Weird Tales

The Unique Magazine

APRIL 1927

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Weird Tales

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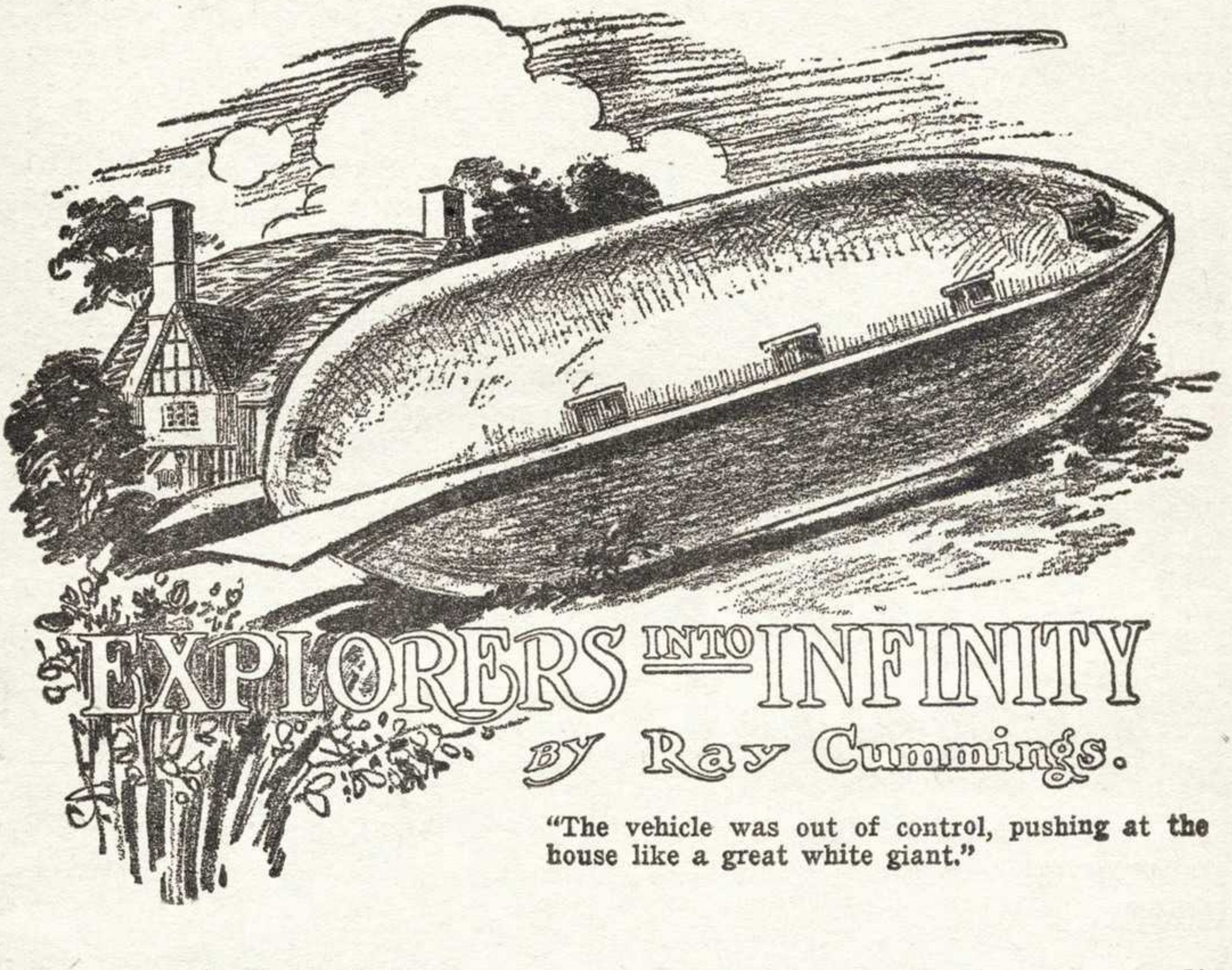


EXPLORERS INTO INFINITY

BY Ray Cummings.

"The vehicle was out of control, pushing at the house like a great white giant."

FOREWORD

SOME of my present readers will doubtless remember "The Girl in the Golden Atom." When I wrote that book of the realm of infinite smallness there was in my mind its logical converse, the realm of the infinitely large. The one a complement to the other. And so I offer "Explorers Into Infinity," in no sense as a sequel to "The Girl in the Golden Atom," for fictionally they have no connection, but rather as its companion story.

You will find here a complete theory of the material universe as I conceive it may perhaps really be. To my own imagination—and I think very likely to your own—it is difficult to conceive of an infinite distance beyond the stars—empty Space stretching out forever. Nor is Einstein more satisfying to me, rather less so, for out beyond the Einstein system of curved Space must lie something or nothing. It is the nothingness which puzzles me. I have tried vainly to imagine a realm, infinitely large, of unending nothingness. Time is equally puzzling. I can conceive of eventful eons lying ahead of us; but rob that time of its future events and I flounder. To me at least, the conception of Time with nothing ever happening anywhere is impossible. To me also, an event presupposes the existence of something; and so, in my effort to imagine the infinitely large—Space illimitable, Time unending—I am forced to conceive what must fill that Space, what must happen to create that time.

You may call this tale fantastic, weird, bizarre. Doubtless it is. But with our most powerful microscopes reaching inward so tiny a distance to see no end in infinite smallness; our greatest telescopes groping futilely

out into largeness unending to our vision, what is left but our imagination? And that, at least, we can send winging into the infinite!

I would not have you fear from this foreword that my story may be some pedantic, heavily technical exposition. It is not; for it is fiction only—a romance with which to entertain you; an effort, by using fictional methods, to reduce theories purely imaginative into concrete form with as great a degree of plausibility as may be. It is this only I desire: to carry you with me as you read; to make plausible this flight of our imaginations momentarily set free from the tiny everyday universe which is all we have physically to envisage.

RAY CUMMINGS.

CHAPTER 1

FREEDOM IN TIME AND SPACE

I WAS busy with the Martian mail which had just arrived when the message from Brett Gryce reached me. I did not apprehend that there was anything of secrecy about it, since he was using the open air; yet there was in his voice a note of tenseness and his summons was urgent.

"I can't come, Brett, until I get through the mail." I was rushed, and in a mood of ill-temper at the universe in general.

"When will that be?" he demanded.

"I don't know. It's accursedly large. Most of it seems to call for radio distribution—these Martians are always in a hurry."

"Come when you can," he said quietly.

"Tonight?"

"Yes—tonight. No matter how late—I must see you, Frank."

"I'll come," I said, and cut him off.

It was long past trinight, with dawn beginning to brighten the sky beyond the masonry of lower Great-New York, when I had disposed of those miserable Martian dispatches. The Gryces lived in the Southern Pennsylvania area. My aerocar was at hand. I had rather planned to use it; but I was tired and in no mood for effort. I decided to take the pneumatic, since there was a branch—little traveled, it is true—which would drop me within some twenty kilometers of the Gryce home.

They gave me an individual cylinder, with a bed if I cared to sleep. I did not. I lay there wondering what Brett could want of me; pleased also that I would see Francine—dear little Frannie. . . .

Occasionally I would call the Director ahead. They are sometimes careless in the switching of special individual cylinders; and I had no wish to pass the branch and find myself bringing up at some gulf terminal with half the morning getting back. Once I called Brett. He would meet me with his aero at the end of the branch when I arrived. He, too, reminded the Director. A surly sort of fellow; the Gryces had already reported him to the General Traffic Staff of Great-London.

I was not misdirected, however; but it was broad daylight when I emerged to find Brett impatiently awaiting me. And in a few minutes more we were landing at the aero-stage beside the Gryce home.

It was a simple enough place—for all Dr. Gryce's reputed wealth. An estate of a few kilometers, set in a heavy grove of trees with a high metallic wall about it. The granite house itself was small, unpretentious. There were few outbuildings; one a large rectangular affair which vaguely I understood was a workshop. I had never been in it. I knew old Dr. Gryce was interested in science; in his day he had materially advanced civilization with several

fundamental devices. But what—if anything—he might be doing now, I had no idea.

Brett would tell me nothing beyond the fact that his father had suggested they send for me. But he seemed excited, tense. Dr. Gryce greeted me with his familiar kindliness. Though I did not see as much of this family as I would like (my business with the Interplanetary Mails was wholly underpaid and miserably confining), yet I counted the Gryces among my closest friends.

Dr. Gryce said, "We are very glad to see you, Frank. Come outside. Frannie is preparing breakfast."

His manner was grave and quiet as always. But there was about him also an air of tenseness; and an aspect of apprehension. And it struck me, a sort of weary, resigned depression which suddenly made his years sit more heavily upon him. He was a man of some eighty odd; and though for him no more than twenty or thirty years of life could be anticipated, I had never considered him really old. He was small, slight of frame, but erect, sturdy and vigorous. A smooth-shaven face with no more lines upon it than a keen intellect and a character once wholly forceful would engrave. And a mass of snow-white shaggy hair to make his head appear preternaturally large.

He seemed old now, however, with that sense of depression hanging upon him. And an indefinable aspect of fear.

I must allot a word to picture the three children of Dr. Gryce, motherless since childhood. Brett was now twenty-eight—three years older than myself, and physically my opposite. I am short, slender and rather dark. And—so they tell me—not too even of temper. Brett was a blond young giant. Crisp, wavy blond hair, blue eyes and the strong-featured, ruddy face of a handsome athlete. But not too handsome, for there was upon him no consciousness of his essentially masculine beauty. He was wonderfully good-natured. His was a ready, hearty laugh. He looked at life often from the humorous viewpoint. But he had also a touch of his father's grave dignity; and a keen intellect and a soberness of thought and reason far beyond his years.

The two other children—Martynn and Francine—were twins, now just seventeen. Alike, physically and temperamentally, as children of a birth traditionally should be. Slim and rather small—Martynn about my height; Francine somewhat shorter. Both blue-eyed, with blond hair. Francine's hair was long-waving tresses which she wore generally in plaits over her shoulders; Martynn's was short and curly. They were rather alike of feature; a delicacy of mold which gave to Martynn a girlishness. But not an effeminacy, for he was a young daredevil; and his sister hardly a lesser one. In childhood and adolescence an impish spirit of deviltry had always seemed to possess these twins; a spirit of mischief which had made them a great trial to their father. It had turned, now that they were nearing maturity, into an apparent desire for reckless adventure—the product of abounding health, and bubbling, irrepressible good nature. They adored each other; were constantly together, with youthful escapades threatening limb and life and complete disaster, out of which they would emerge or be extricated with dauntless spirits unperturbed.

The greater maturity of womanhood at seventeen had brought to Frannie moments of gentleness, sweetness and a simple dignity. But they were brief moments, and no more than a word or look from her twin was needed to dispel them. Martt himself was without a vestige of dignity. But they were no fools,

these twins. They could, upon strict necessity, give sober, intelligent thought to any problem at hand (Martynn had won honors at the Great-London University); but of sober, matured action they were incapable. Fearless — unreasonably fearless. But irresistible, likable, and apparently quite capable of being restrained. A word from Dr. Gryce, or from Brett—and to a lesser extent from me who had known them from childhood—brought instant though often very temporary obedience. They considered themselves quite grown up now. In truth, at seventeen, Frannie was to my eyes a really beautiful young woman.

II

We sat in a little arbor beside the house, with its breakfast table already laid. Dr. Gryce, Brett, and myself. Martt was with Frannie preparing the meal. It was evidence of the simplicity which marked the Gryce household. In these days of mechanical devices for almost everything—and the usual multiplicity of servants—there was not a meal prepared for Dr. Gryce save by his daughter.

I was very curious to learn why they had sent for me; but I had no need to question, for at once Dr. Gryce plunged into it.

"I hope, Frank, that you can stay —well, at least a few days with us. Can you?"

I stared. The Day Officer of the Manhattan Interplanetary Postal Division was undoubtedly already in a rage at my absence. I said so. "A few days? Dr. Gryce, I dread every conjunction that brings these accursed mails—my divisional officers think it's a crime even to eat or sleep when a planet is near us."

He smiled. "I imagine I can fix it."

"Then I'll stay, of course. If you could fix the planetary orbits so that they were parabolas, Dr. Gryce, it would suit me exactly."

He and Brett both were smiling, but Dr. Gryce's smile was momentary, for at once that indefinable air of trouble returned to him.

"Frank," he said, "I hardly know how to begin telling you what we have done—are about to do. It seems curious also—I know it will strike you so, you have been such a friend to me and my children—that during all these years we have given you no hint of our purpose."

"We have told no one," Brett put in: "no one in the world."

I said nothing, but my curiosity increased. It was doubtless of grave import, this thing they had to tell me; the solemnity, earnestness which stamped them both was unmistakable.

For a moment Dr. Gryce was silent; then he said abruptly, "You know, Frank, all my life I have been engaged with science. In a measure, I have been successful; there are a few devices which will bear my name when I am gone."

I nodded. "I know that very well, Dr. Gryce."

"But all those things," he added earnestly, "all that I stand for to the world, has really been of little importance to me. My main labor, goal, dream, if you will, I have never told anyone—not a living person except my children. For ten years past Brett has been helping me. And though you would hardly believe it, for the last year or two Martt and Frannie have been of material aid in the accomplishment of my purpose."

"What branch of science?" I asked. "And you've accomplished it? You're ready to give it to the world?"

"Accomplished it—yes. But we are not ready to give it to the world —perhaps we never shall. There would be evil in it—evil diabolical—in untrained or unscrupulous hands.

But we are ready to test it—a practical test. Tonight, Frank, my boy Brett is going upon an adventure ——"

The fear which had been lurking in his eyes leaped to stamp his other features. He was afraid for Brett—afraid of this thing they were going to do. He had stopped abruptly; and more quietly he added:

"I want you to understand me, Frank, and so for a moment we must be wholly theoretical. This thing we are about to do involves the construction of our whole material universe. You know, of course, that no limit has been found to the divisibility of matter?"

His sudden question confused me. "You mean," I stammered, "that things can be infinitely small?"

"That there is no limit to smallness," Brett put in. "An atom—an electron—they are mere words. Within them conceivably might be a space with stars, planets, suns—worlds of their own so tiny that compared to the Space in which they roam that Space would seem—and would be—illimitable. Picture that, Frank. And picture upon one of those worlds inhabitants of proportionate smallness. What would they see, feel or think of the universe? Would they not conceive it about as we do? Picture them with powerful microscopes, looking downward into the matter composing their world. They would be aware of molecules, atoms—they would gaze down into Space unending. Another realm within their own. And within that one—others and yet others to infinity. The conception confuses you, Frank? It need not. Each of those realms is tiny—or large—according to the viewpoint. There can be no such thing as absolute size."

"That is what I mean," Dr. Gryce interrupted eagerly. "Absolute size—how can you conceive it? You can not. A thing is large or small only in relation to something else smaller or larger."

He waved his hand to the rolling landscape with the morning light and shadow upon it, visible through the arbor.

"There is our everyday world, Frank. How big is it? You can not say. Millimeters, meters, kilometers, helans, light-years—those are only words with which we designate a comparison. Compared to what our microscopes show us, this world of ours is very large, but compared to the spaces between the stars—the stars themselves—it is very small. Try then to imagine its absolute size. You can not, because there is no such thing. A universe within what we call an atom—another realm within an atom of matter upon one of the worlds of *that* universe—is not an extraordinary state of smallness *until we compare it with ourselves.*

"And this world of ours. It is normal to us; of no absolute size whatever—neither large nor small—until we compare it to something else. But suppose we visualize larger realms? Suppose we say these planets, stars—all the starry universe within our ken and this visual space which contains them—suppose we imagine all that to be contained within the atom of a particle of matter of some comparatively still larger realm? At once our world and ourselves shrink into smallness. Where a moment ago we had seemed large, now we seem small. Yet that other gigantic world within which we are contained—if we could live in it our telescopes would show us still larger Space unending. We would feel tiny—and of actuality *we would be tiny*—contemplating Space and size so much larger."

"And there you have infinity of Space," Brett added, as his father paused. "Unending Space both smaller and larger than ourselves. We—everything of which we can be

physically aware—represent no more than a single step in the ladder which has no bottom nor no top. You can not conceive an end in either direction. There is no such thing. Nor —as Father says—can you declare anything to be small or large considered by itself alone. This then is Space as we conceive it to be. Illimitable, unending—infinite Space."

The conception momentarily seemed wholly beyond my grasp. What I would have answered when for a moment Dr. Gryce and Brett paused I do not know, for from the house the approaching voices of Martt and Frannie reached us.

"You'll fall, I tell you! Frannie, give me that!"

"I won't."

"You'll trip over the wires and you'll fall and smash it!"

"I won't."

The sound of a crash. And Martt's voice, "There, I told you!"

They were upon us, wheeling the tray laden with breakfast; Martt, flushed, laughing. "Oh, hello, Frank —they didn't switch you wrong, did they? Frannie broke the heater coils —if the breakfast gets cold, don't blame me."

And Frannie, also flushed and laughing and a trifle rueful over the mishap. Dressed in a blue blouse and widely flaring, knee-length trousers, with her golden hair tossing on her shoulders. The picture of a little housewife, of early morning informality. I thought I had never seen her so beautiful.

III

"That, Frank, is our conception of the infinity of Space."

With breakfast finished Brett had resumed the discussion. We were all seated in the arbor. Martt and Frannie momentarily were quiet, seemingly keenly interested in the impression upon me which they anticipated would come from their father's disclosures.

