell upon it. For a moment only I saw it. Then it plunged straight down, out of sight among the waving asphodels! Once, twice, thrice, I saw the silvery gleam. Once, twice, thrice, it disappeared from view among the flowers, while the old man's back straightened and bowed, straightened and bowed.

Was it imagination, or did I hear a faint sigh, like the breath of an imperceptible breeze, as it gently passed me, scarcely making an impression on my ears? Or did I really hear it with my ears? Or was it my soul that heard it? Or was there any sigh at all? I do not know. That I have never been able to answer. I only know that the old man came into the clearing of asphodels with a precious burden in his arms, that he lowered the burden to the ground, out of sight among the lilies; that his white hand rose and fell thrice; that his back seemed to straighten and bend, straighten and bend; that I at least *fancied* I heard a passing sigh, like the hurried soughing of a gentle breeze.

What, in the Virgin's name, had I just witnessed?

Almost unconsciously my hand went forth until the fingers touched the petals of a flower at my side. The petals were moist, as though a light dew had fallen. This I knew without thinking about it. Again unconsciously I brought my hand back, absently raising it and spreading the fingers before my eyes.

Then I screamed aloud in terror!

For there were crimson stains on the fingers, as though I had dipped them in fresh, warm blood!

Leaning forward, I closely scrutinized the flowers which nodded beside me. I discovered then that I had not touched the petals of the flower, but that my fingers had closed upon the stem, breaking it short off a few inches above the ground. The petals lay strewn upon the ground, while a red drop, like a tear of blood, oozed from the wound I had made in the stem. It was from this that I had received the stains upon my hand. For even as I looked, the red tear slipped over the side of the stem and trickled down its length to mingle with the soil at the base of the flower I had slain.

Then I noted that every flower I could see about me was tinged with crimson at its base, and that this tinge, moment by moment, was creeping slowly upward toward the flower at the top! Ever, as the crimson surged upward, it increased its speed, reddening the stem in its upward climb, creeping upward to assuage the thirst of the nodding asphodels. As it crept, the flowers above seemed to nod more swiftly, as though impatient to feel the caress of the crimson tide. And, as my eyes sped out across the waving flowers, I saw that, throughout the clearing, each and every asphodel seemed to nod the faster as the moments sped.

I must have gone quite mad then, for I opened my mouth in a great scream of mortal terror. Again and again I screamed.

But no one came to answer my poignant summons. I looked in vain for the old man. He had gone. I rose to my feet and ran to the spot where I had last seen him. I found his footprints and a spot in the soil where a burden had rested. But, though I searched diligently, I found no blood upon the ground.

I looked again at the asphodels. They were nodding more slowly now, nodding almost drunkenly, as though they had imbibed their fill and were sleepily bowing and bending.

I screamed again and ran, wildly, desperately, in what direction I do not know.

AGAIN that unexplainable transition. I awoke in the cabin of the old hermit and the sun was shining into the room, while the old man sat asleep in his chair, his hands clasped across his breast, the flower of an asphodel drooping between his waxen fingers. Gently his breast rose and fell with his soft breathing. A tender smile caressed his lips. As I stared at him he shifted in his chair, moving his hands on his breast—and a ruby drop fell from the wound in the stem of the flower which he clasped in his hand! I saw it fall and make a stain on his white cloak!

Madly I rushed from the house. In a frenzy I sought and found the pathway leading out. I feared to look to the right or the left as I passed through the clearing of the asphodels. But, blindly, I stooped and snapped one of the petals from its stem. I looked at it after I had entered the tunnel through the woods—to find that it appeared sickly and drooping, with the merest suggestion of redness at the extreme end of the broken stem!

Once only did I look back.

The asphodels were nodding in a sickly fashion, as though there were no life in them, and from the distance at which I viewed them their snowy petals made me think of girlish faces—dead white faces, drawn and chalky as those of virgins who have wept all their tears away.

The Derelict Mine

A Mystery Serial

By FRANK A. MOCHNANT

The Story So Far

JAMES GERALDTON'S uncle is reported drowned in the sinking of the *Titanic*. The uncle's death brings prosperity to the family, and James is sent to technical school. He is completing his course of training at the mine of which his father is manager, in the heart of Australia.

The lode in the old mine peters out, the mine is abandoned, and landslips completely close it up. But strange clouds, with an odor as from a zinc plant, are seen over the old mine by superstitious miners. Phantom whisperings are heard, and in the fading light of a winter afternoon a form is seen to glide into the ruins and disappear. Young Geraldton and his father see a light shining through one of the fissures of the derelict mine, but as they approach it, the light vanishes and peal on peal of blood-curdling laughter rings out all around them.

Old Sadler, the clerk, dies from shock at suddenly seeing young Geraldton's uncle (the man who was reported drowned). A document is stolen from the elder Geraldton, that would spell ruin for him in case his supposedly dead brother should be really alive.

Young Geraldton is suddenly called by his father's voice over the telephone, and arrives at the office of the mine to find his father dead, with a half-empty glass of poison by his side. He has been dead at least three hours before the son was called on the telephone! The son conceals the evidence of poison, thinking the father has committed suicide.