Dr. Gryce said, "The idea of Time unending is indissolubly bound with the concept of infinite Space. You will realize, Frank, for some centuries it has been understood that Time and Space are inextricably blended. We think instinctively of Space as a tangible entity—of length, breadth and thickness. And of Time, as intangible. Such really is not the case. Space has three dimensions—but Time also has a dimension."

"Length," Martt put in. "It sounds like a play on words, but ——"

"It isn't," Frannie finished for him. "I can't imagine anything clearer than that Time has length."

Dr. Gryce ignored them. "You must understand also that Time as we conceive it can not exist except as the measurement of a *length* between two events. And what is an event? It presupposes the existence of *Matter*, does it not? Matter thus is introduced into the universe. It also can not be independent of Time and Space. So long as anything material exists, there must be Space for it to exist in; and Time to mark the passing of its existence.

"Of our universe, then, we now have Matter, Time and Space. There is a fourth—shall I say, element? It also is interdependent with each of the other three. It is *Motion*. You know, of course, that there can be no such thing as absolute Motion."

"Or absolute Time," Frannie put in.

"That we will discuss later," Dr. Gryce said quickly, "since it is more intricate of conception. Absolute Motion is impossible and non-existent. We can say a thing moves fast or slowly, *only in relation to the movement of something else*. One word more. I want you to realize, Frank, how wholly dependent each of these factors is upon the other. *Matter,*

for instance, is an entity persisting in Space and Time. *Motion* is the simultaneous change of the position of Matter in Space and Time. A thing was *here, then;* it is *there, now.* That is Motion. You see how you can not deal with one without involving the others?"

"Say, Father, why don't you tell him what we're going to do?" Martt demanded. "Frank, listen—tonight Brett and I——"

"But I'm going, too," Frannie declared.

"You're not!"

I saw again that look of fear in old Dr. Gryce's eyes. His children—the spirit of youth with its lust for adventure—they were eager and excited. But Dr. Gryce saw beyond that—saw the danger. . .

He said gravely, "There is no possibility of my making you understand the details, Frank, until we have gone into the matter thoroughly. But as Martt implies, you are no doubt impatient. I will tell you then, briefly, that for most of my life I have been delving into this subject—Matter, Space, Time and Motion illimitable. Longing to investigate this immense material universe which I believe exists. But we humans are fettered, Frank. Like an ant, living for a brief moment enchained with a cobweb to a twig and trying to envisage the earth."

His voice now was trembling with emotion. "I was satisfied to see with my own eyes some little part into infinity. I invented what we—my children and I—call the myrdoscope. I will explain it presently. Suffice it now to say that there are normally invisible rays, akin to light, crossing Space, and I have made them visible. We captured them—saw after a myriad trials unavailing, occasional vague glimpses of the beyond which came to us. It might have satisfied me, but three years ago, one night, Brett saw——"

He paused, looking at Brett. Martt and Frannie were breathless, with eyes fixed on me.

Brett said, and his voice had a queer, solemn hush to it, "I was looking through the myrdoscope. We had seen blurred, brief glimpses of a realm——"

"Beyond the stars," Frannie breathed.

"Yes, beyond the stars. A realm seemingly of forest, or something growing. Silvery patches—you might imagine they were water, or light shining upon something that glistened. They were always haphazard, these glimpses. We caught them, not always from one direction—seemingly from everywhere. A realm encompassing—enclosing—our whole star-filled Space.

"With the labor of years, which you, Frank, will appreciate to some degree, Father has charted what for our own little ken we might call absolute points in Space. Landmarks, say, of this outer realm. With our whirling earth, the ever-changing planets and stars, only this outer realm seemed of fixed position. We could sometimes return our gaze to the same landmark—a tremendous crescent-shaped patch of silver, for instance, which several times we succeeded in re-finding.

"It was near this patch at which I was one night gazing, when through some vagary of the ray bearing its image—or some difference in our crude apparatus—the scene suddenly clarified. And magnified as though at once I had leaped a million light-years toward it.

"I saw then a magnified section of the larger scene. The patch of silver appeared now as a shimmering, opalescent liquid. A segment of shore-front; and this all in a moment, again magnified. Upon a bluish bank of soft vegetation, with the opal liquid beside it, I saw a girl half reclining. A girl of human form, but

transfigured by a beauty more than human. A girl of a civilization behind our own—or perhaps one in advance—I do not know. She was robed in a short, simple garment more like a glistening, glowing silver veil than a dress. Her hair was long—a tangled dark mass. She reclined there in an attitude of ease and the abandonment of maidenly solitude. I say that she was more than beautiful—oh, Frank——"

Brett's voice had suddenly lost the precise exactitude of the scientist. He seemed to have forgotten his father—Martt and Frannie; it was as though he were confiding his human emotions only to me.

"Beautiful, Frank. A strange, wild beauty, with a curious ethereal aspect to it. I don't know—it's indescribable. Human—half human, but half divine."

He checked himself; the scientist in him again became uppermost; but though he now spoke with careful phrasing, his face remained flushed.

"It was some moments before I saw additional details. And then I realized that the girl was not alone. Upon her bare feet were a sort of sandal with thongs crossing the ankle. And standing there beside one of her feet were two tiny human figures. In height, the length perhaps of her little foot. Men of human form; yet queerly grotesque; misshapen. One of them was in the act of reaching upward toward the tassel of her sandal cord where it dangled from her ankle; reaching as though to grasp it and draw himself upward. The other was watching; and both were grinning with gnomelike malevolence.

"Nor was this all, for behind the girl, a brief distance away in what appeared a woodland dell, was another figure—a man of aspect akin to the grinning gnomes, save that in comparative size even to the girl he was gigantic. Ten times her height, perhaps, he stood behind her towering into the trees about him. A man of short, squat legs, dark with matted hair; a garment like the gnomes', which might have been an animal skin; a heavy massive chest; black hair long to his neck. A face with clipped hair upon it. He was regarding the girl; a grin, but with a leer to it—horribly sinister. And in his great hands, brandished like a bludgeon, was an uprooted tree.

"Have I given you an idea of motion in the scene? There was none. The girl was obviously wholly unaware that she was not alone. She lay motionless. But the lack of movement in her—in them all—was more marked than that. The girl's lips were parted in a half-smile of revery; but the outlines of her bosom beneath the silver veil did not move. There was no movement of breath; no change of expression. The gnomes, the giant—not the minutest change could I see mirrored in their faces.

"Yet it was so lifelike, I could not doubt it was life—and that the motion was there though I could not see it. I watched all night, shaken with this fragment of drama, perhaps tragedy, which I was witnessing—but even the girl's eyelids did not tremble. Dawn came; the scene faded.

"For a month I did not even tell Father; and Frank, the vision of that girl has never left me. The menace — gruesome, sinister — upon her—and her beauty——"

"Haven't you ever seen her again?" I asked eagerly. "Was it life? How could it be life without motion?"

"Oh, he saw her again," Martt exclaimed. "I've seen her—we've all seen her."

"Tell him, Brett," Frannie urged.

"A month before I even told Father. During it, I searched for the scene unavailing, then Father and I searched together. It was a year, when almost from the same orbital position we came upon the scene again. A year—and now we saw a change. The figures all were there, frozen into immobility as before. But the gnome had caught the tassel, had drawn himself partly up to stand upon the girl's white ankle. The giant had come a trifle forward, and the upraised tree in his hands was partly lowered. The girl's attitude was unchanged, but there was now upon her face the vague dawn of startled knowledge, as though at that instant she was becoming aware of something pulling at her sandal cord, something touching her ankle—perhaps too, she was hearing a sound from the giant behind her. The startled knowledge which as yet had not had time fully to register upon her face."

My mind was whirling with a confusion of thoughts; the vague comprehension of what Brett meant was coming to me. I stammered, "Not yet had time—but Brett, you must have watched them all that night ——"

"That night, Frank. And others—but there was no sign of movement. Another year—that was last year—we saw the girl partly aware of her danger. This year—a month ago—she was fully aware of it. Frightened—her eyes stricken wide with terror. But she had had no time as yet to move.

"Don't you understand, Frank? That drama is going on out there now. Like size of Matter and Space—and rate of Motion—there is no absolute Time. It is all comparative. To that realm out there of which we have been given a little vision, our tiny worlds here in the heavens are mere whirling electrons, like the electrons within one of our own atoms which to our consciousness of Time revolve many times a second.

"A year! A single revolution of our earth about its sun! To that girl out there, what we call a year is merely an electron in a fraction of a second revolving about its fellow. Even that is very slow—for she herself is wholly within the atom of a greater world outside her. A year as we call it—a second or less, to her. And though she is in full movement, how can we hope to see it by watching for a night? If a year were a second to her—an eight-hour vigil of ours would encompass less than a thousandth part of a second of her life!

"All comparative, Frank. There is nothing wonderful or really strange about it. In what we would experience to be a hundred years from now that girl will be fully faced with the menace of her assailants. A moment only, to her consciousness. It is that, Frank, we meant by the infinity of Time."

"Tell him what we're going to do," Martt insisted breathlessly.

It came from Brett in a burst almost incoherent. "I was not satisfied merely to see into this comparative infinity. Nor was Father. We have worked three feverish years, Frank, to climax all the labor of Father's which had gone before. And we have found a way—not merely to see, but to transport ourselves into these greater realms. A vehicle—I'll show you—explain it all. Its size can be changed—the state of the matter composing it is within our control. Its position in Space can be changed—simple enough, Frank, to enlarge upon the principles of our interplanetary vehicles. And—with one factor so interdependent upon

the other—we have been able to control the rate of its Time-progress. It travels through Time as it does through Space."

His words were tumbling over each other. "You'll see it in a moment, Frank—test it—we have it here, ready yesterday. It sets us free, don't you understand? Free at last in Space and Time. And I'm going in it tonight—with Martt perhaps—we're going out to reach that girl upon an equality of Size and Time-progress. Going out to explore infinity!"

CHAPTER 2

"THIS COULD DESTROY THE UNIVERSE"

I HAD anticipated that they would show me a vehicle similar perhaps to the huge and elaborate space-flyers in the service of our Interplanetary Postal Division. But instead of taking me to the workshops where I had conceived it to be lying—serene, glistening with newness, intricate with what devices for its changing of size and Time-rate I could not imagine—instead of this they took me into the house. And there, in Dr. Gryce's quiet study with its sober, luxurious furnishings and his library of cylinders ranged in orderly array about the walls, I saw not one but four machines—mere models standing there on the polished table-top. Four of them identical—all of a milk-white metal.

But they were models complete in every detail. I stood beside one, regarding it with a breathless, absorbed interest as Dr. Gryce commented upon it. A cube of about the length of my forearm in its three equal dimensions, with a cone-shaped tower on top—a little tower not much longer than my longest finger. The cube itself had a rectangular doorway, and in each face two banks of windows. The door slid sidewise, the windows were of a transparent material, like glass. Midway about the cube ran a tiny balcony at the second-story level. It was wholly enclosed by the glasslike material. It extended around all four sides; small doors from it gave access to the cube's interior. The cone on top also had windows, and its entire apex was transparent.

I bent down and peered into the lower doorway. Tiny rooms were there. Bedrooms; a cookery—a house complete, save that it was wholly unfurnished. The largest room on the lower story—its floor had a circular transparent pane in it—was fitted with a seemingly intricate array of tiny mechanisms all of the same milk-white metal. A metallic table held most of them; and I could see wires fine as cobwebs connecting them. And in a corner of this room, a metallic spiral stairway leading to the upper story.

Dr. Gryce said, "That is the instrument room, complete. It contains every mechanism for the operation of the vehicle. We made it in this size—large enough to facilitate construction, but it is small enough to be economical of material. This substance—we have never named it—is of our own isolation. It is expensive. I'll explain it presently. . . . That room beside the instrument room is where we will put the usual everyday instruments necessary to the journey. Oxygen tanks—the apparatus for air purification and air renewal; telescopes, microscopes—my myrdoscope—all that sort of thing we can best obtain in its normal size. Those—and the furnishings—the provisions—all those in their normal size we will put into it later."

"You mean," I asked, "this is not a model? This is the actual vehicle?"

"Yes," he smiled.

"But there are four of them."

"We made six, Frank. It was advisable, and not unduly difficult to duplicate the parts in the making. The assembling took time——"

Brett said, "Father was insistent that we make every advance test possible. We have already used two of them. We are going to test the others today."

"Now," exclaimed Frannie. "Do it now—Frank will want to see it."

Dr. Gryce lifted one of the vehicles. In his hand it seemed light as alemite. He placed it on a taboret and we sat grouped around it.

"I shall send it into Time," he said quietly, "with its size unchanged, with no motion in Space, so that always in relation to us it will remain right here—I am going to send it back into other ages of Time." He turned to me earnestly. "We wanted you here, Frank, because you are so good a friend to me and my children. But for a selfish reason as well. When Brett goes out into Space and Time tonight, I want your keen eye to follow him. Your ability to record so accurately on the clocks what you see at any given instant——"

He was referring to my experience at the Table Mountain observatory—my first work when my training period was over. I had, indeed, a curiously keen vision for astronomical observation, and a quickness of finger upon the clock to record what I saw. In transit work I was extremely accurate; even now they were asking the Postal Division for my services at Table Mountain in the forthcoming transit of Venus.

Dr. Gryce was saying, "Your accuracy is phenomenal, Frank—your figures as you observe what little we see of this flight will help me—set my mind at rest that Brett is making no errors." He ended with a smile, "So you realize we have a selfish motive in wanting you."

"I'm very glad," I responded. He nodded and went back at once to what he had been saying previously. "I'm going to send this into Time. You must understand, Frank, that I can give you now only the fundamental concepts underlying this apparatus. We have so much to do today—so little time for theory. I need only tell you that it is readily demonstrable that Time is one of the inherent factors governing the *state of Matter*. This substance we have discovered—created, if you will—yields readily to a change of state. An electronic charge—a current akin to, but not identical with electricity—changes the state of this substance in several ways. A rapid duplication of the fundamental entities within its electrons—they are, as you perhaps know, mere *whirlpools of nothingness*—this rapid duplication adds size. The substance—with shape unaltered—grows larger. With such a size-change there comes a normal, correspondingly progressive change of Time-rate. We had to go beyond that, however, and secure an independent Time-rate, independently changeable, so that the vehicle might remain quiescent in size and still change its Time. In doing that, the *state of the matter* as our senses perceive it is completely altered. As you know, no two bodies can occupy the same space at the same time. Which only means that with the Time-dimensions identical, different dimensions of Space are needed. With the Time-dimension differing—the state of Matter is different; two bodies thus can be together in the same space."

"What is a Time-dimension?" I asked. "I mean—how can you alter it?"

"I would say, Frank, that the Time-dimension of a material body is the *length*—or a measure of the length—of its fundamental vibration. Basically there is no real substance as we conceive it—for all Matter is mere vibration. Let us delve into substance. We find Matter consists of molecules vibrating in Space. Molecules are composed of atoms vibrating in Space. Within the atoms are electrons, revolving in Space. The electrons are without substance, merely vibrations electrically negative in character. The nucleus—once termed proton—is all then that we have left of substance. What is it? A mere vortex—an electrical vortex of nothingness!

"You see, Frank, there is no real substance existing. It is all vibration. Motion, in other words. Of what? That we do not know. Call it a motion of disembodied electrical energy. Perhaps it is something akin to that. But from it, our substantial, tangible, material universe is built. All dependent upon its vibratory rate. And the measure of that I would call the Time-dimension. When we alter that—when through the impulse of a current of vibration we attack that fundamental vortex to make it whirl at greater or lesser rate—then we, in effect, have changed the Time-dimension."

There was so much that seemed dimly close to my understanding, and yet eluded me!

"But," I said, "if you send that little cube back into Time, it will no longer exist at all. It will be in the past—non-existent now. Or suppose you send it into the future? It *will exist* sometime—but now, it will be non-existent."

"Ah, that's where you're wrong," Brett exclaimed. "Don't you realize that you're making Time absolute? You're taking yourself and this present instant as fixed points of Space and Time—the standards beyond which nothing else can exist. That's fatuous. Frank, look here, it's simple enough once you grasp it. Time and Space are quite similar, except that you have never moved about in Time but you have in Space. Suppose you had not. Suppose—with your present power of thought—you were this house. You had always been here—always would be here. Suppose, too, that the world—the land and water—moved slowly past you, at an unalterable rate. That's what Time does to us. Then suppose I were to say to you—you as the house—'Let us go now to Great-London.' That would puzzle you. You would say, 'Great-London was here a year ago. But now it is gone—non-existent. It did exist—but now it doesn't.' Or you would say, 'The shore of the Great-Pacific Ocean will be here next year.' If I said, 'I'm going there now,' you would reply, 'But you'll be in the future. You'll be non-existent!' Making yourself the standard of everything. Don't you see how fatuous that is?"

I did not answer. It was so strange a mode of thought; it made me feel so insignificant, so enslaved by the fetters of my human senses. And these fetters Brett was very soon to cast off.

II

MARTT said, "Can't we make the tests, Father? There is a frightful lot to do and it's nearly morning already."

From the table Dr. Gryce took a small rod of the milk-white metal—a rod half a meter long and the diameter of my smallest finger. He knelt on the floor beside the taboret, peering into the tiny doorway of the mechanism he was about to send winging into the distant ages of our Past. Again we were breathless.

"More light, Frannie," he said. "I can not see inside here." Frannie illumined the tubes along the ceiling; the room was flooded with their soft, blue-white light.

"That's better." Rod in hand he turned momentarily to me. "I'm going to throw the Time-switch by pressing it with this rod," he explained. "Within the vehicle—the confined space there—the current is equally felt." He smiled gravely. "Without the rod I should lose a finger to the Past——"

Carefully he inserted the rod into the doorway. A moment of fumbling, then I heard a click. The little milk-white model seemed to tremble. It glowed; from it there came a soft, infinitely small humming sound. It glowed, melted into translucency—transparency. For an instant I had a vague sense that a spectral wraith of it was still before me. Then with a blink of my eyelids I realized that it was gone. The taboret was empty. Beside it, Dr. Gryce knelt with the rod melted off midway of its length in his hand.

I breathed again. Brett said softly, "It is gone, Frank. Gone into the Past, relative to our consciousness of Time. Gone from our senses—yet it is here—occupying the same Space it did before—but with a different Time."

He passed his hand through the apparent vacancy above the taboret. To me then came a realization of how crowded all Space must be! Of what a tiny fraction of things existent—of events occurring—are we conscious! That Space over the taboret—empty to me. . . . yet it held for a mind omniscient an infinity of things strewn through the ages of the Past and Future. What multiplicity of events—unseen by me—Time was holding separate in that crowded Space above the taboret!

Dr. Gryce was saying, "Let us test one now by sending it into smallness—come here, Frank."

He had risen to stand by the table, with another of the models before him. "This bit of stone," he said. "Let us send it into that."

He laid a flat piece of black-gray, smoothly polished stone on the table near the model. And with another rod he reached into the doorway. Again I heard a click. He withdrew the rod. "You see, Frank."

I saw that the rod was slightly compressed along the length he had inserted. The model was already dwindling. Soundlessly, untremblingly—it was contracting, becoming smaller, with shape and aspect otherwise unchanged. Soon it was the size of my fist. Dr. Gryce picked it up, rested it upon his opened hand. But in a moment it was no more than a tiny cube rocking in the movement of his palm. He gripped it gingerly with thumb and forefinger and set it on the polished black slab of stone. Its milk-white color there showed it clearly. But it was very small—smaller than the thumb-nail of my little finger. The cone-shaped tower was a needle-point.

A breathless moment passed. It was now no more than a white speck upon the black stone surface.

Brett said, "Try the microscope, Frank. You watch it."

I put the low-powered instrument over it; Brett adjusted the light. The stone was smoothly polished. But now, under the glass, upon a shaggy mass of uneven rock surface I saw the vehicle visually as large as it had been originally. But it was dwindling progressively faster. Soon it lay tilted sidewise upon a slope of the rock; smaller—a tiny speck clinging there.

"Can you still see it?" Brett murmured.

"Yes—no—now it is gone." The rock seemed empty. Somewhere down in there the little mechanism lay dwindling. Forever it would grow smaller. Dwindling into an infinity of smallness; but always to be with things of its size—and things yet smaller. . . .

As I turned from the glass, I became aware that Martt and Frannie were not in the room. Dr. Gryce and Brett, absorbed in the test, quite evidently had not noticed them leave. There had been two other models on the table—there was now but one.

Then from the garden outside the house a cry reached us. A shout—a cry of fear—terror. Martt's voice.

"Father! Brett! Help us! Help! Quick!"

WE RUSHED from the room. Crowning wonder, yet horrible! A surge of fear swept me. In the garden quite near the house stood the other model. Small no longer. It had grown—*was growing*—until already it was as large as the house itself. Around it the flowers, shrubs, even a tree had been pushed and trampled by its expanding bulk. It stood gleaming white in the sunlight, motionless save for that steady, increasingly rapid growth. Its windows and doors loomed large dark rectangles; its balcony was broad as a corridor; its cone tower was already reared higher than the nearest trees.

"Father! Help!"

At the doorway of the vehicle, standing just outside it, were the terror-stricken Martt and Frannie. They were holding the end of a long metallic pole which projected into the doorway. Struggling with its weight, striving to throw the switch inside.

We reached them. The expanding bulk of the gleaming side of the vehicle had pushed them back into a thicket of shrubbery. Near them a tree, uprooted as though it were a straw sticking upright in sand, was pushed aside and fell with a crash.

Martt and Frannie were livid with terror; breathless, almost exhausted with their futile efforts.

Martt panted, "We can't—lift the pole! It's—too heavy—too large inside."

Within the huge doorway, by the sunlight streaming through the windows, I could see the interior half of the pole, bloated by growth, huge, heavy.

Brett shoved Frannie away. "Frank! Here—take hold with us."

Dr. Gryce was with us. Together we four men got the interior end of the pole upon the table inside. A tremendous switch lever was there. But the pole slipped, rolled down. I expected it to break at the doorway point where it was so small outside, but it did not. The expanding doorway had pushed us farther back. Another tree on the other side fell. Above us the vehicle's tower loomed like a cathedral spire. Tremendous now, the vehicle had grown until it was almost touching the house. A fence had been trampled, had vanished beneath its giant bulk.

And the growth was increasingly rapid. If we could not check it . . . If it got wholly beyond control—this monster, growing . . . forever growing, to a size infinitely large—larger than our earth itself. . . .

I must have been standing stupidly confused. I heard Dr. Gryce imploring, "Take hold of it, Frank! We must lift it. We must—our last chance——"

But Brett pushed us away. "I'm going inside. I can move the switch—let go of me, Father! That switch

(Continued on page 570)

The CASTLE of TAMARA

BY

Maria Moravsky

"She pushed him away from her; he reeled and plunged into the river."

THE indolent Tartar guide, whom Rex Wilton hired to show him Caucasus, pointed his finger toward the nearest mountain peak.

"See? The Castle of Tamara."

The traveler looked in the direction of the already drooping bronze hand adorned with many cheap rings, and for a moment could not see anything because the setting sun struck the stones of those rings and played on them, awakening myriads of rainbows. Only when that blazing hand dropped, he saw the vision. It stood on a steep mountain slope, its gray towers taking on the color of old rose. Purplish mists rose from the foamy river rushing by its walls and hid its foundation. With its graceful Moorish towers silhouetted against the darkening sky, it seemed to be poised on clouds.

"Gee, it's beautiful!" the traveler cried impulsively, in unmistakable American. Then he asked in his six-months-old Russian, "Who lives there?"

To his surprize, the guide answered in English, "A cruel lady. Haven't you heard of Princess Tamara?"

Wilton remembered the well-known Caucasian legend about the princess who would lure travelers to her castle, and after a night of passion throw the discarded victims of her fleeting favor into the river swirling below.

"I meant, who lives there now?" he asked the guide, being sure that he had mixed his tenses.

"Tamara lives there," was the amazing answer.

"She lives there now?"

"Now."

Wilton smiled tolerantly. Those people were like children in their weird beliefs. Brought up in the sober atmosphere of the New World, he

considered himself immune from such nonsense. But, as he glanced once more at the castle above, the smile faded from his ironical lips. For up there, in the tall, narrow windows, lights flashed up one after another, like large yellow stars, rivaling the pale stars above those slim towers.

"You mean the castle is occupied by her descendants?" he said persuasively, and it was partly himself whom he tried to satisfy that the guide was talking nonsense.

"No, she herself, Princess Tamara," was the obstinate answer.

"But she lived centuries ago!"

"But she lives again."

They descended the mountain path in silence. There was no use arguing with that superstitious boy. The lights of the village lying in the misty valley glittered faintly like phosphorescent fires over an unplumbed swamp.

The swish of the torrent left behind them was like an unintelligible whisper trying to convey a mystery.

The silence grew oppressive. To break its unnerving spell, Wilton asked his guide, "Sing for me, Ibrahim. Let us rest for a while on this rock, so you can take your guitar off your shoulder."

"I may sing while walking. I would not stay so near Tamara's place."

As he was unstrapping from his shoulder his precious Italian instrument, Wilton asked, "By the way, where did you learn your English?"

"In New York. I had a rug shop there."

"The business was not good? You had to return?"

"Not that. I no like New World. Everything too clear."

"Just what do you mean?"

But the boy did not answer. He plucked the strings of his guitar and sang the popular ballad about Tamara:

"From that turret, so high and so narrow,
Fair Tamara was casting her spell,
She was fairer than angels of heaven,
She was cruel as demons of hell."

On trailed the ballad, sung in a low, indolent voice. Wilton did not understand half of the words, but their meaning was familiar. In the pale light of the rising moon, he pictured to himself the unfortunate victims of her love, how they were hurried to the cataract below, how the stormy waves mourned their death. . . . The song went on:

"Her good-bye was so sweet and so tender,
So caressing her musical voice,
You would think it was promising passion. . . ."

Wilton thought with dismay of how those Orientals delighted in descriptions of tragic love, while his guide sang about the deathly paleness of the lover's lips, the rocks tearing his body and the waves kissing his dead cheeks. He seemed to enjoy the gloomy ballad. His deep, dark eyes were fire-pools of sensuous dreams. His indolent face looked tender and more beautiful than ever. Wilton recalled the stories of the wealthy Russian ladies robbed and violated by those tender-faced Tartar guides. He wondered how such a delicate, effeminate beauty could be so savage.

THE moon rose higher, surrounded by a great opal ring. Suddenly a wind from the east dispersed the fog billowing around the castle and it could be clearly seen, proudly perched on the cliff above the waterfall. Its towers were now ominously dark, and the lights flickering in its windows were like winking eyes of the malicious mountain djinns.

"Let's return to the hotel," the American ordered, abruptly.

But it became suddenly impossible. The clouds gathered, and there followed one of those unexpected, unaccountable showers so frequent in the mountains.

It stopped almost as soon as it started, but the air, saturated with dampness, became even more misty; the moon was blotted out; they could only guess its presence by the milky color of the fog, pierced now and then by a shaft of liquid silver. It was as if the moonlight became solidified, forming a wall of mystery between them and the village below.

The guide refused to move. He sat on a stone boulder, and declared he was going to stay there until the mists cleared. The impatient American produced an electric torch and a compass.

"This will keep us from being lost," he explained to the guide.

But the boy refused to trust it. "I will not move," he said. "Something may turn the magnet the wrong way. . . ."

"Quit these infernal superstitions! You are plain lazy! Are you afraid that your witch from the castle——?"

"Please, *barin*," he pleaded, "she may hear you."

"You are a coward!"

But even the insult failed to move Ibrahim. He bent toward his companion's ear and whispered something which made the American stare incredulously.

Was the boy lying? There was no reason for it. Yet the thing seemed utterly impossible; here, in this comparatively civilized part of the Caucasus, a woman had thrown a man over the precipice and was not even tried for it.

"Why didn't they arrest her?"

"You can not arrest a witch," the boy said with deep conviction.

"Have you heard of others being killed?"

"No—she is old now. She doesn't care for lovers, I believe."

Wilton fell silent, his eyes trying to pierce the seething mists. Strange to say, after the story which he had just heard, he wanted to go there, to meet that woman. He had never had a real adventure in his life, never a wild night, not even while in college. His mother had had a weak heart, and the boy was brought up with awed consideration for her illness. It was always: "You must not do this," and "You must not do that, because it might kill mother," and this was stronger than fear of punishment. When he grew up, he still remained a model boy, always suppressing his adventurous nature, until she died, leaving him a small legacy which enabled him to take the long-desired trip around the world.

He went to Russia just because people had warned him that he should not. The possibility of dangerous, romantic happenings attracted him. But he had met with no real danger as yet, save the legal holdups of the hotelkeepers and guides, who proved to be the same the world over.

But here, at last, was a sense of mystery. It was absurd to believe in the reincarnation of the cruel princess who probably had never existed save in a legend. Yet he longed to believe in it, for like most of us he longed for something unusual to happen, something which he did not have to plan ahead. Now that unusual thing seemed to lurk up there in the Castle of Tamara. Yet it was absurd to invite disaster.

Forcibly he sobered himself and declared, "Well, we can't stay here all night. Since you refuse to go, I will return to the village alone."

"Oh, *barin*, don't do that!"

But Wilton would not listen to the whining boy. By now he had lost patience with his cowardly superstitions. The village was but a short

distance away, and he did not believe in witches turning the needle of the compass.

HE WALKED away, it seemed to him, in the right direction, yet half an hour passed and he did not reach the village. The road before him became steep again, rising up in curves—and he had expected to reach the valley by now! Clammy fear assaulted him, as he looked at his compass. The needle was turning restlessly like a weathercock!

"I must be near some magnetic ore," he assured himself aloud. If it were so, it was bad, but natural. "Wilton, don't be a superstitious idiot!" he upbraided himself when the other thought obtruded.

The wind blew in his direction, chasing down the mists and bringing to his ears the ever-increasing swishing of the mountain torrent. It unveiled the foamy waves, and above them Wilton saw the walls of the castle.

The view of that dark structure, glinting in the faint moonlight, was so unexpected and so somber that it filled him with awe. The castle, seen closely, lost its airy grace. It loomed solid, massive, forbidding, its gates crisscrossed with huge iron bars. The narrow mountain road leading to it seemed too steep for either horse or carriage.

"How do people communicate with the valley below?" came the involuntary thought. And, in harmony with his superstitious mood, there flashed across his mind a picture from a folk-story—a witch flying home on a broom. There seemed no other way to approach the castle, except on foot or with wings.

Yet the road proved broader than it looked in the deceitful moonlight. Presently there appeared a rider in a rain-soaked black *burka* and high white *papaha*, its glistening wet fur hanging over the rider's face. The foam-flecked horse climbed heavily up the steep slope.

As if at a given signal, the massive gates swung open and the stranger rode in. Moved by irresistible curiosity, Wilton ran toward the slowly closing gates, and reached them just in time to push his alpine stick into the narrow slit which still remained between them.

A voice from within called hoarsely, "Who is it?"

"A stranger; I lost my way."

This was enough. Wilton knew that the unwritten law of Caucasian hospitality entitled any stranger who had lost his way to be admitted into any home in the mountains. The gates swung wide again, moaning on their hinges like a beast in torment, and the traveler found himself in the vast courtyard paved with black and white slabs of marble.

He looked around with curiosity. The strange rider who had preceded him had disappeared as if removed from the scene by a stroke of a magic wand. He caught only a glimpse of the servant leading away the foaming horse.

Another servant, a broad-shouldered Georgian with a wasplike waist, approached him and politely invited him "to enter the *sakla* and accept shelter and food." Wilton followed him into a large hall, lighted only by the logs burning in a cavernous fireplace. As soon as he seated himself comfortably on a bearskin-covered bench, there entered a stout lady in black with a veil hanging from her traditional Georgian headgear resembling a narrow crown. The veil was thrown off her face and covered her graying hair.

She looked at him benignly with her languorous black eyes, the only remains of her faded beauty, and asked, "May I know your name, most welcome stranger?"

After Wilton answered, adding that he was lost during his descent into the valley, she nodded her head indifferently, as if there was nothing unexpected in a man's being lost within sight of his destination.

"The fogs and the magic stones," she explained; her voice was unusually musical for an old woman.

Wilton interpreted the "magic stones" as the magnetic ore, the existence of which he had blamed for the queer behavior of his compass. After all there was nothing mysterious in the lady's manner. She must have sheltered many a strayed traveler before; then why should she be surprized? he argued with himself. But unreasonable insidious thoughts crawled into his reasoning; what if the meeting was—arranged?

"Wilton, don't be a superstitious idiot!" he upbraided himself again.

His hostess clapped her hands. Two boys entered noiselessly like apparitions. Wilton knew it was their felt boots which made them glide so noiselessly, yet there was something uncanny about their catlike steps.

An order was delivered in a strange tongue, and, almost instantly after the boys disappeared, his nostrils caught the appetizing smell of a broiled *shahlyk*. It seemed as if his appearance was the signal for supper, as if the hostess waited expressly for him.

She made him a sign to resume his seat, which he had left at her entrance, and slumped heavily on the bench opposite. Instantly the watchful servant pushed a little footstool under her feet, which was scarcely visible under the heavy silk skirt. Her hands went to her bosom and she took from it a Mohammedan rosary made of amber, with a shining golden bead on its tassel end, and started fingering it absently.

"And now tell me where do you come from and who are your parents."

It was just a formal question of politeness, for she listened with a detached air. As he was answering her briefly, he could not help asking himself: was she bored by his explanation or had she known it all in advance?

Catching himself thinking weird thoughts again, Wilton concluded that the Caucasus "went to his head."

The servants brought in the tasty *shahlyk*, broiled on silver skillets, and offered it to him and his hostess on the same large plate. They also brought native bread, long, soft, flat, which one could roll like a piece of heavy fabric. His hostess ate it, tearing little pieces from the whole roll.

He looked at her pudgy fingers with beautiful fingernails and wondered against his will if this was the reincarnation of the woman to whom the legend ascribed the love murders. If so, her second life was nearing its decline. This overripe bosom, this craped face, he thought, could not lure men any longer. He wanted to laugh at his guide's notion that this benign elderly woman in chaste black dress was a dangerous enchantress.

His hunger appeased, his thoughts clarified, he bid his hostess a thankful good-night and briskly followed a servant whom she sent to show him his room, situated up the narrow stairs, in an octagonal tower. After the servant left, the self-invited guest began to undress rapidly, feeling too tired even to observe his surroundings.

He took off one of his muddy shoes and stiffened, holding it in his hand, his attention arrested by low melodious singing. He heard the gentle strumming of a *zurna* accompany the unintelligible foreign words. He could not understand

them, but it was unmistakably a song of love.

Its languor, its insidious sweetness, the longing it awakened, reminded him of the less tender but equally passionate air sung by his guide.

So this was how the witch attracted her victims! His critical mind surrendered. The night, the strange surroundings, the weariness of his journey, all conspired to make him succumb to the waves of superstition which haunt the air of Caucasus. He listened, listened hungrily, longing to see the singer. Could it really be his hostess singing? Could an old woman possess such a voice?