Then one night the youth is trapped in the mine by his frightful uncle, who has indeed returned, the report of his drowning being a mistake. The youth is held a prisoner underground by his uncle, who tells him that he must stay there until the uncle dies, and then bury the uncle in an underground grave, already prepared. The uncle promises to tell him how he can find his way back to the surface, *but will not tell him until after he (the uncle) is dead and properly buried!*

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THREE days I spent in that subterranean retreat. All told, there must have been some miles of underground passages. I wandered into several shafts, and looking up saw the

faint light of the upper world with its sprinkling of stars. But all means of ascent had long since crumbled into decay. In one of the many underground excavations the old man had a storeroom from whose larder we could have thrived for a month at least. In another was a small, but by means of devices that I never fathomed, exceedingly powerful electric plant. Another formed a general workshop, and another an analytical laboratory, and I am convinced that there were other secret places whose entrance I did not discover. For several hours during the day the whole place vibrated to the throb of a huge oil engine, several features of which were unfamiliar to me. This was the driving power behind an effective system of dynamos, to say nothing of a storage plant. The air in some portions of the subways was oppressive, but in the chambers referred to and the passages leading to them, a simple electrical scheme of ventilation kept the atmosphere in a very tolerable condition. The fact that the old man placed no restrictions upon my explorations, however, served to convince me that the only exit lay behind the locked door. I wandered about for many hours and came across old stopes and drives, but only in rare instances was I able to proceed down these more than a few feet before my way would be blocked by a mass of rock. Indeed I was cut off in this manner from the far greater part of the old mine, unless, as seemed more likely, the bulk of those underground works had suffered a general collapse.

The horror with which my uncle inspired me in the first instance was steadily increasing, and I took every possible opportunity of avoiding him. In his presence I found that his eyes were always upon me, and he appeared to be gaining some inexplicable power over my will. How long I should have been able to resist it I do not know, but during the fourth night, after he had inveigled me into his weird domain, the old man had a severe paroxysm from which he never really recovered.

He was in a coma all the next day, but toward evening he regained consciousness and signed to me to bend over him. He then managed to gasp, "I've always held your father in the hollow of my hand;" and four attenuated fingers and an emaciated thumb crouched over a shriveled palm that lay upward on the outside of the bed. "He won the girl, but he paid. Smart engineer, your father, but hopeless in business detail."

Here the old reprobate referred to things that I could not place at all, but I gathered that through the years he bled my unfortunate father white. Then he mentioned the extension, and I concentrated my mind upon his hardly uttered words.

"I sold the whole of my interest years ago, but the transfer was never registered. All he held to indicate the transaction was my receipt. He missed this receipt the other day, and when I threatened to put in a claim as a shareholder and make it retroactive he bought the document back from me for seventy thousand pounds. Whether he got off cheaply or not depends on whether he would have won or lost his case. I was not sure how it would go after the lapse of time, but I bluffed. Anyway it virtually cleaned him out," and the gleam of a malicious satisfaction passed over the ghastly face. Then the astounding narrative was resumed.

"'Your father never knew that when the old company sold out, retaining the plant, the shares came into my hands. The whole of the old mine property is now virtually at my disposal. Mark you, the precincts of this mine contain some of the richest untapped resources on the line of

lode. It beats me how the dad came to miss it."

After a short pause he went on, "Wrapped up in the old plan you will find a new one which you would do well to follow. When do you get your certificate? Due about now? Good! You will be appointed to the managership of the old mine within six months if you follow my instructions. Played out, indeed!" And the figure on the bed indulged in its last satirical laugh. "But look here," the voice went on, "when you have buried me where I showed you, see that my bones are not disturbed. There's no need to reopen that part of the mine."

Another pause, and then with his next words my senses simply left me for some moments under the shock of astonishment.

"Everything I possess becomes Myrtle's automatically when she reaches twenty-one."

My head swam, and when I came to myself a little, the unutterably awful eyes of my uncle were fixed upon me more intently than ever. I closed my own, but it was stupefying to hear a voice to all intents my father's saying, "Then you did not know that I was Myrtle's father?" and I was glad to open them again.

For the next few minutes a thousand thoughts chevied each other through my brain. So this was the appalling mystery surrounding Myrtle! I screwed courage to focus my eyes upon the monstrous face before me and pondered the contrast. As if in answer the old man spoke.

"I never did have any looks to spare, but after a strange illness on the African mines more than fifteen years ago, old Aunt Maria was the only member of the family who was game to exhibit my picture."

I shuddered involuntarily as I thought of my one visit to my great-aunt Maria.

Though he was my father's self-confessed murderer, I did what I could for the old man during the few hours that remained to him. After drinking a cup of some beef extract he sank into a deep sleep. About 10 o'clock that night he awoke, and as I went over to him he seized me by the wrist and said clearly and earnestly, "The door key and the dispatch box are together. You will know where when you have lowered my coffin."

Almost immediately he fell back on the pillow, and the mechanical regularity of his breathing indicated that the coma had returned. Those were his last words, and they were extraordinary. What instructions could I receive beyond those he had already given? Surely he did not intend to return and impart a post mortem addendum! Yet when he gave voice to this remarkable utterance he did not appear in the least delirious, and there he lay, jaw on breast and eyes agape!

THE whole thing began to impress me with a sense of the uncanny. I sat on the stretcher on the far side of the room and waited—waited; and all the time I felt that I was on the verge of a fearful nerve storm. Suddenly I became conscious of the loud ticking of the clock. Then I saw why it arrested me. It synchronized exactly with the old man's breathing. The effect of this upon nerves already overwrought was diabolical in the extreme. Besides the locked door and the door on the opposite side of the chamber there was an aperture in one of the other walls. It was through this that I passed to my long subterranean wanderings, taking the lantern with me. Now rendered all but desperate, I was making up my mind to seek temporary relief from this grisly monotony by entering once again those passageways, and getting if possible out of earshot of the depressing sound which the tall time-

piece so weirdly accentuated, when I became aware that the electric lights were growing dim. Almost immediately they began to jump. Then I was in darkness. It was unthinkably horrible. Then, while I was searching my pockets for matches, the breathing stopped with startling abruptness, and the clock seemed to pound the eery silence.

I succeeded at last in striking a light and the feeble flare revealed the rigid features on the bed. As I was fumbling with the wick of the lantern, several deep-drawn breaths came from the bed, and after a pause another, and, though through the aggressive stillness during the next few hours I imagined the sound again and again, I knew that that was the last. I hardly more than staggered into the storeroom, where I fell into an exhausted sleep.