He again drew on his muddy shoe and laced it absent-mindedly, still listening to the languorous song. As it died out, a window was opened one flight below—he heard its shutters strike the stone wall. Something like a beating of heavy bat's wings flapped against the window glass. Then he heard musical laughter, young, yet somehow sadly forced. The window-frame shook, the glass trembled. . . His curiosity aroused beyond endurance, Wilton ran to the window and looked out.

Below, in the uncertain light of the mist-veiled moon, he saw a black form dangling from the window ledge. He shrank back, terrified. In a flash he recalled the stranger who had ridden into the castle just before him. Sudden conclusion made his heart contract with horror and pity. That stranger was being thrown out of the tower window, just as the ballad had it.

Then why did he not cry for help? Was he too proud or too desperate?

Wilton did not consider for long. His natural chivalry aroused, he was bending out of the window before he knew it, shouting, "Hold out, fellow; help is coming!"

He snatched a sheet from his bed, tore it in two, tying the parts in a secure marine knot, fastened one end to the hook of the shutter and easily swung down the improvised line, trying to reach the black form now plastered helplessly against the wall.

As he steadied himself enough to grasp the hanging form, the swiftly passing clouds unveiled the moon, and in its full light Wilton saw a wet *burka* hung out to dry.

He felt that he had made himself utterly ridiculous with his attempts to save that comical cloak dripping with rain. He wanted to retreat as soon as possible, but could not climb back. He had seen it done so neatly in the "movies," but in real life it required unusual strength. He felt that if he did not reach the window below he would have to let go and then—— He heard the mountain river swishing below his feet. The wind swayed his body rapidly and made him dizzy.

He could lift himself only to the level of the window. Fortunately, it was open. In the faint light of an image lamp burning in the distant corner, he saw a woman's figure with a *zurna* on her lap.

He was ashamed to disturb her, yet he had to do so, as his strength was ebbing fast. He made the last desperate effort and succeeded in climbing a little higher up his line. His feet were now touching the winlow ledge. He stepped on it with a sigh of relief. Instantly he heard a piercing shriek.

Jumping in, he approached the screaming figure with rambling words of explanation. Luminous black eyes widened with horror stared at him from the ghastly pale face.

It was not the face of his hostess. To be sure, there was a resemblance: the eyes were the same. But her features, although distorted with horror, were beautiful, and the fig-

ure shrinking away from him was slim like a young palm. As she sprang to her feet, her tightly plaited black hair tumbled down her back like a great glistening snake.

"I beg your pardon," he repeated, again and again, "I did not mean to intrude."

His soothing voice calmed her somewhat and she consented to listen to his explanations, huddled back into her rattan chair, pressing her *zurna* to her breast as if it were a weapon of defense. Her slim brown hands trembled and the instrument gave a plaintive sound as she nervously jerked at its strings.

"But how could you take my *burka* for a man? Why should a man hang out of the window?" she asked at last, still suspicious.

He gave no answer. How could he tell her the truth? His wild thoughts about a man being hurled out of the window by a witch seemed to him now utterly incredible. He could not bring himself to confess them.

She looked at him long and searchingly. Then a somber smile stirred her face. That smile made her look suddenly older. Only now he noticed a gray lock among the heavy black waves of her hair.

"So you, too, have heard about that?"

Still he stood silent, his head bent low, ashamed to look into her face. It was a sweetly sad face, kindly and trustful, now that she had accepted his explanation. How could anyone suspect such an innocent-looking, frightened little woman of premeditated murder?

"I would not be surprized if a Caucasian believed the silly story. But you, an American!"

"How do you know I am an American?"

"My aunt told me. Do sit down, now that you are here." She pushed toward him a little padded footstool.

"She would think me compromised if she saw you here. But I don't mind. It is ages since I saw a new face; the solitude here drives me mad! It's several years since——"

She stopped abruptly, her beautiful eyes widened again as if she saw a ghost.

"She came to live with me since my father died. She doesn't care for the mountaineers' superstitions and is surprized at nothing. She seems to take everything for granted. This is because she is so very primitive. When I was young I thought it was because she is so very wise."

"But you are young!" he protested.

"I am twenty-six. An old age for a Georgian woman. I gave up marriage. None would marry a witch."

Again she smiled, bewitchingly.

"They think me a reincarnation of Princess Tamara. They say I can grow old and young at will." She laughed forcedly. "Ridiculous, isn't it? Unfortunately, my name is also Tamara."

She fell silent, her smooth forehead crossed by a frown.

"Now that they think the worst of me," she continued in a plaintive, musical voice, "I don't care what I do. I prance on horseback until late into the night, alone, in men's clothes. I saw you entering the castle after me."

"Riding up that steep slippery road! You might have killed yourself!"

As he said this he looked at her small hands, at the delicate oval of her face, into her eyes of a timid doe, and wondered how such a woman could "prance on horseback."

"You might have killed yourself," he repeated, and felt a painful contraction of the heart at the very thought of it. That strange woman, with her childlike face and wisp of gray hair over her left temple, was

rapidly arousing in him unusual tenderness.

"I could not! Nothing could happen to a witch!"

"Please, stop reproaching me for my stupid notions, and tell me how it happened that people began to believe it. Some strange misunderstanding, no doubt. A guide in the village told me——"

He stopped abruptly; it would be cruel to repeat to her Ibrahim's story.

"He told you that I killed a man," she supplemented. "Quite right!"

Her face took on hard grimness. Her gentleness was gone.

"He was a guide who taught me to ride on horseback. He was very drunk that day; he insulted me. I had to fight for my honor. He followed me to the flat tower roof . . . my father and his servants were on a big hunt, and I hated to cry for help to my women. I pushed him away from me; he reeled and plunged into the river. Before he died, he told the priest who ministered to his departing soul—what you have heard. Such a vengeance!"

They were both silent. The sky outside darkened as if saddened by the tragic story. The moon disappeared, the rain began pouring again.

"Ah, it is good to tell it to an outsider, to one who is not obsessed with those insane beliefs! This is Asia, old Asia I am living in! As stuffy with legends as it was thousands of years ago. It was cruel of my father to educate me abroad and then to seclude me in this hole!"

Her eyes blazed with indignation. Without realizing it, Wilton laid his hand on her shoulder to calm her. His sympathy and tenderness became tinted with a warmer feeling.

"They made my life miserable. Children hoot after me when I come to the village. My father—he was a very influential man here—had hushed the affair, and I was not even brought to trial, partly because the man was a Tartar guide, and they are hated here. Maybe it would be better if I were tried. As it is . . . that bloody veil of mystery about me! It suffocates me!"

Her voice broke. She was sobbing now, sobbing pitifully like an abused child. Imperceptibly her head rested on his shoulder. It was warm and scented with the roses of Shiraz. Her soft body, not bound by any corset, swayed gently against his. Struggling through the sympathetic pity, there arose in him intense desires. . . He wanted to silence those sobs with kisses.

"It is wonderful!" he whispered hotly. "Wonderful that I found you!"

All his life he had had dreams which he deemed foolish, dreams about finding his love in some distant land, rescuing her from distress, as is told in romantic books. And now that the meeting was realized, it seemed a vision.

"You, such a gentle flower, in these jungles! I will take you away from here. They do not believe in witches in my country."

"Oh, do you mean it? Do take me away!"

"Would you go? Would you trust me?"

"Go with you? Why, yes! You are the most wonderful thing that ever happened to me! Would I trust you? Let me look at your face! You—you look like Saint George, the dragon-killer, the patron saint of Georgia."

She looked into his large, deep-set blue eyes, stroking indolently his high forehead with light wet curls plastered to it; she lightly touched with her finger his broad, generous mouth. She admired every feature of that face, so spiritual in comparison with the full-lipped, swarthy men of her race.

"You look like Saint George," she repeated.

Suddenly the door-knob shook, and they heard the muffled sounds of retreating steps. Tamara looked around dazedly like one awakened from a dream.

"Why did I tell you all this? Why? It was shameless of me, shameless! Please go away. I am afraid, servants were spying. . ."

Gently she shook his hand from her shoulder.

"I am a lost one, anyhow," she whispered; "I shouldn't care. But my aunt. . . She would be furious if she saw a man in my room."

Reluctantly he turned to the door. She stopped him.

"Oh, no! I just heard steps there. They may be watching still. Can't you go through the window?"

Dubiously he looked out. The rain still lashed the castle walls, the gusts of wind were shaking the shutters. It would be a heroic stunt to go out this way. Well, was he not wishing for an adventure? A dangerous adventure? Here it was, mocking him.

Knowing that he was about to do a foolish, a neck-breaking thing, he braced himself to refuse. Yet one look into those languid eyes, those appealing lips breathing sweeter than the roses of Shiraz, and his mind was made up. An instinct stronger than that of self-preservation prompted him to smile assuredly.

"Certainly, I will go through the window—if you kiss me."

There was a commotion at the door. The girl turned her flushed face toward him. Her lips were parted expectantly.

HE KISSED her so long and so hard that her lips bled. Yet she smiled beatifically through her tear-stained eyes, repeating caressingly words in a foreign tongue, the words which, he felt, were endearments. Absurdly he remembered lines from the ballad:

"Her words were so sweet and so tender,
So caressing her musical voice,
You would think it was promising passion. . ."

The remembrance was ominous, but he chased it away.

The door shook on its hinges as if forced by a hurricane.

The woman rose to her feet. Her body rigid, her face grave, she appeared taller and older.

"She will kill me if she finds you here. Such a disgrace! Oh, goodbye, beloved!"

She pushed him toward the window. As he was feeling for the rope line, clammy with dampness, and grasped it, he heard the door open. Swiftly he jumped out and hung, swayed by the wind.

He tried to climb upward, but could not. The wind was too strong and his muscles strangely tired as if the long moments of passion had exhausted their strength. He remained there, lashed by the rain, listening with sinking heart to the stormy torrent below, asking himself how long he could endure it.

Tamara stood at the window, watching him, whispering: "If you can't climb up, jump down!"

At first he thought that his ears deceived him. To jump down into that torrent which he could hear roaring below! The woman who had just called him "beloved" was ordering him to leap to certain death!

Again he heard her saying, this time louder: "Jump down!"

Her face peered at him from the surrounding gloom, unearthlily beautiful, a wistful, sweet face, looking like a mystic vision which blossomed out of the fog. The light behind her made her raven hair shine like a

dark halo. He recalled the words from the ballad:

"She was fairer than angels of heaven,
She was cruel as demons of hell."

In that moment he believed everything that Ibrahim had told him. The woman was a witch. He believed it fully, desperately, as he saw her closing the window, deliberately locking him out.

His hands tightened on the rope line, he decided to wait until the intruders left her room, then break the window and force his way back.

He peered within, trying to blink off the drops of rain clinging to his eyelashes. But he could see only a blur of strong light and dim figures moving through it. It was like a moving picture film out of focus. He heard the angry voice of his hostess booming on and on. When she came nearer the window, he caught the words:

"I don't believe you. You must have invited him into your room. No one heard you crying for help. You are as bad as they say. I wouldn't be surprized if you were really a witch! I am leaving you, hear me? Live here alone, you do not need a decent woman to protect you any longer, you hussy!"

With that she left the room, stamping heavily, her women servants following her.

As soon as the door closed behind her, Tamara opened the window. When Wilton scrambled in, she said appealingly, "My aunt is enraged; she wants to leave me here alone! Will you go to her, my beloved, and ask my hand in marriage?"

He was speechless with amazement and rage. To ask such a thing of him, after she had wanted him to be killed! He had an impulse to swear, to strike her.

Restraining himself, he said witheringly, "You don't imagine I am going to marry you, after you wanted to kill me?"

She flew toward him with a faltering cry. "To kill you, my clear-eyed falcon! How can you say such a thing?"

The hypocrisy of the woman seemed to him appalling. He had to go away, or he would strike her. His hand on the door-knob, he turned his head scornfully. "Didn't you ask me to jump down?" he accused her.

"Yes, I did. But——"

He opened the door, and the squeaking of its hinges drowned the rest of her sentence. Her voice, until now pitifully low, grew desperately loud.

"Listen! Don't go! I will explain!"

"I will not listen to any explanations! You are a liar! If you are not a witch, then you are a heartless, cruel woman!"

He was already on the other side of the door. He was shaken with rage when thinking that a short while ago he believed in her explanations of the murder. That bewitching voice held no more appeal for him.

"I loathe you!" he cried, slamming the door after him.

He heard her muffled cry: "You don't believe me! You hate me! Then look!"

Against his will, he was moved to open the door. Bewildered, he saw her jumping out of the window.

Dazedly he approached it and bent over the void filled with crawling fog. The rain had ceased, the moon had set, the mists below grew milky white, lighted by the promise of dawn. For a while, nothing was heard from below save the steady swish-swash of the torrent. Then Tamara's voice, more appealing than ever, sounded through the fog.

"Leap—leap down, beloved!"

His head went dizzy. After the sleepless night, those swift changes from horror to love, from love to rage, his brain was fagged. The melodious voice sounding through the milky mists once more swayed his heart. There could be no danger in that call. He felt irresistibly drawn toward it, down, down, to join her. . . She could not have called from the bottom of the torrent. She called to love and safety.

Only when his feet were already slipping off the window ledge, he recalled with frenzy of new suspicions the tales about the sirens who lured the sailors to their doom, down into the waves, to be dashed against the rocks.

Once again he heard her call. Then his head struck against something hard and he lost consciousness.

WHEN he opened his eyes, his head was lying on her lap, his temples bathed with some fragrant lotion. The sun shone over the dispersing mists, and the air was filled with vanishing rainbows. He looked dazedly around, and saw they were in a small garden, only a few paces away from the roaring torrent but separated from it by a high fence of grilled iron. Little rock-flowers, the color of dawn, trailed down beyond the bars, like wistful prisoners longing for their freedom.

He looked up, and the happenings of last night became suddenly clear to him. For the window from which he had jumped was but a few feet from the ground.

Shamefacedly he met the great luminous eyes of "the witch." Her face, wan, pale and suffering, bent over his.

"I was so afraid," she said. "You wouldn't open your eyes for so long. . . You had struck your head against the edges of the fountain."

Only now he saw the little round fountain playing among the water-lilies. Its marble basin was broken by the storm, and the water trickled out of it, running along the narrow flagstone path to join the waves raging below that secluded, flower-scented spot.

"But—hadn't he—hadn't that man leapt from there to his death?"

"Why, not from this tower. Do you think I could bear living here afterward? That wing is on the very brink of the torrent. The entrance has been nailed up; no one has entered it since the accident. Servants say demons live there."

At any other time he would have laughed at their superstitions; now, after he had been a victim of equally fantastic beliefs, he did not feel like scorning anyone's wild notions. Instead, he asked gently:

"Will you forgive me and go away from here, with me, away from witches and demons?"

She laughed tenderly.

"There are no devils here, only the bad will of the people. But I would go with you even to the top of the Witch Mountain."

He looked admiringly at her clear young face uplifted toward the sun sailing above the morning mists, and the heavy darkness rolled off his mind as if the sunshine reached its depths, chasing away the mists of superstition.

The Death of Time

By **W. E. UNDERWOOD**

" 'Tis finished!"
The sum of all that is or was is full,
And from the shattered glass of dying Time
The last sand trembling, slips.
The sun no longer speeds upon his path,
But, like some monstrous, ghastly funeral pyre,
Smokes in the firmament.
Silent and cold, transfixed in rayless depths,
The planet sentries wait the next command;
The tenantry of Earth are locked in death;
While yet the ruined, crumbling globe itself
Hangs faltering in the brazen empyrean.

" 'Tis finished!"
As creeps some giant shadow, these words creep,
In music tones, throughout God's vast estate.
Though soft and gentle as All-loving Love,
They sway and stir the rimless realms of space;
Convulse the star-gemmed arch; shatter its spheres;
Unmake the universe!
Fulfilled their destiny, the countless worlds
Drop piecemeal from their age-long settings;
The blazing beacon of the sky expires;
The Earth to primal elements returns,
And Death, its sternest despot, headlong falls
Athwart his ebon throne.

Upon the bosom of the pulseless night,
That broods in dreadful majesty where once
The flaming subjects of the Sun stood guard
Amid the trackless depths,
Are borne th' innumerable multitudes
That seek, unsummoned, the glitt'ring precincts
Of celestial beauty.
The silence breaks! The fleecy raven plumes
Of wide, o'er-arching Dark
Are ruffled by the variant notes that beat—
Triumphant and despairful—sweet and harsh—
Against the unsubstantial walls that bound
The black and empty vault;
For all who lived, in strong, resistless tide,
Sweep on to Judgment!

The ENDOCRINE MONSTER

by R. ANTHONY

"As Bonita pivoted toward us, something yellow and shiny slithered down from above on her shoulder."

IT WAS my usual mid-weekly visit to Dr. Wilkie's laboratory. For some reason a large and heavily barred animal cage had arrested my attention. Its sole inhabitant was a small guinea-pig.

"What's the idea of this big cage for a dinky guinea-pig?" I demanded promptly. "Going to make a lion out of him?"

Dr. Wilkie grinned. "Perhaps," he said. "As a matter of fact, the ordinary cages are not strong enough to hold Andy. That's what I call this chap. Just watch!"

He took an empty basket cage, the square kind with half-inch meshes of chicken-wire and open at the top, and dropped it into the barred cage, covering the guinea-pig. "Now watch Andy!"

Anyone who has ever watched guinea-pigs in a laboratory will have noticed the patience of these animals, which makes them such ideal subjects for experiments. They are passive and never show signs of fight. This Andy chap, however, was different, decidedly so. As soon as the basket cage fell over him, he reared up and began to claw the chicken-wire. To my amazement the wires bent and snapped like so many feeble threads. In scarcely ten seconds a rent was made, sufficiently large to permit Andy to pass through.

But Andy was not content with the opening. He turned to another spot and ripped and tore, then to still another point to repeat the performance. He tore and twisted with a quiet ferocity that was completely startling in a guinea-pig. In a short minute the basket cage was reduced to a mass of accordioned shreds.

After that he ran to the bars and began to nuzzle them.

"Good Lord!" I exclaimed, drawing back a bit. "He's—doctor, is he bending those bars? Or is my imagination making me think they are bending?"

Dr. Wilkie waved a competent hand and remarked, "I guess they'll hold Andy all right. But let's go into the library and smoke while I tell you a story. Only"—he made an ironical grimace—"only remember this: Andy isn't a he at all. This *he* is a *she*. Andy is a female guinea-pig, not a male. At least Andy started out that way. But now——"

This is the story Dr. Wilkie told me that night.

2

All this happened rather more than twenty years ago. We were a party of seven going up the Parana on an old stern-wheeler, the property of Don Ramon, one of the seven. We were on our way to the Gran Chaco to get—— But why bother about that part? We never got there. And that's the story.

It wasn't a lucky trip. Engine trouble, snags, leaks, and what-not, and finally a terrific *pampero* that drove us up on an island in mid-stream, and partly wrecked our stern wheel. It also wrecked our only boat and marooned us on the ship, since to get to the shore we would have to wade through shallows populated with greedy *jacarés* and alligators.

Fortunately some huge floats came down the Parana within a few hours and the rafters stopped to help us make repairs.

And it was then that we first heard of the "Strong One" or the "Strong Demon," as it was called. We told the rafters that we were making for the Gran Chaco and that we intended to leave the ship near Villeta and pole up the Brazo Occidental into the Chaco.

"*Santo Cristo!*" exclaimed one of the rafters. "Stay away from there, *Señores!* There is something fearful there!"

"Something fearful?" Don Ramon inquired. "What do you mean?"

"We know not, *Señor,*" the rafter replied. "But there must be some—some demon there. There, at the mouth of the Brazo Occidental is the Peninsula del Circulo where ships and rafts stop for the night. They prefer that to the harbor of San Lorenzo a mile farther down. But now they are afraid!"

"Well, tell us, then," Lassignac demanded in his peremptory way.

"The people told us. They warned us. We must stay in camp and not leave it. But Juan Felista, one of our company, heeded not. He went out into the night—to meet some woman it was—and returned not. In the morning we searched. We found him"—here he shivered and crossed himself—"*Señores,* his back was broken—like that!—and his chest crushed in! And he was a very powerful man!"

Arnheimer and Connaughton, the leaders of our party, looked at each other. Arnheimer was a German who had "gone native." Connaughton was an American of certain brilliancy and uncertain passions. His particular crony was Darrell, with whom he had hunted the world and had been hunted in turn.

"Bah!" Darrell exclaimed. "A jaguar, I'll bet!"

"No, no, *Señor,*" the rafter protested. "It could not be a jaguar. A jaguar tears with his claws. And he rips the throat with his teeth! This—this demon—he *crushed!* Juan Felista was crushed—as you take a reed and crush it in your hands."

Arnheimer was listening carefully. The rest of us were listening, too. But somehow I felt that Arnheimer was at home among these people and would know if they were lying, or simply imagining things. "It sounds strange," he said after a minute's thought. "A snake?—But we have no large snakes any longer. Not in these parts. Farther north, perhaps,

in the deep jungles. But hardly here. What think you, *Señores?*" he asked the rest of us.

Mostly we shrugged our shoulders and looked wise. Janis, however, made a slight gesture to call attention and asked, "Did you see any tracks?"

The rafter nodded. "Yes, *Señor,* there was a streak through the grass, and some giant footprints beside it. It surely must be a demon! The blessed mother protect us!"

"Oho!" Connaughton burst forth. "Then there were tracks! I thought demons never left tracks!"

"Tracks or not," Lassignac bristled, "we shall see! We'll look for the thing! Unless the *Señores* feel that their well-being can not be risked!" he added with an insufferable air of patronage.

Darrell surveyed him with a cold stare. "You damned little porcupine! I'll size up your well-being in a moment!"

Lassignac made a gesture which was an insult in itself. "You *Americanos!* Bah! You always know so much! And then you don't!"

Darrell let out a blood-curdling screech and yelled, "One more slant like that and over you'll go! Right to those damned *jacarés!* Just look at the pretty things clap their jaws!" And then he laughed.

Janis interfered. "Whoever is sent to the alligators, the sender follows him! I'll see to that!" His voice was chilly and they all knew that he meant what he said. Tall and thin, with a look of innate refinement, he seemed out of place in that bunch. Still, it was the sort of thing he liked. He had trained for medicine, but hated to practise, and hopped around the world in search of adventure.

Janis' words stopped the quarrel and we turned to the rafters.

"But what of San Lorenzo?" asked Don Ramon. "Do they know of the demon there?"

"Oh, yes, they know!"

"And have they seen it?"

"No, *Señores!* Nobody has seen the demon. They are afraid to! They would see—and then die!"

Arnheimer stroked his beard and evolved another question: "But what becomes of the tracks? Or didn't you follow them?"

The rafter shivered at the memory and grew pale. "*Señores,*" he said hoarsely, "they stopped at the body of Juan Felista, and then—then disappeared!"

"Well, I like that!" said Connaughton with a chuckle that sounded rather ghoulish under the circumstances. "But didn't you follow to the place where they started?"

The rafters hemmed and hawed a bit and finally admitted that they had been afraid to follow the trail into the forest. And that was all we got out of them.

It was a bit unsatisfactory, but just enough to whet our appetite for more. We resolved most certainly to pay the Peninsula del Circulo a visit, and speculated on what we might find.

A few days later we docked at the village of San Lorenzo, below the mouth of the Brazo Occidental. We had to stop there to arrange for the ship and to buy flatboats to ascend the Brazo.

THERE is not much to say about the village, except that the people looked as though they all had malaria. They were listless, thin to emaciation, with a muddy, unhealthy color. The swamps, of course!

During our evening meal in the single café I noticed Connaughton getting very restless. He was always restless, but now he was worse than ever, pecking away at his food, drinking a lot, and eyeing the *señoritas* on the square. Before the rest of us fin-

ished with our meal, he arose, stretched, gave us a smile, and murmured, "I'm off! See you later!"

Darrell called after him, "Careful, Ned! That demon, you know!"

We were surprized by Connaughton's departure. All except Darrell, who shrugged and said in explanation: "It's always that way with him. Every few weeks. If it wasn't for the women, Connie would be one of the biggest men in the States in whatever line he cared. University man and all that. Had plenty of money to start with, but——" He stopped himself as if he had said more than he intended. "Women! Huh!" he muttered.

" But, Señor Darrell!" Don Raman complained. "This Señor Connaughton—will he be back tomorrow to go up the Brazo with us?"

Darrell shook his head. "Don't know. He'll come back when he pleases. Perhaps tonight, perhaps not for a couple of weeks. Oh, don't worry about him! He'll catch up with us. Ned's always there when the divvy comes."

There was little to do that night except to loaf and talk and finally go to bed. Next day, too, we lolled around; except Arnheimer and Don Ramon, who were arranging for flatboats and men to take us up the Brazo. Late in the afternoon Don Ramon told us he had got the boats. But we would have to do the poling ourselves, unless we cared to wait over for several days, since the morrow was some sort of church holiday. On feast days these people would not work.

"Well, a little perspiration will do us some good," Janis said reflectively. "Sweat some of this rotten alcohol out of our system and harden us for what is coming in the Gran Chaco."

Toward sunset the place began to fill up. The feast days and Sundays brought many people to the village, we were told, and, as in many other Catholic countries, celebration began the eve before the feast. The people were dressed in their best and were rather interesting. Lots of them were Spanish, Portuguese and Italian in origin, but most of them rather mixed in blood, I thought.

After our evening meal we were again seated around a table in the *patio,* all except Connaughton, who had not yet returned. But there were more people now, chatting, drinking, singing, and playing. Altogether it was getting lively. Occasionally there would be dances, solo or in pairs.

Somewhere near 9 o'clock I noticed a young woman slip into the court through a small side entrance. Her movements were sinuous, reminding one of a cat, but remarkably graceful. A light *mantilla* was thrown over her head, so that we could not see her features. But she was young, that was evident from her movements.

She sat down a few tables from us. With a flirt of her wrist she flung back the lace *mantilla,* and then we saw her face. When I tell you that I have never forgotten that face, you can imagine that it must have impressed me. To this day I see it vividly before me just as I saw it that night. Yet when I try to describe it, it evades me.

It was beautiful, there was no doubt about that, beautiful with that warmth and class of the high-bred Spanish type. To this was added something of the somber sadness of the Indian. Yet it seemed to me that there was also a certain wildness, a strange ferocity hidden there. Again, it seemed as if she were not quite a woman, since there was an incipient angularity about the jaws and forehead such as one finds in men in their late twenties and in women in their fifties.

Her figure, too, while slender and beautifully rounded, seemed some-

how to have larger and more angular proportions than the delicate ones one expects to find in a girl. Her hips, for instance, were larger than necessary. Some of our athletic girls these days look that way, at times.

Even so, I am not sure that I am not permitting ensuing experiences to superimpose later impressions on that first impression. After all, I was only a lad at the time, just out of college and not yet twenty.

As she ordered her wine, her voice sounded melodious, but throaty, with a curious huskiness.

I'll admit she interested me and I could hardly keep my eyes off her. The rest felt the same way, so they told me later. In fact, almost everyone in the *patio* seemed to feel like that.

She drank silently, her brilliant eyes darting hither and thither. Then the music struck up, and with a sudden jerk she arose and swept into a dance in the center of the court. It was one of those rapid Castilian melodies, which later changed into a slower movement.

This girl danced with marvelous grace, doing the intricate steps with the assurance of long practise. She seemed to vibrate life. Then as the music took up the slower air, she changed. She twisted and turned, and swayed and shook. Her gestures seemed to beckon, her body seemed on fire with life.

From somewhere I caught the remark, "It is the fair Bonita."

Of course that meant nothing to me. What got me was her dancing. I had seen some pretty passionate stuff in those hot-blooded countries. But this was more than passion, it was invitation.

BONITA stopped with a final whirl. At once there was a torrent of applause in which we joined, calls for more, and offers of drink. Someone reached over to seize her arm. And again I was startled. With a quick move she thrust the hand aside. But the force of that blow was sufficient to hurl the man clear to the wall, breaking down intervening tables and chairs.

Around us the people spoke. "Bonita is very strong. She is stronger than a man," they murmured.

Surely strange, I thought. Beyond a momentary angry flash in her eyes Bonita gave no further sign of displeasure. She smiled and nodded to the people. Then she caught sight of us—evident strangers in that village.

Her eyes widened, then grew small with sudden resolution.

She came toward us with a feline swagger, the *mantilla* draped over her shoulder, hands on her swaying hips, eyes flashing, and lips curled in a fascinating smile. She moved slowly, each step an alluring swagger, till she reached our table and stopped before Don Ramon.

There she fastened her eyes on him, and he seemed to be held as if hypnotized. They stared at each other, Bonita with her head tilted invitingly, Don Ramon apparently irresolute. Not a word was spoken between them. But Don Ramon began to flush a slow red; he got up, muttered an excuse to us, and left with the girl.

"So Don Ramon likes women, too," Darrell remarked cynically.

"This woman, this Bonita," said Arnheimer, "where does she come from?"

We inquired, and someone said, "She lives in a cottage on a small farm at the edge of the forest, a little way above the Peninsula del Circulo, opposite the rapids of the Brazo Occidental."

"Where the demon is?" Darrell asked.

The man looked startled. "By the wounds of Christ, *Señor*, do not mention that! We are all of us afraid of it, of that thing, whatever it may be.

All except Bonita. She has never been harmed."

"And she is not afraid?" Lassignac queried.

"Not the slightest. She laughs at our fears. But, *Señor,* we have seen them, the dead ones, right in that jungle near the Peninsula, at the edge of the swamps. All killed the same way! All crushed, with their ribs broken and their backs broken! Holy Mary, it was terrible!"

"But were any of them eaten?" Janis put in.

The man looked a bit surprized at this question. He pondered for a while before he answered. "No," he finally said. "The bodies were crushed and left there."

"A strange demon," Janis mused. "All animals kill either for food or in self-defense. Here apparently it is not a desire for food. Still, it is hardly conceivable that any human would attack a being so powerful that it can crush in defense."

Arnheimer nodded in agreement. "May I ask how long this has been happening? And how many have been killed?"

The man eyed the two with fearful interest. "Careful, *Señores!* I hope you do not intend to attack that —that—whatever it is?"

Janis smiled. "No, hardly that. But answer our questions."

"A little more than a year ago, I think, was the first time that someone was killed."

"From this village?"

"No. And that is strange, *Señor.* It is always people who are visitors here like yourselves."

Darrell laughed shortly. "Doesn't sound good for us, does it?"

Janis waved him to silence and asked, "How many were killed?"

"We are not sure, *Señores.* Two, sometimes three a month. And many we probably never found. Bonita told us of cries and shrieks and groans not far from her house. But when we went we did not always find anything."

"Humph! Did Bonita ever see this—this—demon, as you call it?"

"No, *Señores.*"

Someone just then called our informant and that was all we could learn, since others seemed to know even less.

"Well, that settles that," said Darrell. "I move we look up that thing. It's got me going."

"Very well," announced Lassignac. "I, too, will go. Or I will lead!" he said with insufferable grandiloquence. "And where a Lassignac leads others may well follow!"

"Cut out the trumpets and bass drums, you fish!" Darrell snapped. "We'll all go together and——"

Arnheimer stopped him with a gesture. "No, we can not go," he said. "Tomorrow early we must start. Don Ramon should be—should be rid of the girl by then. And perhaps Connaughton will be back, too. We can not bother with these side issues in view of the purpose of this trip."

That settled the matter for the time.

But Don Ramon did not come back. After breakfast next morning we looked in his room and found his bed untouched. Nine o'clock came and the bells in the decrepit old church began to ring for mass, and our partner was still absent. So we decided to look for him, whether he liked that or not.

Since we knew he had gone with Bonita, we inquired the way to her home. We could take the road, we were told, such as it was, which led past the cottage. Or there was a shorter way, if we followed a faint path along the edge of the swamps. The latter would be nearer, but was not much used on account of the mosquitoes, and the danger—from the demon.

Despite the caution, we decided to take the path, figuring that Don Ramon would hardly return quite openly along the road, but would take the concealed way.

We found the path boggy and dark, and thick with mosquitoes. Fortunately, we had head-nets with us, so we were protected at the most vital points. The jungle got thicker as we went on, hedging in on the path, until we seemed to move between two solid walls of vegetation. Later we skirted a swamp and the trees grew thinner, although the ground vegetation was a greater tangle than ever. Finally we seemed to be leaving the river, since the ground became firmer and the trees more scattered, much like some of the open "parks" in Texas.

And then we saw white water ahead.

"Hello!" exclaimed Darrell, who was in advance. "That must be the Brazo! But how the deuce——"

"Yes," said Arnheimer. "Apparently we have got onto the Peninsula del Circulo!"

"The lair of the demon!" Darrell laughed. "Ha! We weren't going to look him up! But we're here after all!"

"We may find him," Lassignac cried excitedly, "and then——!"

Janis smiled amiably. "And then we go right on. We're here to look for Don Ramon, remember! Let's strike back along the Peninsula and see if we can't find our path again. We must have lost it somewhere, I'm sure."

So we turned away from the rapids toward the neck of the Peninsula. As we went along we saw signs of clearing, of human activity. Camping spots, of course, where the boatmen and rafters had laid over.

Darrell, once more in the lead, suddenly stopped and pointed to something in the grass. "Connaughton's cap!" he exclaimed.

We crowded around him. There lay the cap, beside the path, as if carelessly dropped. We all recognized it at once.

"He's around here somewhere," said Darrell. "Oh, Ned! Oh, Connie!" he called.

We joined him in the call, but except for the noise of birds and insects, and the chatter of some little monkeys, we heard nothing like an answer.

"I'll bet he's around here somewhere," Darrell insisted, in a curiously flat tone. "Let's look for him!"

Although he didn't say it, we knew what was on his mind. We saw his face suddenly grown pale and strained. And I feel sure that the rest of us looked no better.

"Have the demons got Connaughton?" was what he had left unsaid.

We had brought our revolvers and automatics with us. Silently we drew them and then we spread out to search.

The point where we found Connaughton's cap was at the neck of the Peninsula. So we were moving toward the main river bank. The ground vegetation there was a bad tangle and difficult to get through, but in places it would leave fair-sized spaces covered with lush grasses, looking like comfortable spots for camping. I had reached one of these grass plots, when I noticed that it looked somewhat different from the others I had examined, as if someone had sat there and kicked holes in the sod. Not recently, that is, but a day or two before. You know, in such moist places tracks do not keep long.

Well, I did my best to follow them. The tracks led through the bushes, over other grass plots. It was chiefly by the broken branches and torn

leaves that I was able to follow at all. Finally I came to a thick group of trees on a small hillock. I dared not approach directly, so I moved sideways around the elevation, trying to pierce the gloom of the thicket, looking carefully up and down, prepared for every attack.

Half-way around I caught the glimpse of something gray. I stopped and watched sharply. No movement. I bent down to look along the ground. And there, in the semi-darkness, I could discern something like a body in gray linens. The humming of flies and the odor of decaying flesh apprized me that something else might be close by.