I awoke hours later to find that the lantern had burned itself out, but I had noted a drum of oil and soon replenished the reservoir. I then decided to get the body out of sight as soon as possible, and had it encoffined with but little difficulty, but it took me a good hour to get it down the stope to its queer grave, and it was with the utmost effort that I succeeded in getting the coffin ready for lowering. I managed at last, however, and the rest was simple, and as the weight descended, the rope unwound from the windlass. When it was nearly all run out something white gleamed through the remaining coils around the roller. I saw what it was as the coffin reached the bottom and the hook was released with a snap. It was a large sheet of parchment. I took possession of it and at a glance read in large letters the heading, "FINAL INSTRUCTIONS."

I hastily wound up the rope—some twenty feet at least. Then perusing the document quickly in the light of the lantern I became acquainted with the contents.

"You are on the floor of a lift (hydraulic). Let yourself down. Key and box in cave behind coffin."

But I'd had enough, and lost no time in getting back to the inner room. It was 11 o'clock in the morning, and I spent hours in trying to find egress other than that suggested in the document that had been presented so ingeniously. I tried to find means to force the massive door, but I saw at last that it was hopeless. It was rather past midnight, though day and night are all the same in these subterranean regions, when I determined to go through with it. I knew something of hydraulics, and, arrived at the old shaft, soon discovered the valve control. I should have noticed it before, but it ran down a groove in the wall farthest removed from the windlass that had previously absorbed my attention.

Presently I commenced the descent. The valve was stiff, evidently through infrequent use. My downward movement was at first almost imperceptible, and continued to be phenomenally slow.

I was expecting it, of course, but nearly collapsed when it came. The head of the coffin as the lift descended seemed to protrude itself through the square hole in the floor. The glass portion of the lid was toward me, and the yellowish rays of the lantern shone through upon the ghastly face. The eyes were open and fixed upon my own, though they were closed when I had let him down. With a bump and a grind the lift rested upon its base, almost flush with the ground of the shaft.

I moved across the floor and made for a small opening in the wall behind the coffin, but as I moved the glassy eyes held my own and followed me till they peered at me through their corners, and the side of the coffin cut them off from my view. In a sort of daze I crawled into the cavern, and after a brief search found a small

box. Lifting the top, which was merely fastened by a clasp, I saw a large key and a number of papers. I closed the box and rushed with it out of the cavern, but instead of stepping upon the lift floor I found myself on the earth bottom of the shaft, which had been filled in up to the top of the cylinder. The valves were leaking and the lift was already some distance up the shaft. I had an indescribable dread of getting in front of the coffin again, but to operate the lift it was unavoidable. A sort of fascination drew my eyes to the coffin head, and the hideous face behind the glass followed me as before, though now from edge to front. I tried to persuade myself that it was an illusion, but I was by now almost mad with horror, and blindly I jerked open the exhaust. Still my eyes were riveted on the face, which was now a hundred times more fiendish than before. Suddenly a light grinding sound made me look up, and a new terror pended. In my distraction I had forgotten the lift, and it was within a few feet of my head and coming down at normal speed. I darted to the controls, but either through my excessive panic, or through something's having gone wrong with the mechanism, I could do nothing to arrest the descent of that massive floor. In a flash I saw my one chance. I could not reach the cavern in time for the lift to pass me. I dashed frantically at the coffin, hurled it down and stood erect immediately under the descending aperture. I retained my grasp of the box, but the lantern slipped from my fingers and fell over upon its side, and in its last flicker I saw the blood trickling down the now convulsing face of the old man as a piece of glass from the broken lid penetrated the flesh.

Darkness engulfed everything as the opening came over me, and I sprang through. But my uncle had fully recovered from his trance, and a moment later his screams curdled my blood as the coffin cracked like a nut, and during twenty eternal seconds the life was crushed out of his mangled form for good and all.

I felt my senses leaving me, but with a courage born of desperation set about to find means of escape. More by instinct than reason I tugged at the chains, which by the light of matches I found again in their groove. But tho lift was now completely out of action. It had become hopelessly jammed. Still only by instinct, I dragged at the chains till something seemed to give, and they sagged considerably from the wall. I put the key in my pocket, and the box I squeezed under my coat in front of me. Then hand over hand I scaled the wall by means of the sagging chains. Several times I paused to strike a match, and at last found myself on a level with the stope. Then began my real danger. I could just reach an upright at the mouth of the stope with one hand while I swung from the chain with the other, and there was more than twenty feet of darkness below me. Eventually I conceived the plan of throwing the box in the light of another match into the stope. This gave me greater freedom of movement, and I succeeded in half jumping, half scrambling after it, but as I approached safety the reaction became more and more intolerable. The air was becoming almost unbreathable, and I began to fear that I should suffocate before I could escape, for with the stopping of the engine the storage plant was soon drained, and the lighting and ventilating system had ceased together.

As I entered the chamber that had been the old man's living room, the ticking of the clock thundered ominously through my head. Then I struck a match, and for one brain-reeling moment I believed that I was mad, for there, but a few paces before me, standing erect in his coffin seemed

to be the old man I had left pulverized below! A piercing scream, my own, reverberated through the vault and subways. This awakened me as from a nightmare, and probably preserved for me my reason. Certain it was that as the match burnt itself out against my fingers I penetrated the illusion. The flare had fallen directly on the dial, and dimly lit up the outline of the clock!

I was gasping now, partly in frenzy and partly on account of the stagnant air. I staggered to the door, fitted the key as in a daze, swung open the door, and blundered on till I found my way through the tunnel and up the ladder, and removing the timbers re-entered the shack. I caught sight of the stars through the open doorway. A gust of wind revived me for a moment, but I knew that I was at the end of my physical resources. I could go no farther. Just why I did it I can not tell—possibly it was but blind instinct again; but the last thing I remember before a greater darkness than ever overcame me before is that I carefully and with my remaining strength replaced the timbers which concealed the subway at the back of the shanty. Then I seemed to be falling. The darkness had come.