I called to the others. Meantime I looked for some sign of a wild beast, but saw and heard nothing. Seeing the others approach, I pushed forward through the bushes.

There, twisted strangely, eyes protruding and glassy, blood oozing from the distorted mouth, lay Don Ramon! He was quite dead, that was evident. And a little farther, partly hidden behind the bole of a tree, lay another body, clad in white ducks.

Even before I saw the face, I knew it would be the body of Connaughton. Flesh-flies were swarming around it in masses. He must have been dead fully twenty-four hours. In those latitudes flesh decays rapidly, you know.

"My God, it's Don Ramon!" exclaimed Darrell, the first to come up. His glance flew to where I stood. "And over there?" He came over and saw the body. "Ned!" he groaned.

He turned ghastly pale, and for a moment I thought he was going to faint. But he sank to the ground and there he sobbed, the hard, broken, tearing sobs of a man. It was agonizing to hear him.

Beside Don Ramon's body stood Lassignac, pain unutterable on his frozen features. Till then I had been inclined to despise the chap as a heartless braggadocio; now his sorrow drew me to him. Arnheimer and Janis had come up also and stood there silently, but with a look of iron resolve on their bleak faces.

They were all a strange, even piratical, crew. But it seems a human law that man must love something or other. So Darrell had loved Connaughton, and Lassignac had loved Don Ramon, and had gone with them into crimes and unholy adventures. Moralists will jeer at such affection. I did not then, nor do I now. There was a weak spot in the moral make-up of every one of them. They knew it of themselves and recognized it in others, and perhaps it was this community of weakness that had drawn them together. Like and like, as the old blurb puts it.

It was Janis who finally roused Darrell. "Come, Jim! We have work to do!"

Darrell shook himself and got up. "Yes, we've got to find—that—that *thing!*"

Janis was examining the bodies with professional sureness. "Ribs crushed, back broken in both," he said. "As if someone had embraced them!"

"But what?" barked Lassignac. "Surely no human! Don Ramon was strong as a gorilla. I've never seen him beaten."

Janis shook his head wonderingly. "I don't understand this. As we said the other day, there is no animal that simply embraces and crushes." His glance took in Arnheimer, who was moving away slowly, looking at the ground. "The tracks, of course! Let's look for them!"

"Damn it, yes!" Darrell cried and swung in beside Arnheimer.

It was clear that the latter had found something, for he was moving

forward, away from the hillock. Since they were careful not to step on the tracks, I could see them myself. What I saw was a streak leading from Don Ramon's body, and beside it some oblong footprints of huge size, but spaced the length of an average person's step. In the dank, lush grass they were quite clear.

They led through the undergrowth, between trees, until we reached an open space, where they mingled with a lot of miscellaneous tracks. There the grass had been pounded down, as at a picnic. And with this we saw other evidence.

"That's blood!" Darrell exclaimed. "That's blood, or I'm a fool! Here's where the thing got Connie and Don Ramon, and then dragged them to that hillock!"

Arnheimer nodded. "Quite true! They evidently fought here. See how the grass is stamped into the ground. But there is a confusion of tracks here. We might circle the spot and see if we can find any other tracks like those going to the hillock."

We adopted the suggestion, some of us going one way, the rest in the other direction. At a point opposite our starting place we met.

Nothing! We were puzzled, and somewhat frightened. What was this thing that could leave huge footprints and still vanish in thin air? I did a little perspiring right then and there and shed not a few ripples of goose-flesh, let me tell you.

It was Janis again who found the solution. "Humph!" he said. "If this were Africa I'd say it was a gorilla or some such apelike creature. But this is South America, and as far as I know there are no large apes here. That eliminates that. Of course, there is a possibility of a huge ape, but it is not probable. Let's take the probabilities first, before we bother with the improbabilities. Darrell, you and Lassignac circled the other way. Did you see any other tracks besides those giant footprints we were looking for?"

"I? No!—Oh, wait a minute!" Darrell looked perplexed for a moment, then turned quickly and retraced his steps. "Over here!" he called back. "Over here!"

We ran after him. There were tracks there, not at all like those we were seeking, but as if some human had run lightly through the grass. The grass was nearly upright, but the marks were still discernible.

"That's what I mean," said Janis. "Let's take the normal probabilities. Whoever ran here is certainly human, and may know something of what happened here. Further, since these tracks look fairly recent—certainly not older than the thing's footprints —then this human *must have seen*, and must be made to tell! And note that the tracks go only one way—away from the spot, and also away from the hillock with—the bodies! That human must have made tracks in coming here. And since none are visible they must be so old that they are wiped out, just as those of Don Ramon, who certainly came to this point last night, are wiped out. Hence this person must have been with Don Ramon at the time. Suspicious? Indeed, yes!"

There was no need to urge us onward. In a few minutes the new tracks led us to the outskirts of a small farm, where they vanished near a hut at the edge of the forest. The hut was hardly more than a hovel, just four walls of mud mixed with straw, and a small lean-to.

No sound came from the hut. With youthful impulse I moved forward, ahead of the others, and sneaked up to a small window. From within came the regular breathing of some sleeper. I peered into the gloom. On a bed of straw, covered with a light

blanket, lay some person—a woman, I thought.

I reported back at once. It was decided to wake her and question her.

"Better be careful," said Lassignac. "There may be more than one there."

His voice had a peculiarly penetrating quality and he spoke louder than he had intended. For at once there was some stirring in the hut, and a few seconds later the door opened and there stood—Bonita!

"I'll be damned!" said Darrell in disgust. For some reason we had forgotten about her, although we knew that she had gone with Don Ramon the night before. But we were looking for something monstrous and hideous and grotesque, for in our minds only that sort of thing could be associated with the fiendish killing of our friends and others. Yet here was the brilliant dancing girl of yesterday, and the tracks led straight to her door! I was befuddled, completely so.

"Let me question her," said Janis.

Without waiting for a consenting reply, he addressed her. "*Señorita,* where is Don Ramon?"

With her streaming hair, and dressed in a sacklike garment, she looked the Indian part of her rather than the Spanish. I mentioned to you, didn't I, that she was of mixed blood? She didn't appear to be the least bit embarrassed or afraid. In fact, she faced us with a certain reckless confidence, such as one sees in boxers when they are sure of having an easy time with an opponent.

Janis repeated the question.

She smiled and shook her head. "*Señores,* I know not where he is," she said.

"But you must know," Janis insisted softly. "Why did you run away from him during the night? Out there in the forest."

This time she did not smile, but looked at Janis with sharp eyes. "I ran away," she said slowly, "I ran away because—because that—that thing came. I heard it—and then ran."

Janis eyed her contemplatively. "This—this thing, as you call it—has it ever attacked you?"

"Oh no, *señor.* It kills only—men!" And here she laughed rather gleefully. It gave me the shivers.

"If that is true, if it attacks only men, then why did you run away from Don Ramon and leave him?"

This time Janis had scored. Now I saw the purpose of his questions.

Bonita saw it, too. But she snapped her fingers. "Oh, la la! I just heard—and ran."

"You—you ran—you, who are very strong? When your strength added to Don Ramon's might have saved him?" Janis continued with emphasis. His eyes gleamed with sudden light. "Yes, and Connaughton, too!" he added sternly.

Bonita became enraged at Janis' insistence. "What care I for these men?" she flared. "I could kill them myself! I could kill you!" She stamped the ground in anger. "And I will! I will!" she screamed.

Darrell came running from behind the hut. We had not seen him disappear, he had moved so quietly. But now he came in a rush, waving something at us.

"I've got them! She's the murderer!" he called, pointing at Bonita. "You—you she-devil!" he bellowed at her. "Though you're only a woman, blast you, you're going to die! And die right now!" He flung the things he carried into Bonita's face.

As they fell to the ground we saw what they were. Just large, oblong strips of leather fastened to a pair of ordinary woman's shoes—that's all. But at once we understood how the tracks in the forest could be made with them. Most certainly these—

well, this footgear had made those extraordinary footprints.

"You—you *demon!* You *monster!*" Darrell continued furiously. "You killed Connaughton and dragged him away! You killed Don Ramon and dragged him away! I don't know how you did it! But I know that you are going to die for it! Get ready, you!"

Darrell swung up his automatic.

"Good God!" I muttered. I couldn't understand at all. Was Darrell really going to shoot this woman? What had she done? Left Connaughton and Don Ramon to be killed, so I thought. Certainly he couldn't mean that he believed she did the killing herself!

I moved toward Darrell to stop him and tried to call him. But I never said what I wanted to say.

IT HAPPENED like a flash. Bonita whirled to one side and Darrell's gun roared. He missed her. With a tigerish spring she was on him.

And then I saw what I never would have believed had I not seen it myself. With a quick blow she knocked the automatic from Darrell's hand. Then she flung her arms around him. Darrell fought furiously, screaming curses. But that was only for a moment. And then I saw his face turn crimson, his eyes seemed to pop from his head, we heard a dull crash, a smothered gurgle, blood rushed from Darrell's mouth, and he was flung aside, broken, dead.

This woman, still not much more than a girl, had *crushed a grown man to death!*

I think none of us moved. The speed, the ghastly horror of it, had us paralyzed.

But Bonita swung around with fury in her eyes. I was close, for I had jumped to intercept Darrell's shooting. And she seized me. I wanted to tear away, but I was helpless, my own boasted strength like that of a babe against hers. She grabbed me by the arm, pulled me toward herself and embraced me.

I felt an agony of shock tingling to my forehead and fingertips, a surging protest, a revolting horror at the inhuman thing that was happening to me. Then everything went black and I knew nothing more.

Apparently I was out only a few minutes. As I awoke I felt numb and helpless. With some difficulty I rolled over and tried to rise. It was painful. Something in my side ached furiously, stabbing me as I moved—a broken rib, as we found later.

Janis and Arnheimer were standing near me, while farther away Lassignac was busy winding ropes around an inert body. That body was Bonita, unconscious or dead.

"What—what has happened?" I wheezed.

Janis turned around. "Oh, you are alive? Thank God! I feared she had gotten you, after all!"

"Feel half alive," I said. "All right otherwise. Only weak in the back and ribs. But what's happened to Bonita?"

"Janis threw her," Arnheimer answered. "Struck her in the neck or back of the head."

"No," Janis corrected. "I thumbed her on the vagus nerve. The pneumogastric, you know. A little Jap trick I learned over in Kioto. You may have heard of it. I wasn't sure I could shoot quick enough or straight enough to prevent her from crushing you, so I thumbed her and made her faint. Lassignac is tying her up with all the ropes he can find. Hope they'll hold her. If they don't"—he paused reflectively—"well, we may have to shoot her yet!"

Lassignac was still winding ropes around Bonita until she began to look like a bandaged Egyptian mummy. Even at that, I had my doubts about the ropes. They were old and

rotten, weathered from lying around outside; but perhaps if the quality of the rope was not enough, then the quantity might do.

That's what Lassignac seemed to think. He was winding away with fervor, muttering and cursing under his breath.

I got up slowly and went over to gaze at Bonita. Just then she woke up. Recollection came swiftly to her. "What are you doing?" she demanded of Lassignac.

I could see that the latter was furious with her and with himself. The former because his friend Don Ramon was dead, the last because he was doing something that went against the grain, against the innate chivalry of his nation, and he hated himself for it. Under such circumstances a man is likely to go farther than he intends. So Lassignac.

"I am binding you," he snarled. "I will see you hanged, you female brute! You fiend, you arch-murderess!" he screamed. "Bah! *Cochon!*" And then he kicked her.

It was a beastly rotten thing to do. But as I said, under a strain a man may do things he would normally think impossible.

Bonita seemed to shiver for a moment. Then—it happened so quickly that I couldn't quite follow—she just seemed to bound from the ground, the ropes falling from her like so many broken threads. In the same upward motion she seized Lassignac and before we could prevent she hurled him with terrific force against a tree, where he crashed and lay inert.

She turned to the rest of us. Our guns had come up at once, I can tell you. No, we didn't shoot. At that I am not so sure that our bullets could have stopped her unless they tore her to pieces. That uncanny concentrated energy and demoniac strength needed more than bullets to stop.

But our bullets were not necessary.

She had thrown Lassignac with such force that the impact had shaken the tree. And there was something up there that was disturbed, and didn't like to be disturbed. As Bonita pivoted toward us, something like a rope, yellow and shiny, slithered down from above to her shoulder, hung there for a fraction of a second, and dropped to the ground. From there it moved through the grass toward the jungle, not smoothly, but in a series of leaps and bounds much as a coiled bed-spring bounces when you throw it, and finally disappeared in the thickets.

None of us had seen it clearly, but we all knew what it was from the way it moved. It was that deadliest of South American snakes, the fer de lance, swiftest and most venomous of reptiles.

"I'm glad it didn't come this way," Arnheimer murmured, pale to his eyes.

Bonita had scarcely moved since the snake struck her. Already her eyes were filled with horror and fear. And scarcely half a minute later she began to writhe in the first paroxysm of pain. No, we could do nothing for her. She had been struck in the neck, close to the jugular vein, a direct path to the heart. She twisted and screamed in her agony. It was gruesome, and I almost felt sorry for her.

It didn't last long. Just a few minutes. Brrr! I shudder at the recollection. The discovery of the bodies of Connaughton and Don Ramon was terrible to us, and terrible, too, was the sight of Darrell's death. But most terrible is the memory of the woman, Bonita, rippling and heaving under the action of the poison.

"Well, it's over, thank God!" said

(Continued on page 575)

A Grim Story of the Death of Mankind

THE RULER OF DESTINY

By CHARLES HILAN CRAIG

WITH an ironic smile upon his face the Ruler of Destiny rode through the streets of the Greatest City. There was in that smile of irony something of disdain, a little of pride, a great deal of triumph—but never a vestige of pity. As the great limousine rolled along the densely crowded street he watched the hurrying crowd—hurrying the Lord alone knew whither. And as he sucked the smoke from an expensive cigar deep within his lungs he watched that crowd with the conscious, positive knowledge that he was their master.

The Master of Destiny, he called himself, and as yet he alone of all the world knew why. The others who had known were dead. He was alone in his secret. It might prove a hindrance if others knew, so he had seen to it that none other did know. The chemists, for instance—the three of them who worked in the Master's laboratory—they had known. And now they were dead: but more of that later. And there was his chief assistant who had died the night after their final discussion of the great thing which had come to pass. "Wood alcohol" had been the doctor's cryptic verdict. But the Master knew better. There is a more subtle poison than wood alcohol; it works more quickly and with no chance of failure. Investigation? No, far from it; for who would think of investigating such a man as the Master—a man whose beck and call were commands to the politicians?

And so this day he rode among them, smiling sardonically, rode to the War Office where the politicians were awaiting him, ready (he thought) to kowtow before him for what he was—their master. For the war must be won at any cost, and was he not the man of the hour, the Master of Destiny, the Ruler of Fate, the man who could by a wave of the hand wreck the opposing armies?

He was not just fat in the usual sense of the term. His corpulence was of the type which one associates with swine. His cheeks bulged; his eyes were tiny orbs of blue steel set in soggy pockets of baggy flesh; his chins bounced up and down with every movement he made. And his body—ponderous, sweaty, powerful—reminded one of nothing in the world so much as a husky hippo.

Instinctive dislike? Yes! But one's feeling toward the man did not stop there; nor did it, after all, begin there. For to the ordinary person there seemed to be about the personality of Travis Bannister a sinister quality which imparted a touch of that sort of discomfort which writers usually associate with a haunted graveyard at the midnight hour. For some men, to look into the blue eyes in the bulging face brought a sensation of terror; for the braver-hearted, a feeling of icy cold.

He was a scientist. And that he was a remarkable scientist there is no doubt. Not that he was a delver of the usual type. Far from it. Not in fifteen years perhaps had he handled the actual apparatus of his craft. But his ponderous brain worked out marvelous theories which his assistants put into execution.

It was his wont to sit in a huge armchair under an electric fan and sip his liquor while in his soft, womanlike voice he gave directions to his employees. Mix A with B and one has a certain combination. Mix AB with C and the mixer might in all probability be blown to damnation.

But Travis Bannister was never injured by his experiments, for when the result of his chemical combinations was at all uncertain his instructions were given over the telephone. And tragedy stalked after these telephoned instructions to his aids many times. There was, for example, the young college graduate who was ordered over the wire to perform a certain experiment and within five seconds thereafter where the house in which he had been working stood there was nothing but debris. A terrible hole in the earth bore mute witness to the catastrophe. Again there was the time when three assistants were killed by a new kind of poison-gas which ate through their masks and suffocated them.

Travis Bannister was sorry that these things happened, very sorry; but don't mistake me—it was not because of any sympathy for the victims, but rather because costly and rare apparatus was lost in each case.

IT HAD been during the World War that Travis Bannister had turned his attention to the making of poisonous gas. He took an intense interest in it—as he always became interested in that which would cause suffering and death. But it was not until after the armistice that he turned his undivided attention to the perfection of a thing so diabolical in its very immensity as to bring a shudder of horror to the war lords who were used to diabolical contrivances of all kinds.

For Travis Bannister had, several years after the end of the war, invented a type of gas which would wipe out of existence the entire human race. And so when in the year 1933 the nations of the world had locked in mortal combat and his own nation was getting decidedly the worst of the fray because of an inadequate air force, Travis Bannister mailed a letter to the War Department.

The Committee of Nine sat about the long table in the War Office discussing the latest phase of the struggle when an orderly entered, handing to the chairman a sealed letter.

Slowly the chairman, as though he realized its importance, opened the letter and with grave face read. There was some potent thing in the very atmosphere which came to head on delivery of the letter—what it was one could not guess. The chairman read, and as he came to the end he smiled; but there was in that smile no hint of mirth.