9

When consciousness dawned again after an interval that might have been seconds or decades, I became aware of a vaguely familiar figure moving silently about me in a wholly unfamiliar room. I was lying, too weak to stir, in a bed that in a hazy fashion I knew was not my own. In a state of dreamy wonder and contentment I dozed and awoke many times before memories began to jostle each other in my brain. I was still too weak to raise my head or speak when I first recognized in the face bending over me Myrtle's mother. Then I remembered that it was not Myrtle's mother, but Mrs. Clysdale, the old nurse who had brought her up.

Within a couple of weeks I was convalescent and able to crawl about the place, and one evening after the heartiest meal I had taken since my terrible experience, the old lady who had pulled me through the crisis of the fever that supervened upon my swoon told me how I came into her competent hands, though she did not put it that way. She told me that she had been to the town one morning, and was walking along the main road home when she heard heavy but rapid steps behind her. On looking around she saw two men, one of whom she recognized at once as Lane, our foreman. The latter said "Good morning" as they passed, but they hurried by and almost immediately left the road and cut across to the shanty occupied by the old-age pensioner. She noticed them enter, and half a minute later Lane came out again and tore over to her, reaching her as she was about in a line with the structure. Lane told her that they had found me lying unconscious just inside the doorway, and he was hurrying off to fetch Dr. Harris. She went to the humpy and was met at the door by the other miner. I was then on the stretcher where he and Lane had placed me, and my hand was clenched around the handle of a small dispatch box. While they awaited the arrival of the doctor and Lane, the man informed her that when he heard the night before that I had been missed and had not been seen for several days, he immediately associated my disappearance with a stranger he had seen prowling around the office a few evenings back. He had at the time a notion that he had seen the fellow before, but could not place him till that very morning, when it flashed upon him who it was. He was not on before afternoon shift, and was taking a stroll down the street when his attention was at-

tracted by a number of old-age pensioners around the post office. Then it was that he remembered his man. It was the old-age pensioner who lived in that very humpy. He went at once to Lane, who was on the same shift, and together they came to the place, and found me as she saw me, except that I was on the ground.

When the doctor and Lane came soon after this, the former looked grave and said something about meningitis. Mrs. Clysdale wanted him to take me to her cottage and finally he agreed to do so.

My convalescence was rapid, and in a day or two I took leave of the old nurse to whom I no doubt owed my life, and was soon comfortably settled in my bachelor quarters. My illness had become pretty generally known, and, as Lane and Bob Trenoweth were loyal and did not reveal the peculiar circumstances under which I was discovered, was apparently regarded as sufficient explanation for my absence. Myrtle had not been told of the seriousness of my collapse, and my mother had been kept in ignorance altogether.

A few weeks later I received a wire from Melbourne informing me that I had secured my certificate, and almost directly I dropped into a vacancy caused by the retirement of one of our draftsmen. Let it not be supposed that a mine manager's certificate is tantamount to an immediate managership. Rather has it been sagely observed that there are more mine managers than there are mines to manage.

Then came letters from my mother and Myrtle to say that the former, considerably recovered, was about to pay a prolonged visit to a maiden sister in Brisbane, and that the latter would be coming home. I could scarcely contain myself for excitement. I was longing to see Myrtle again for herself, but in addition to this I was wildly curious to go through the dispatch box with her, for with the exception of the plan of the old mine that had been in my father's safe, and the new plans to which the old man had referred, the other contents of the box were sealed. Of these there was a large envelope addressed to a firm of solicitors in London, and another somewhat similar directed to Myrtle. Besides this was a small package also addressed to Myrtle. It seemed to be a little cardboard box that had been placed at the bottom of a cartridge envelope, the surplus end of which was folded around it and heavily sealed. For its size it was remarkably weighty, and from the moment my eyes lighted upon it, it affected me strangely. I did not leave the dispatch box at the cottage, but retained it in my possession pending Myrtle's return.

ON THE morning of Myrtle's arrival I slipped away from the mines and met her at the station. She stepped down from the train more beautiful than ever. The gleam of pleasure that lit up her eyes at her homecoming combined with the glow of health that she had acquired away had made her radiant. For the next few minutes, while I gathered her luggage till I committed her to the sober old cabby, Myrtle was the one glorious thing in the world; but that evening I went across to her home, and told her just sufficient of my experiences with her father to make the business of the dispatch box intelligible.

First she opened the large envelope addressed to her. In it were another envelope a shade smaller, and an envelope of letter size.

"Better keep the letter till last," said I. "It will probably explain the other things."

She opened the big envelope and in it found twenty fifty-pound bank notes. That was startling enough, and caused its little sensation, but I

was eager to see the contents of the package, which still strangely fascinated me. Myrtle fumbled for a moment with the wrapping, tore off the thick envelope, and then, finding within a strong cardboard box tied firmly with string and a knot sealed with wax, she handed it to me and said, "You'd better open this with your pocket knife, Jim."

I took the package, the outer wrapping of which had now gone, and a perceptible shudder passed over me as I did so. A nameless fear seemed to be taking possession of me, something akin to the horror I had experienced in the presence of my uncle in the bowels of the old mine. I made an effort to get myself in hand, however, and ripped open the package. In a moment I was gazing down aghast at something in the palm of my hand. It was a perfect model in ivory of the old man's coffin in its pyramidal case. Behind the piece of mica which represented the glass at the head of the lid was a marvelously carved miniature skull. The lid itself was detachable and kept in place by perfectly wrought little thumbscrews. As I removed the lid I saw that the skeleton was complete.

Myrtle glanced at the hideous image and exclaimed, "How horrible!" Then she looked up at me and said, "Why, Jim, what is the matter? You are white as a ghost."