He read the letter aloud:

The War Department:

Sirs:

Realizing that our forces are hard pressed I hereby volunteer to win the war for our country. In so doing I shall introduce a poisonous gas which will, under proper direction, exterminate every living plant and animal in the enemy's country. I am, sirs,

THE MASTER OF DESTINY.

Silently the letter was passed about the table. An intangible something emanated from it, bringing to the members of the committee a sensation of impalpable gloom.

They called the telephone number given and asked the Master to come before them. And presently he was announced by an orderly who said:

"Sirs, a gentleman who says he has an appointment. He calls himself the Master of Destiny, sir."

"Show him in," returned the chairman.

And so Travis Bannister came into the presence of the Committee of Nine, assembled in the War Office to discuss the question of avoiding inevitable defeat. He came in fat and bland and suave, and smiling that cold, ironic, chilling smile.

"Bannister!" exclaimed the chairman. "So it's you!"

"Yes," replied the huge man in that soft, even voice which made one involuntarily hate him. "I, sir, am the Master of Destiny."

"Just what do you mean by that, Bannister?"

Bannister smiled, icily.

"What do you suppose I mean, dear sir? But I shall explain. I mean that I am your master, that ——"

"Are you mad?"

"——that I am the world's master."

The members of the committee were nonplussed. Never before had a man come before them save in humble mien. And now there was stealing through the blood of each man there that terror which the sight of the gargoyle invariably brought.

And then he was explaining in that voice of horror which made men grit their teeth to keep from screaming: "I have invented a poisonous gas, sirs, which will at my dictate annihilate the entire world."

"But how——" began the chairman.

Bannister waved a pudgy hand, deprecatingly.

"I shall explain and then you can tell me what you will do. I have in my laboratory two tremendous machines, lately perfected. One of them generates a gas so terrible that it brings instant death to any form of life—plant or animal. The other machine is a counter-agent.

"Let me tell you my plan. The gas machine can be assembled anywhere and set going, and the gas will follow the wind. At the same time the counteracting machine can be set going. The poison gas will travel about the entire world killing as it goes. It is too heavy to rise high in the atmosphere and it will not evaporate or disintegrate. To the best of my knowledge it will, without the counter agency, exist several years.

"Now on the other hand the counteracting gas will be generated here and will form a transparent wall which will keep out the poison. The poison depends on the wind, but the protecting gas can be guided by radio activity. The other nations of the earth shall be destroyed and we shall prosper. Presently the counter-agent, turned on full force, will destroy the gas and then we can stretch our empire over the entire world."

The immensity of the suggestion stunned the committee.

"But if this is as you say, what will happen to our allies?" asked the chairman. "It will take a long time to form a protection for them—and the enemy is coming."

The tiny blue eyes of Travis Bannister lit up with a demoniac light.

"Who said anything about our allies?" he said, coldly. "They can die also."

"Do you mean, sir," asked the chairman, "that we shall destroy the population of the world at one stroke with your machine?"

"Oh, it will take time."

"But ultimately the whole world will die, save us?"

"Yes."

"But think of the non-combatants!"

"They do not interest me."

"But the women and little children?"

"They'll die sometime," came the cool reply.

"Good God, man, are you a monster?"

The cold smile disappeared from the face of the fat man. A diabolic expression so malevolent in its distortion came over his face that the committee trembled.

"You shall vote," he said harshly. "You shall vote now whether to die at the hands of the enemy—or be saved. I have a personal interest. I am the richest man in the nation. I want my property protected. Vote!"

"We shall vote," said the chairman, trembling.

"Sir," said the admiral of the fleet, "I have never believed that our country could lose, but rather than destroy the whole world I shall surrender!"

There was a ripple of acclaim about the table. The chairman was himself again.

"We thank you, Mr. Bannister," he said. "But we feel that we would be slapping the face of God to commit such a crime as you suggest."

The jowls of Travis Bannister were blue with anger.

"Remember, sirs," he said, "you have refused the Master of Destiny." He glared upon them for a moment and passed from the room.

IT WAS the next day that the last air-defense line broke and the enemy was ready for his last thrust upon the Greatest City and the country behind. Every available airship was hurled into service ready to turn the invasion, but as the war committee sat in their office they realized that they represented a beaten nation. The radio had announced the enemy fleet on the way at tremendous speed. Terror-stricken people were milling in the streets before the War Office—some praying, some shrieking blasphemy, some fighting.

The jangle of the telephone.

A voice soft and cold over the wire said: "The enemy is on his way."

"He is!" snapped the chairman.

"There is yet a chance. Say the word and I shall start the machines."

"Never!"

"Do you want to die?"

"Not with that crime on my hands."

"Fools, I am the Master of Destiny! You and your people shall die with the enemy, but I shall live and protect my own. A last chance. Do you want to live?"

"Never under your administration."

"Then die," came the cold voice of fury. "Sir, you are talking to the last man who will live upon this world. You can see the roof of my building from your windows. *Watch!*"

"I shall watch."

"Look to the east, fool, look to the ——"

The chairman rushed to the window. There on the horizon was a growing cloud, now the size of a man's hand—but it grew larger.

"Gentlemen," said the chairman in his cool, precise voice, "the enemy is upon us. Shall we prepare to die?"

"Watch!" had been the Master's command, and the committee watched. "I shall save my own," had said the Master. They watched the laboratory roof in the distance. They saw running figures. They saw a thing which looked like a gigantic cannon raise its ugly mouth to the heavens. Another cannon. "Watch!"

A deep reverberating boom sounded across the city. Purple fire burst from the mouth of the cannon, rolled out with the wind toward the oncoming horde of airplanes. A hissing mass of purple fire, gloriously tinted at the edges, iridescent, but hideous as death. With the wind rolled the fire, billowing, changing color.

The airplanes were close now, too close. In a gigantic triangle they

moved. First the scouts, then the fighting helicopters, then the giant bombers. Behind all came the dirigibles. The pop-pop of the protecting anti-aircraft guns. The rattle of machine-guns, and then——

The mass of purple smoke and fire met the coming horde. A vast chaos; the wind blew on. The smoke issued no longer from the laboratory—a stream of purple fire. The fire and smoke dissolved, but the oncoming air fleet was no more, though here and there a plane rolled drunkenly in mid-air without a guiding hand. The gas of the Master of Destiny had wrecked the greatest air navy in the world.

"Saved," breathed the chairman. Then he gasped in utter horror: pointed toward *them* was the great gas gun; it belched flame and smoke —death. The committee did not try to run. They were ready for the end. They saw the gas leap toward them on wings of vengeance—the gas of the Master. A faint breath of it in their nostrils. They saw people a quarter-mile away falling; saw trees shrivel. A faint odor; then they died.

THE blighting breath of the greatest war mankind ever had known had left its terrible mark on every nation in the world. Millions of men, countless millions of dollars worth of property, had been wiped out by the contrivances devised by men to destroy other men. The bravest and best of every nation participating in the Gargantuan struggle had been destroyed. The flower of the world's best manhood was no more. And those who were left in the armies of the world were plunging into the same chaos. Behind, the women took up the men's work. The remaining men—the misfits and failures of life —were hurled into the breach in a vain attempt to stave off disaster.

And then through the radio came a sinister tale of wo that brought fear to the rest of the world. First a wild rumor, then verification. Terror!

From the top of a great laboratory (went the tale) a huge cannon was sending gust after gust of poisonous gas into the air, which burned with a purple fire, which seared like a white-hot brand through any gas mask ever devised. A gas that would not disintegrate, a gas against which there was no protection. Already in the Greatest City where the machine was located, every man, woman and child was dead, every plant and animal was no more—with one exception. Travis Bannister still lived in the laboratory, about which a pink nebula had formed a protecting wall.

Terror and chaos ruled the world. The radio spoke wild and improbable tales. Nations of people were dying, dead. And then through the air waves there came a message—an ultimatum:

> To the Remaining People of the World:
> Cease fighting and bow to my will and I will yet save the world from destruction. But only on this condition—that I am to be named the sole ruler of the entire world. Submit—or die!
>
> THE MASTER OF DESTINY.

"Never," said the ruler of a great country. "We will fight to the end," said another. But rumor on rumor came over the air. Death ran rampant through the earth. And at last the countries of the world yet in existence agreed to submit. Over the air went the token of surrender.

IN A little room of a great laboratory building the Master of Destiny received the reports from the nations. Surrender, unconditional surrender! And as the last report came in he walked ponderously to the roof and threw on to the full the power of the counter-machine which had heretofore been throwing off gas sufficient only to maintain the protecting wall about his buildings. A gigantic spurt of pink flame soared into the air with a hissing grandeur. A crash of

sparks, the breaking of steel. The pink fire died. The counter-machine was dead.

Then for the first time in all his life the face of Travis Bannister wore an expression of fear. The fat lips parted in horror, the tiny eyes widened as realization came over him.

Too soon had he put the machines into operation. The one was perfected, but the other was inadequate. Realization! Through the world, blown hither and yon by the winds of destiny, the poison gas seared a path more arid than the desert's trails. No longer was there a counter-agent. It would now be only a matter of time till that devastating flame had destroyed the life of the entire world. Then he would be left alone—the only living thing in a dead world.

Feverishly he hurried toward the lethal machine to turn off the power, but out from the machine came terrific waves of heat that beat him back, and he knew then that the gas would continue to come till the engine of death had melted away. And then when he had decided there was nothing left for him to do he betook himself to the radio room, there to await the last reports from a dying world.

Out of Africa came the news of the strange gas that was strangling the people. Out of South America came word of the people dying by tens of thousands. And even as one radio speaker gave the word, a death rattle came into his throat; and Travis Bannister, listening, knew that the gas had reached him.

Day after day, day after day the winds blew the poison about the world. There came an hour when only one radio operator in all the world remained. He was situated in Australia, and it was with mockery that he spoke to the Master of Destiny, with the bravado of a doomed man:

"Are you listening, Master of Destiny? Are you listening? You should be satisfied now, for all the world is dead save you and me. All the world is dying save you, for even now the gas is slipping in through my supposedly gas-proof room, sweeping in like a dread blight. All—are—dying. Ah, the hands—of doom—are on—my throat. I—am dying. Master of Destiny—may God—have mercy—on—your soul!"

Might God have mercy on his soul! It had been a long time since Travis Bannister thought of God.

It had come. Everything was dead, save only him. Dead! One remaining life in all the world. The days passed and he watched that pink aura about his laboratory, and through it he could see the purple tentacles of disaster pushing, pushing, pushing. The counter-machine was dead. The gas cannon still was hurling its horrible product into the dying atmosphere. He knew not how to stop it.

And now the purple was beating back the pink, closing in upon even the Master of Destiny. Was it possible that he, too, must die? Die by his own diabolic invention?

He visioned the approaching end and he knew beyond a doubt that it would be an end of horror. For relentlessly, a little at a time but inevitably as the sun, the purple would press in the pink till it suffocated him, crushed him down slowly; vastly more slowly would he die than those victims of his had died. And so the last man upon the earth became afraid of the justice of fate.

Even the air was dead now, for there were no plants left to return oxygen. Long since he had started his oxygen machines going. Utter silence reigned. His footsteps when he walked were ponderous and the sounds reverberated in his tortured ears as the cannonade of war never did. Hour after hour of stark silence—the silence of the grave.

Purple streamers were slipping in

(Continued on page 574)

OUT OF THE EARTH

BY
FLAVIA RICHARDSON

"It seemed incarnate evil, and it swayed toward them with a leer."

ANTONY WAYRE felt that he could never forget the horror of that night. Even when the actual experience had been forgotten and lived down, there would be intervals of madness when the whole scene was reconstructed in his memory. What Sylvia, his wife, thought, no one knew, for she held it closely to herself. All her energies were given to keeping Antony from brooding.

It all happened without any preliminary warning whatever. Antony and Sylvia had bought a small cottage, called "Roman's," in Gloucestershire. Since the end of the war, Antony had been indefinite in his plans, unable to get a decent job anywhere that would bring in sufficient for their wants and yet give him time to go on with his own writing. Then, at the end of 1924 his godmother was killed in a motor smash, and he found himself the possessor of five hundred pounds a year, long before, in the ordinary course of events, it would have fallen to his lot.

He and Sylvia had at once started to look for a country cottage where they could settle down. With what he expected to make by writing, Antony judged they could manage well on his new income by living quietly. Sylvia was fond of gardening and of a country life, and she planned to breed chickens and ducks for their own use as well as to grow fruits and vegetables.

After much hunting, they found "Roman's," and knew it was the home of their choice. The cottage was small and compact, built at the top of a hill, two miles from the village, but only a quarter of an hour's walk across the fields from a small market town. The nearest neighbor lived at the bottom of the hill.

The first month they were there passed without noticeable event. They were both in love with the house, both busy all day, and tired and

healthy enough to sleep perfectly at night. Had they not done so, it is just possible that they might have had some warning of the horror that was to come upon them.

SHORTLY after Christmas, Antony Wayre went to dine with the doctor who lived in the house at the foot of the hill. Sylvia was invited, but there was a thick white mist from the valley which had risen even to their altitudes, and as she had a bad cough and cold, she decided to stay at home by the fire.

Antony, being a good husband, and remembering that his wife was alone in the house—for their daily "help" went as soon as she had laid the supper—did not stay long with the doctor, and was walking up the hill again by half-past 10.

The mist was rolling up in strange white shapes, and by the time he had reached his own garden gate he could not see the lights from the doctor's house, nor any of those from the outlying villas of the town, usually to be seen through the trees. He pulled his scarf up more closely round his throat and shivered a little.

Suddenly he was aware of a strange feeling in the garden: it was hard to define; hard to pin down to anything in the least definite, yet it was strong enough for him to stand still and peer around. He was strangely conscious of the presence of a second person.

The feeling was so strong that Antony called out sharply: "Who's there?" wondering if some thief was hiding in the garden with intent to despoil the chicken run. But there was no answer; the white mist rolled up in deeper waves till it seemed to engulf him; it was becoming hard—with the mist and the darkness—to see even the garden path, in spite of his electric torch.

Shrugging his shoulders, Antony went on to the hall door. Rather to his surprize, it was bolted. He knocked twice, and as he did so, the feeling that he was accompanied grew stronger.

A minute later, Sylvia opened the door and half dragged him into the hall, shutting and bolting it with feverish rapidity.

"Hullo, what's up?" asked Antony, naturally surprized. Then remembering his own sensations, he asked as casually as he could: "Have you been frightened? Did you think you heard someone about?"

Sylvia laughed, nervously, and backed into the drawing room.

"No, oh no," she said, "only—only it's the first time you have been out without me and I suppose I got a little nervous. There's a nasty mist up, isn't there? The house seems full of it."

Antony knew his wife too well to take her words at more than face value. He could see that she was on the verge of hysterics, and cursed himself soundly for having left her alone, even for a few hours. He ought to have remembered that she was not used to the country and that the silence was bound to affect her nerves.

Very deliberately, with the impression of infusing an air of everyday life into the situation, he divested himself of coat and scarf, put his stick into the stand, and lighted a cigarette. Then he went into the drawing room where Sylvia was waiting for him, the door wide open so that she could watch him in the hall. The room was, as she had said, decidedly full of mist, but it was not too badly lit for him to see that her eyes were wide with horror and her hands trembling as she sat down and picked up her knitting, making a feeble pretense at normality.

"Sylvia, what is it?" Antony spoke sharply; his own nerve was be-

ginning to falter. "What has happened? Are you frightened?"

She lifted her eyes from her work and nodded her head.

"Tony, Tony," she began, and her voice held a sob of fear in it. "Tony, I don't know what it is, but there's something dreadful about this place tonight. It—the feeling, I mean—came on about an hour ago; I've been sitting here, praying you wouldn't be very late. I began to think I should go mad."

Antony shook off the creeping horror that was beginning to possess him also. "Nonsense, darling," he said, as cheerfully as he could. "You aren't feeling very fit; your cold's pulled you down, and your nerves have given out. I was a fool to leave you tonight. Forgive me, dear. I'll make some cocoa, shall I? and we'll have it here by the fire before we go to bed."

His effort at normality seemed to pull her together, but she would not leave him alone. Almost clinging to his coat, she went with him to the tiny kitchen and helped to fetch the kettle and the tin of cocoa. Curiously enough there was hardly any mist in the kitchen; it seemed to have concentrated in the drawing room.

"Something to do with the aspect of the house," Antony thought to himself, but he did not comment on it to his wife.

Over the cocoa, Sylvia seemed to become happier, though she jumped badly when a log fell out of the fire on to the hearth.

"What did you talk about at the doctor's?" she asked.

Antony shrugged his shoulders. "Everything," he said, with a smile. "The birth- and death-rate of the village, poultry feeding—by the way, he's got some wonderful food mixture he thinks you would like to try—local history and so on. He told me, too, that there used to be a Roman settlement here; and that's why this cottage is called 'Roman's.' Apparently at one time it was a pretty big place, and then it died out. But every now and then the farmers turn up old weapons and things when they're plowing."

Sylvia nodded. "I wonder if the hens will scratch up anything," she said. "They work hard enough. I believe they're going to do well. It's a bad time of year to start them, though."

"I suppose so," Antony spoke sleepily. "What about a move upstairs? That fire has almost burned itself out."

AS THE words left his mouth he became aware once more of that other presence. For the last few minutes it had left him; now it was back, and even more strongly than before. He glanced at Sylvia. She was looking over her shoulder at the door, and there was fear in her eyes.

"I—I don't think I want to go to bed just yet," she said in a strained voice. "Antony, I'm afraid. It's come back again."