I replaced the lid and put the thing face down on the table. Myrtle fortunately knew nothing of its grisly associations. I gave a forced laugh and replied, "Oh, I'm all right. Now read the letter, Myrtle."

It was a brief note:

To my daughter, Myrtle Estella Geraldton, otherwise known as Myrtle Clysdale.

Post without delay large sealed envelope addressed to my executors. By a prearranged code therein they will be informed of my death. You will enter into a considerable inheritance upon reaching the age of twenty-one years. The thousand you may use at your discretion. Pack ivory symbol securely and forward to Omar Moonsha. [Here followed a minute East London address.] You will receive a valuable acknowledgment which, however, you will need to guard. Farewell.

YOUR FATHER.

Myrtle sat in a glow of excitement with the letter in her hand, and I leaned on the back of her chair and peered at the curious contents over her shoulder.

Presently she said, "I don't like the Moonsha part of it. I have always been a bit afraid of these mysterious Orientals. Suppose you post it, Jim. We need not be in any hurry about it anyway."

I turned my head casually toward the object of our consideration on the table, but the moment I caught sight of it I started back with astonishment, and I felt the blood leave my cheek, for the hideous thing, which I had purposely placed face down on the table, was up on end, and the small death's head gleamed through the transparent part of the lid. I knew Myrtle had not touched it. It had been out of her reach all the while. There was about it something diabolically sinister, and although I soon discovered that its base was almost imperceptibly convex and loaded, causing it to assume very gradually the vertical, I could not elude the sense of fearsome repulsion that it had from the first inspired in me.

"We will get rid of the beastly thing at once," I said, and that evening I took it home with me despite my aversion, and the next morning committed it to the registered post.

It may have been that my nerves had not yet recovered from their more than thousand shocks, but for a week or two I could not help putting to myself several awkward questions. What if Lane or Trenoweth, or even the doctor, should drop a hint concerning the circumstances of my discovery in the old pensioner's crib? What if the old pensioner himself were missed, as it seemed certain he

would be? What if the entrance to the subways of the old mine were found and the indistinguishable body of my uncle brought to light from the debris of its coffin? I could see the possibility of still more awkward questions arising. I was in increasing torture from these apprehensions.

ONE afternoon Myrtle and I were sauntering along the ridge above the old mine and toward her home. We came to the pile of timbers and sat down upon some of the projecting lower logs, as used to be our custom. It was our first walk together since my illness, and as I sat down I tried to shake off the depression that had been gradually settling upon me, and I said gayly, "Here we are in the same old spot again."

But Myrtle did not at once reply. She was looking around with a puzzled air. Then suddenly she caught hold of my arm, and with her free hand pointed excitedly straight below us and exclaimed: "Why, look at our poor old monster! Who could have pushed it over like that?"

And I saw that the old boiler of our earlier day dreams was no longer like a huge beast trying to rise, but was rather symbolic of "down and out," for it was lying abjectly on its side. Then I glanced and saw that which confirmed the conclusion that was already dawning upon me. The remains of a shed had fallen, a heap of debris on the ground, and here and there were signs of newly sunken earth. In a moment I saw what had happened and what it meant to me. No fear now of awkward discoveries. I threw my hat in the air like a schoolboy, and yelled for Myrtle's delectation and my own: "Hurrah!" The old mine had had another and tremendous 'creep.' The chances were now a thousand to one that my uncle's subways were all filled in. His grave would not be disturbed in a thousand years.

The sun set and left behind him a glow of red and gold, and above us was the intense blue of what in the southern hemisphere we call our northern skies, as we sauntered home, Myrtle's arm in mine.

"One—two—three—four—five," she counted presently in girlish glee, and her left hand reaching across her breast kept tally on my wrist. "Five more months and I shall be twenty-one."

"And that's our wedding day," I informed her with sudden inspiration, and over her face spread that which rivaled the glorious blush of the west.

As we entered the gate, Mrs. Clysdale appeared on the veranda and beckoned us to tea. That was but a week or so ago.

It may be that my nerves are still a trifle disordered, yet it would be a certain relief to me to acknowledge that I have moments of vague apprehension concerning our mysterious mail to London, and especially that gruesome image which is obviously a secret token. It and the document should be about due at their respective destinations in the great metropolis almost any time now, but Myrtle, radiant and confident, is already preparing for our wedding day.

[THE END]

THE EYRIE

THE so-called "pseudo-scientific" tales have ever been popular with the readers of WEIRD TALES, and it is the intention of the editors to publish more and more of these. Pseudo-science is "false science;" but the "false science" of the past is the reality of today. Nicholas Copernicus' conception of our solar system, in which the Earth and the other planets revolved around the sun, was pseudo-science when it was promulgated. Benjamin Franklin's dream of harnessing the lightnings was pseudo-science; Jules Verne's "mad tale" of a submarine roaming beneath the seas was pseudo-science; but today these are everyday realities. Rapidly are the incredible dreams of yesteryear becoming the commonplaces of today. Edgar Allan Poe once wrote a story, *The Thousand and Second Tale of Scheherazade,* in which the heroine of *The Thousand and One Nights* tells the Sultan a tale of the scientific marvels of our own time, but so incredible is it that the Sultan repents him of having spared Scheherazade's life, and orders her forthwith to the chopping block, thus giving a new ending to the *Arabian Nights.* And the realities of a thousand years from now would sound like fantastic fairy-tales to us of today, so rapidly are invention and science transforming the pseudo-science of today into the reality of tomorrow.

It was pseudo-science, in the WEIRD TALES story of *The Moon Terror,* for Chinese fanatics to attempt to pound the Earth to pieces by timing the stroke of an electric hammer to the vibration of the Earth; but the pseudo-science of that tale was based on sound scientific principles. It was pseudo-science that imagined the *aethir-torps* and *ak-blastors* in *When the Green Star Waned;* it was pseudo-science that pictured the strange animal-vegetation which sprang from seeds brushed from a meteor passing through the Earth's atmosphere, in *The Abysmal Horror.* But the writers of such tales are prophets. They are dreamers, whose dreams give solid food to the minds of inventors; and they are therefore benefactors of the world.

It is new tales of this type (the Jules Verne type) as well as the purely "weird" tales (the Edgar Allan Poe type) that you, the readers of WEIRD TALES, seem especially to want. A fascinating tale of this *genre* is *A Runaway World,* by Clare Winger Harris, in next month's issue, based on the theory that our Earth is simply an electron in a vast cosmos, revolving with its fellow planets around the sun as electrons revolve around their proton in an atom, and subject to chemical experiments on the atom by the dwellers in that vaster cosmos. Pseudo-science, this, but based on sound scientific theory. In fact, the whole electronic theory was pseudo-science a

few years ago; and who can say that there is not a world of truth in this story of what would happen to our Earth if it were made the subject of experiment by beings so vast that they can not see our solar system through even their most powerful microscopes?

WEIRD TALES will also continue to print the best weird stories obtainable; ghost-stories; tales of stark horror; voodoo and black magic; tales of strange monsters; werewolves and devil-worship; in fact the whole realm of the bizarre and unusual will continue to be the province of this magazine.

The April issue was immensely popular with you, the readers. Your helpful letters and your use of the coupons at the end of The Eyrie can not fail to assist in keeping the standard of all future issues very high.

Writes Harold S. Farnese, of Los Angeles: "I wish to congratulate you on your April number, particularly on the new serial story, *The Derelict Mine*, by F. A. Mochnant. Here is the type of weird story which pleases me most—interesting, refined, reasonable and yet weird and eery, written in a masterful, compelling way. I am fond of planetary stories and stories of lost civilizations."

James Leboe, of Portland, Maine, writes to The Eyrie: "I want to congratulate you on your usual discriminating taste in publishing such a wonderfully fantastic tale as *The Phantom Drug*, by A. W. Kapfer. If you will publish more stories by the same author you will add to the ranks of your enthusiastic readers."

Ray Cummings, himself an author of prominence, writes in a letter to the editor: "Who in blazes is H. P. Lovecraft? I never heard the name before. If he is a present-day writer—which I can not imagine he is—he deserves to be world-famous. I read *The Outsider* and *The Tomb*. No need of telling you they are masterful stories. Quite beside their atmosphere—all those fictional elements which go to make up a real story—I felt, and still feel, looking backward upon my reading of them—somehow *ennobled*, as though my mind had profited (which indeed it had) by the reading. Never have I encountered any purer, more beautiful diction. They sing; the true poetry of prose."

Yes, H. P. Lovecraft is a living writer, and he resides in Brooklyn.

Writes Mrs. C. J. Esden, of Sidney, Iowa: "Of all the stories printed in WEIRD TALES (and I have read them all) I think H. P. Lovecraft's *The Outsider* in the April issue was the most original in conception and the most artistic in treatment and finish. It affected me as much as did Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*: as something entirely new."

August Derleth, Jr., of Sauk City, Wisconsin, writes: "If Lovecraft's *The Outsider* does not get first place I shall be disappointed in the readers of WEIRD TALES. That story is worthy of Poe, and, if I may say so, I believe it to be *better* than any work of Poe, and I have read every bit of Poe except his letters. I can not find words to express my enjoyment of that superb tale. As I was engrossed in it, my sister at the piano played Rachmaninoff's *Prelude in C Sharp Minor*, and its majesty was an excellent parallel to the story. Give us more, many more, by Lovecraft, please!"

Francis P. Mooney, of Brooklyn, New York, writes to The Eyrie: "I think *Lochinvar Lodge* in the March issue is one of the spookiest tales I ever read. Also, please give us more stories of the Black Republic. I consider Seabury Quinn your best author."

"I have just finished Eli Colter's *On the Dead Man's Chest*," writes Ruth E. Sapulos, of Winston-Salem, North Carolina, "and I consider it a

masterpiece. Having been a student of good literature for years, I feel quite competent in awarding it a place among the classics of literature with Scott, Poe, Kipling, and others. WEIRD TALES has kept faith with its readers in giving us the best."

Mrs. Charles Brandenburg of Hot Springs, Arkansas, writes to The Eyrie: "The April edition of WEIRD TALES is the 'Cat's Meow.' And *The Hooded Death* is the 'Snake's Hips.' I like all the stories so well that it is hard to say which is best, although I greatly enjoyed *The Vengeance of India.* That de Grandin knows his stuff and struts it; in fact all of Seabury Quinn's stories are just great in my estimation. Keep 'em scary."

Writes Elizabeth Adt Wenzler, of Brooklyn, New York: "Eli Colter's story, *On the Dead Man's Chest,* is truly wonderful; I have just read the last installment and must say this story is not likely to be forgotten by any reader."

Carl J. Smith, of Port Felix, Nova Scotia, writes: "Every day in every way WEIRD TALES gets better and better. I always read The Eyrie first. The cover designs merit a special word, as they are beautiful; in fact, it was the cover design on the December issue that first attracted me to WEIRD TALES. I especially like stories of the planets, far-away places on the Earth, and futuristic stories; also about the lost continent, Atlantis."

"I have tried many magazines," writes Nell Warsavage, of Lafayette, Colorado, "but I have never found one that I like as well as I do WEIRD TALES. I can hardly wait till it comes out each month. I think that ever since I first started buying it, it has been getting better."

Three stories are in a close race for first place among the April stories, as this issue goes to press. Again it is the weirdest story in the issue that wins your votes for first place: *The Outsider,* by H. P. Lovecraft; but this is closely pressed by *Wolfshead,* Robert E. Howard's medieval adventure story; and by the last installment of *On the Dead Man's Chest,* Eli Colter's serial story of spirit return. What is your favorite story in the present issue?

MY FAVORITE STORIES IN THE JUNE WEIRD TALES ARE:

Story	Remarks
(1)----------	----------
(2)----------	----------
(3)----------	----------

I do not like the following stories:

(1)----------	Why? ----------
(2)----------	----------

It will help us to know what kind of stories you want in Weird Tales if you will fill out the coupon and mail it to The Eyrie, Weird Tales, 408 Holliday Building, Indianapolis, Ind.

Reader's name and address:

The Foot Fetish

(Continued from page 734)

Three hours later Powell was closeted with Captain Brand. Soon the purser was summoned.

"Give Mr. Hubbard and Mr. Powell berths in my cabin," the captain ordered. "Place them at my table, Mr. Sims. And send up the passenger list immediately. . . Most remarkable. . . Unbelievable. . ."

Little was gained from studying the passenger list. There were many Chinese aboard the *Empress*, Hoys, Sings, Moosoongs, Lees, Wus,—more than a hundred in all. If June's abductors were aboard only a magician could pick out their names.

Nor did meal-time bring John Powell any nearer the solution; there were many Oriental men in the dining rooms; most of them answered the description, "tall, swarthy."

"We're stuck," Powell admitted to Mr. Hubbard soon after noon. "It ought to be easy to find your daughter's abductors, but it isn't. We aren't sure enough that they are here so that the captain can order a general search of every room. . . Let me think the thing out. . ."

Half an hour later John Powell went to the captain to get permission to borrow the ship's carpenter and the ship's electrician.

Captain Brand issued a general order at dinner that night. Every person aboard must attend a meeting at 8 o'clock in the grand salon to be instructed in procedure in case of fire or accident, he announced, and his officers carried the word to every part of the ship.

At 8 o'clock the first mate began a talk on the use of life-belts before a crowded salon. Every passenger aboard had been herded into the room. The mate talked rapidly, assigning positions, apportioning boats. Suddenly, in the middle of a sentence, the room was plunged into blackness. Every light was out.

Passengers huddled together in the salon; it was weird, fearful, the way the great vessel plunged through the darkness, blind, black. The uncanniness was increased when strains of music sounded somewhere, wild sounds from stringed instruments which grew insistently louder, like a wind gaining in volume. Then the weird climax——

Overhead in the blackness a faint green light appeared. It seemed to float overhead, across the ceiling of the salon. Gradually it grew stronger, a ghastly, phosphorescent glow. It took outline—the outline of a great foot, a giant foot, green and terrible. Suddenly on its side a jagged spot shone, blood-red and shaped like a huge human tooth.

For the fraction of a minute the strange apparition glowed, then the ship's lights flashed on again. For a dazed second the passengers remained staring at the great foot. Then they laughed uneasily. The foot was a wood-and-canvas affair, crude and rough, with a red tooth painted on its side, the whole thing strung with many wires. The spectral foot was a joke of the ship's crew, of course! The passengers crowded forward to examine it. But not John Powell.

In the first flash of the lights he searched the crowded salon; in that second he saw what he had hoped to see and feared he would not see—a group of Chinese men, their heads touching the floor in worship of that great green foot. "There!" Powell called to Mr. Hubbard. "Keep an eye on them until I can get to them!"

But the Orientals quickly rose

from their worshiping position, their eyes blinking, their faces grave and mystical. Silently they slid away from the crowd, below to the cabin deck. Close behind them pushed John Powell and after him Captain Brand and Mr. Hubbard. The Chinese turned into a stateroom on the main deck; the lock clicked shut.

Powell shook the door. "Open up, there!" he called. "The captain wants to see you. Open!"

There was no sound from behind the locked door. "Hurry!" pleaded Mr. Hubbard to the captain. "Don't give them time to hurt June if she's in there!"

Without more parley John Powell crashed his weight against the door. It splintered before the impact and he fell into the room. Instantly three Orientals were upon him; three more threw themselves on Captain Brand and Mr. Hubbard. But it wasn't a long fight. The three Americans had seen a white figure on the altarlike bed, the beautifully garbed, silent form of June Hubbard. They were fighting for a definite object now.

Blows, guttural exclamations, then the flashing of knives, the smack of fists and finally the bark of the captain's revolver,—all in a few seconds. Then a moment of silence, broken only by rapid breathing and smothered cries of pain.

ON THE bed, totally oblivious to the strange fight which had occurred, June Hubbard breathed almost imperceptibly. John Powell was the first to reach her side. The beauty of her, as she lay marble-white in her robe of cloth-of-gold upon silks of red and green, almost frightened him. She seemed a goddess of rare beauty, a queen of mankind. The long lashes of her eyes showed black against her white face; her hair was held back from her broad forehead by a string of many-colored jewels. A rope of pearls hung from her neck and were passed around her hands, which lay crossed on her breast. Her lips, contrasting vividly with her pallor, were opened in a slight, fixed smile. One foot, white and slender, was extended from the coverings. Lighted tapers surrounded it, revealing on the instep the odd, tooth-shaped mark.

All this John Powell saw in a moment. Then Mr. Hubbard was at his side, seizing June's hands, caressing her face with his fingertips. The more practical captain was already issuing orders. "Powell, take my gun and keep those three Chinese in the corner covered. Those on the floor won't bother anyone again for a while. They're badly hurt. I'll get the ship's surgeon and an officer with irons. Watch those birds, and if they move, shoot!"

The ship's doctor examined June while a deck officer and Captain Brand took charge of the Chinese. The examination was brief. It ended when the doctor forced open June's mouth and took from it a white, glutinous substance. "Hashish," he said, "or bhang. Something of that nature which made her happily unconscious. Lucky thing, too. She'll not remember the horror of what she's been through. . . No, she's uninjured as far as I can tell. . . She'll be conscious shortly. We'd better get her into another room, out of this incense cloud, and put her in civilized clothes. . . Mr. Hubbard, I'll send a stewardess. Mr. Powell and I will go up and have a bracer and he can tell me the story. I guess from the attitude of the Chinese that they have found a new goddess! . . . Come, Mr. Powell, we'll go. I've heard many strange things on this steamship, but this——"

John Powell turned to go. Then irresistibly his eyes were drawn to the white figure on the bed. His eyes caressed the girl's beauty; he felt a strong desire to take the slender foot in his hands, raise it to his lips and

kiss it; to touch devoutly the odd mark on the instep. There came to him a feeling of certainty that his bachelor days were almost over, and his heart leaped with gladness.

"The foot fetish," he murmured to himself. "I can understand its power. Why, I almost worship that mark myself, for it brought me to her side after many strange happenings." He glanced at the last of the Chinese who was being marched away under heavy irons. For a brief moment it seemed that a flash of mutual understanding passed between the blue eyes of the American and the black, mystical eyes of the Oriental fetish-worshiper.

[THE END]

Have You Read Page 724?

STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF CONGRESS OF AUGUST 24, 1912,

Of Weird Tales, published monthly at Indianapolis, Indiana, for April 1, 1926.

State of Indiana } ss.
County of Marion }

Before me, a notary public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared Wm. R. Sprenger, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of the Weird Tales and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management (and if a daily paper, the circulation), etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 443, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are:

Publisher—Popular Fiction Publishing Company, 408 Holliday Bldg., Indianapolis, Ind.

Editor—Farnsworth Wright, 408 Holliday Bldg., Indianapolis, Ind.

Managing Editor—None.

Business Manager—William R. Sprenger, 408 Holliday Bldg., Indianapolis, Ind.

2. That the owner is: (If the publication is owned by an individual his name and address, or if owned by more than one individual the name and address of each, should be given below; if the publication is owned by a corporation the name of the corporation and the names and addresses of the stockholders owning or holding one per cent or more of the total amount of stock should be given).

Wm. R. Sprenger, 408 Holliday Bldg., Indianapolis, Indiana.

Farnsworth Wright, 408 Holliday Bldg., Indianapolis, Indiana.

George M. Cornelius, 2457 E. Washington St., Indianapolis, Indiana.

George H. Cornelius, 2457 E. Washington St., Indianapolis, Indiana.

P. Cornelius, 2457 E. Washington St., Indianapolis, Indiana.

3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: (If there are none, so state). None.

4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company, but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest, direct or indirect, in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him.

5. That the average number of copies of each issue of this publication sold or distributed, through the mails or otherwise, to paid subscribers during the six months preceding the date shown above is_____. (This information is required from daily publications only.)

WM. R. SPRENGER,
Business Manager.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 1st day of April, 1926.

ANNA M. MORGAN,
[SEAL] Notary Public.

My commission expires January 26, 1928.

Spider-Bite

(Continued from page 750)

light burst out from within as the candle-light fell upon a great mass of wondrous gems, glistening with water and reflecting a rainbowlike radiance into the faces of the two men who leaned close, drinking in the beauty.

A sound from above caused them to look up. Instantly their surprize and delight were replaced by sudden terror, for upon the edge of the pit, his eyes blazing a maniacal red, stood Za, the scribe. He held aloft a heavy carved stand and slowly gathered himself to send it crashing down upon them. Seeing that he was observed, he paused. His dry, blackened lips writhed back from his yellow teeth in a fiendish mockery of a smile and the low cackle of a madman grated from between his set jaws.

Looking above and beyond him, Phil was conscious of something else —a huge, white, hairy something that twinkled across the ceiling and halted above the maniac. As Za drew himself to his full height and tightened his grip on his brutal weapon, the white, handlike thing upon the ceiling dropped, alighting tenacious as a burr on the back of the brown man's neck. Za shrieked and dropped the stand to one side. He fell to his knees, clutching at the horror on his back.

Phil hastily tucked the little casket of jewels under his arm and scrambled up out of the pit after the professor. There both men stopped aghast at the horrible sight on the tomb floor before them.

A mighty tomb-spider, a giant of its kind, was clamped in a deathlike grip to the spot on Za's neck that reeked of the odor of crushed leaves from the Mona bush. The huge thing's thick, hairy legs twisted and

knotted themselves convulsively as its greedy fangs sank deep. The brown man writhed in agony, his glazing eyes rolling wildly in their sockets. One arm shot out and grasped Phil by the ankle, dragging him toward the edge of the empty pool. The young man screamed in mortal terror and kicked himself free. His glance swept down into the pit, and as if touched by a high-voltage wire his whole body suddenly stiffened. The color drained swiftly from his face, leaving it a ghastly gray. The case of jewels slipped unheeded from his fear-paralyzed arms and crashed to the floor, sending the glittering baubles rolling in the dust. . . *Trooping up out of the foul subterranean darkness of the great square drainage hole at the bottom of the pit, came countless thousands of great white spiders!* In an undulating tide of furry evilness they crept up from the lower chamber that had been their prison and from which the water had just driven them. The professor, too, saw the advancing horde of horror, and the two men's eyes met in unutterable terror.

A low moan from the dying Za broke the spell. Snatching up a huge handful of the wondrous stones, Phil led the dash for the doorway, where for a moment he paused and looked back.

As Za, his spinal cord severed, sank at last into the eternal rest which should have been his three thousand years before, he rolled limply over on his back, crushing under him the bloated form of the immense spider. With a noise like the bursting of a great oily bubble the creature's thin skin split, and it spattered out into a formless blot. The blood from the lacerated neck swelled into the sticky puddle that had been a tomb-spider, and trickled out to meet the oncoming wave of glittering eyes and writhing legs that was flowing soundlessly over the edge of the pit.

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