"Don't be silly, dear," he said, encouragingly, and all the time knowing that it was he who would be silly if he set foot outside the door. Somehow he knew that It—the Horror—was in the hall—that he himself might have paved a way for its entrance when he came into the house.

The lamp gave a sudden flicker and then went out; the oil had been exhausted. Sylvia gave a little cry of dismay. The room was now lit only by the dying fire. Antony dashed to the window and dragged back the curtains. The mist had lifted and a pale moon shed a gleam on to the floor and the grand piano.

Antony went over to the grate and picked up the poker, all the while aware that it was a useless weapon. Then he went toward the door. Whatever it was out there, he meant

to face it; he could not endure the thought of being beaten in his own house. But as he laid a hand on the door-knob, he drew back. Something was on the other side, something so strong, so definitely evil, that every fiber of his soul recoiled by instinct from facing it. He could not co-ordinate his muscles; for a moment he stood still, dumb. Then he pulled his scattered senses together and turned round.

Sylvia was standing behind him, white as the moonlight; her eyes big and dark, her fingers moving tremulously. Antony went up to her and slipped an arm round her waist.

"Darling," he said, "we've got to see this thing through."

"What is it? What is it, Tony?" she asked, half sobbing.

"God only knows—or the devil," he returned grimly.

His arm round her waist still, they retreated to the far end of the room. Their eyes were seemingly compelled to remain on the door. Would It come in? What did It want? When would It go away?

AFTER what seemed hours of waiting, Sylvia gave a little cry and pointed to the floor. Antony followed the direction of her finger. Over the threshold, under the door, was coming a slow, thick, greenish vapor that rose slightly in the air as it was forced into the room by the pressure of a further discharge behind.

"My God!" gasped Anthony. "What's that?"

Clinging to one another, backs against the wall, they watched and waited, while the vapor increased in volume till it seemed to fill a quarter of the little sitting room. Then they realized that it was as if it were kept within confines of its own. That was in one way the most horrible thing about it. It did not spread and diffuse as gas would do, but moved in a solid block with cumulus edges.

For a moment or two nothing more occurred; then Sylvia cried out again: "It's taking shape!" Staring, horror-stricken, they saw that this was indeed the case. Out of that solid wall of greenish gas—a foul, horrible green, that reminded them of rotten slime and duckweed—certain portions were growing together, were becoming a form. And as the Horror did this, so did the foul smell grow greater till they could hardly breathe the air round them. It was suffocating them.

Antony made a supreme effort, and without loosing his hold of Sylvia, jerked his elbow through the window. The raw night air came in with a rush, but it could not dispel the vapor inside. The edges of the block wavered a little for a moment, but that was all.

Sylvia was sobbing quietly, burying her head on Antony's shoulder, trying to shut out the sight. A sudden catch of his breath made her look up again, and she shuddered, sick with fear.

The form was growing clearer now; the central part of the green gas had become a being, an entity such as they had never seen before. Swaying backward and forward, raised slightly above the floor but without visible means of support, was a travesty of a man—grotesquely limbed and featured. But the chief horror lay in the expression. Never had Antony or Sylvia conceived that such bestiality, such foulness could live in any semblance to the human face. It seemed incarnate evil, and it swayed toward them with a leer, coming imperceptibly closer every moment.

Antony's back was against the wall; he could retreat no farther; Sylvia lay upon his arm, half-fainting with terror.

Somehow, by some strange instinct, Antony knew that he must make no effort to get out by the window; that outside was the creature's own ground: at a disadvantage here, he would be utterly lost if he made any attempt at a fight in the garden. The thing must be faced here and now. It was coming closer; the fetid smell was overpowering. Helpless, Antony lay splayed against the wall. It could be only a question of minutes, perhaps only a few seconds, before he and Sylvia would be engulfed in this ghastly sea of evil that emanated from the foul Horror in the room.

His hand, groping wildly round, touched the poker, but he made no effort to pick it up, knowing that such a weapon could do no good. His eyes roamed wildly round, seeking for help. Was there nothing that could save them? Were they to be possessed forever by the Thing, to fall hopelessly, irredeemably into its clutches?

Sylvia gave a little moan and fainted dead away on his arm, her head rolling to one side. The shaft of moonlight caught a ribbon round her neck. Antony saw it, unthinkingly, then with a glimmer of hope. With his free hand he jerked at the ribbon and dragged out the little silver crucifix she always wore.

The time for drastic measures had come; the Horror was only a yard away; Antony felt that he himself could not keep his senses much longer; he dropped his wife on the floor and stood in front of her, the crucifix held at arm's length, his eyes on the horrible black depths where the creature's eyes should be.

For a long minute he stood there, taut as a bow-string, concentrating all that was left of his strength. And the thing wavered, swayed backward, then forward, while a sudden wave of noisomeness engulfed Antony. Dimly he realized that this was the crucial moment; that It was doing its utmost to crush him then. With one last supreme effort he flung the silver crucifix straight into the middle of the mocking, bestial face, crying: "In the name of Christ, begone!"

There was a sound of rushing wind, a cry so terrible that it rang in his ears for weeks, and the Horror disseminated and disappeared, leaving the room filled with the raw night air from the broken window.

Then Antony fainted also.

THE doctor was already in bed and asleep when he was roused by the pealing of his night bell, and looking out, saw two figures at the door. He hurried down and, to his surprize, Antony and Sylvia tottered into the hall. He dragged the story from them by dint of close questioning.

"What is it, Doctor?" pleaded Sylvia. "Will it come again?"

"I don't know," he said. "Honestly, I don't know. But I should not stay at 'Roman's,' if I were you."

"What was it?" reiterated Antony.

The doctor moved his hands deprecatingly. "A Roman encampment and settlement," he said; "it has been considered by many experts that the hill is not a natural one but was originally a tumulus, perhaps also a barrow. And it is a well-known fact among those who study the occult, that such places are the favorite haunts of elementals.

"Mrs. Wayre—indeed, both of you—you have had a very fortunate escape. Something unknown to us, some natural cause, perhaps, some hidden attraction in one or other of you had let it loose and sent it like the devil its master 'seeking whom it might devour.' It is only by the grace of God that either of you can tell me the tale."

By the Well of Tiz He Was Buried

THE RETURN

By G. G. PENDARVES

"H-M-M! Might spend a night in many worse places than this!" said Arnold Drysdale to himself, as his host disappeared; leaving him alone in the great vaulted room, lit by the dancing flicker of a log-fire.

The portraits on the paneled walls were veiled by the shadowy darkness, but beyond the circle of radiance within which Drysdale sat could be seen the dim outline of the Bechstein grand, the huddle of chairs at the far end of the music room, the pale glimmer of flowers in tall vases, and the clouded splendor of the gold brocade curtains drawn across the windows.

"Yes! It's a very easy way of earning five pounds!" went on Drysdale reflectively, lounging back in his chair and lighting a cigarette. "And what's more—I believe it's done the trick with Millicent," he chuckled complacently; "she thinks I'm no end of a hero to take on the wager and spend a night in the haunted room!" His lazy brown eyes half closed as he thought of Millicent Fayne—her youth, her loveliness, her dawning love for himself, and above all her wealth. "Nothing like a misspent youth for teaching a man the sort of woman he ought to marry," he concluded; "discrimination is better than innocence, and experience than much fine love!"

He looked round sharply as the far door of the room opened, and a man's tall figure showed for an instant against the lighted corridor without, before the door was closed again and the intruder approached.

"That you, Holbrook?" said Drysdale, thinking his host had returned to add a word of warning or advice. "Come back to see me hobnobbing with your spectral friend—eh?"

"It's not Holbrook! It's I . . . . Jim McCurdie!"

"Wha-a-a-t?" Drysdale sprang to his feet. "Why, where . . . how?"

"I wasn't sure if I could get here tonight, so I did not let Holbrook know I was coming—thought I'd just give you a surprize!"

"Surprize!" echoed Drysdale faintly, his hands clenched so that the knuckles gleamed, his cigarette dropping from suddenly relaxed lips to the rug at his feet.

Jim McCurdie sat down at the table, and looked across at his companion with a grin. "I heard you were at your old game of playing hero," he said, "and I thought it was a good opportunity of finding you alone. I've wanted this little chat with you for the last eight years!"

"Then you weren't . . . . you didn't . . . . you came back after all from that expedition?"

"Yes—I came back after all. We're pretty tough—we McCurdies—and there were several good reasons for my getting back. It's a bit too late for doing all I meant to do—but there's still one thing!"

A silence fell. The shadows in the big room seemed to thrust forward to peer and listen, as Drysdale sank into his chair and looked at his old rival opposite him—incredibly aged and altered from the gay, carefree youth

whom Drysdale had sent on that deadly mission eight years ago.

"Then the ambush——?" Drysdale bit back the words too late; against his will the fatal question had shaped itself into words.

"Ah yes—the ambush! You knew all about the ambush, didn't you? You urged me and my men to take that particular route across the desert, knowing that Ibn Said and his ruffians waited by the Well of Tiz for us! You cowardly—lying—thief!"

The last deliberately spoken words bit like ice into Drysdale's consciousness, and partly steadied his whirling thoughts.

"Thief!" he stuttered; "thief!"

"Thief—one who steals what belongs to another man," explained McCurdie, leaning forward until his eyes blazed like points of blue flame into those of his companion. Drysdale's gaze fell before them and he half rose from his seat.

"Sit still," ordered McCurdie. "I've come a long way for the pleasure of meeting you once more; and now you're going to listen!"

"Don't make a fool of yourself," sneered Drysdale, his confidence returning as he began to adjust himself to the situation. "Thief—you call me!" He shrugged his shoulders. "Jean Kennedy was quite ready to be stolen, if that's what you mean."

"You tricked her and lied to her and deceived her! You left her to die miserably—as you left me."

"That's your own rotten imagination at work," answered Drysdale. "She went abroad the year after you—er—disappeared; no one ever heard what became of her."

"She went to Bruges—she lived at a mean little inn called *Le Chat Gris*—and died there when her son—and yours—was born!"

Drysdale started back, his nonchalance again stripped from him. "How the devil did you——?"

McCurdie's lean brown hands toyed with the match box on the table. "I know where she lies buried in the paupers' graveyard down by the river—she and her nameless son. I know that you stopped her allowance when her reproaches annoyed you; and that she became a wretched, half-starved slave to the innkeeper, Père Grossart, and his drunken wife."

"Damn you—you paid them to tell you this fairy-tale!" blustered Drysdale.

"I have never spoken to them in my life," was the answer.

"Liar! No one else in the world could know that she—that I——"

"So—you corroborate the story."

"No, curse you, I don't!" shouted Drysdale, getting to his feet. "You've found them out by accident and concocted this tale to try to ruin me."

"Before you ruin Millicent Fayne—as a climax to your varied career."

Drysdale's angry face changed, the red faded, and ugly unexpected lines appeared round his mouth. His brown eyes were suddenly hard and calculating.

"So *that's* your little game!" he said at last. "We're rivals once more! I did not know you had ever met Millicent," he went on. "You're going to try to use my 'guilty past' as a weapon! Very neat—I see—I see!" And turning to the whisky and soda which stood on the table, he began to fill his glass.

For a moment the other man sat very still, looking steadily at Drysdale; then, pushing back his chair, he got up and stood with his back to the glowing fire, his thin brown hands clasped behind him.

"I thought that even you would see such an obvious thing," McCurdie rejoined at last. "You'll leave here tonight—now, in fact!"

All the baffling, violent emotions that had possessed Drysdale during the last few minutes boiled up suddenly within him, his interlocutor's words of easy command setting a match to his fury. With a swift, uncontrolled movement he hurled the glass he held, striking McCurdie full in the face.

There was a sharp hissing sound as the liquid splashed on the hot tiles of the hearth, and the glass shivered against the mantelpiece a few feet behind McCurdie's head.

"Good God!" Drysdale's voice was a mere thread of sound, as the eyes of the other man continued to look stedfastly into his own. "Who —what are you?"

"I am Jim McCurdie, whom you sent to death eight years ago in the Desert of Tlat."

Drysdale gasped and held on to the back of a chair, while the familiar surroundings of the music room receded to vast distances and a swimming darkness enveloped him. Then, slowly, reason asserted itself. How absurd of him to think, even for a moment, that the glass had passed *through* McCurdie's head! It was merely an effect of the firelight and his own jangled nerves.

"It appears you did not die—in spite of my efforts," he answered, with a barely perceptible tremor in his voice.

"I was buried by the Well of Tiz, with six spear-wounds through my body."

Drysdale looked stunned for a moment, but a lifelong habit of disbelieving what he did not understand conquered his rising fear.

"Either you're Jim McCurdie or his double! In any case you're making a nuisance of yourself," he said finally, and drawing an automatic from his pocket he leveled it at his companion, who had moved until he stood with his back to the paneled wall at the right of the fireplace. "I am going to shoot you. If you did not die in the desert, you'll die here and now! I shall say I thought you were the ghost that haunts this room!"

"I *am* the ghost!" replied McCurdie. "I have waited eight years to get back again; and tonight gave me my entrance to the world of humans once more. In this room there is power I could adapt to my needs—power to materialize—to borrow for a brief time a visible human garment for my soul."

"Splendid!" answered Drysdale, with a sneering laugh. "You always had a powerful imagination, McCurdie. Well, I am going to deprive you of your garment once and for all."

He raised his arm and a shot rang out—but the tall figure stood motionless before him, the blue eyes steady on his own.

"Curse it!" muttered Drysdale, "This light——" he fired again and yet again. "Die, can't you!" he shrieked, stumbling up close to that quiet figure, and putting the muzzle of his weapon to its breast he fired one shot after another in rapid succession; then fell with a wild yell of laughter to the ground, the smoking revolver clenched in his fingers.

HOLBROOK was the first to find him lying there, and hastily dropped his handkerchief over that agonized, grinning face, before the startled guests and servants poured into the room.

The paneled wall to the right of the fireplace was riddled with bullets; but no sign of blood—no foot nor fingerprint of any assailant did the keenest man from Scotland Yard ever discover.

What or *whom* Drysdale had tried to shoot was never known—for the dead can not speak; or if they do, they are not believed.

SHADOWS CAST BEHIND

by

OTTO E. A. SCHMIDT

"There were three blinding flashes of light even before Garcia's hissed 'You lie' was fairly uttered."

HUMDRUM, indeed, must have been the existence of that man who, having reached middle age, can look back on no episode or occurrence in his past life that was either uncanny, outré, or inexplicable by the ordinary laws of physics. When a man has been blessed, or otherwise, by being the chief actor in such incidents, he has food for speculation for the rest of his natural life, and perhaps beyond. Let skeptics scoff—who can blame them, not having taken part in the happenings themselves?—but I, having seen, sensed and felt what I have find it impossible to "laugh off."

It was back in the 80's, in the early days of my novitiate as a United States customs guard, that I was assigned the offshore detail on the passenger steamship *Glory of the West* as she lay tied up at the Broadway dock in San Francisco one winter's night. Well do I remember it.

To the uninitiated I may explain that the duty of the offshore or deck detail of the customs guarding force consists in preventing the smuggling of goods by boat or otherwise off the vessel by way of the offshore or waterward side.

Brrr, what a disagreeable night! Despite my heavy overcoat and muffler, I shivered. A fine drizzle, driven by a cold, gusty wind, seemed to penetrate to my very marrow as I tramped up and down the deck with feet heavy and chill as two chunks of ice.

I heard quick footsteps approaching—ah, the lieutenant of the watch.

"Hello," said a cheery voice.

"Hello, lieutenant," I returned.

"How's everything?" he asked, gazing round and taking in the general surroundings.

"Oh, everything's all right," I replied, "at least as right as it can be when you're cold and wet and miserable. This job of guarding-officer is no snap. If every night

were like this one I'd chuck it up and go to heaving coal."

"It's a pretty nasty night, that's a fact," said Wood, sympathetically, "especially for the offshore detail. But this is only one night. Cheer up, Stallard, there'll be other nights, fine nights that you'll enjoy and that'll make you feel glad to be one of Uncle Sam's boys. You'd better go below," he continued, "and have the ship's watchman fix you up a cup of coffee. I'll relieve you for a few minutes."

A fine chap, that John Wood, a man with a heart freighted deep with sympathy and thoughtfulness for his fellow-man. No wonder he had the love and respect of the whole watch.

I hastened down to the deck below by way of the port gangplank and soon was enjoying the warmth and cheer of the snug little galley. Presently I rejoined the lieutenant, feeling greatly invigorated and refreshed. After a few more words he left me to resume my solitary vigil.

The wind hummed in the rigging and the rain swished down on the slippery deck glistening in the glow of the distant dock-lights. The winches alternately hissed and purred over the main hatch, like great cats crouched in the shadow of the forward cabins waiting for their prey. I tarried often before them, for their slight warmth was grateful; it was good to clasp the steam pipes and thaw out the griping cold from my numbed fingers.

Seven bells, half-past 3, chimed from some "lime juicer" anchored near—four long hours before my relief would start from the distant mail dock at the other end of San Francisco's waterfront! I thought ruefully of my warm bed at home. Why the devil should there be such a thing as night work? Why couldn't everybody sleep at night like white folks, as the good Lord intended?

I WALKED aft and looked over the dreary expanse of the bay, overhung with the misty curtains of the night. The faint light on Yerba Buena Island vaguely blinked a sleepy warning to the mariner venturesome enough to risk his craft in the jaws of the storm, and ever and anon the hoarse murmur of the fog signal on Alcatraz boomed across the heaving space like a deep sonorous snore.

I stood close by the door of the smoking saloon. It was unlocked, I knew, for I had tried it before. I turned the handle and peered into the gloom within. A soft, delicious warmth enfolded me, for it was the sailing day of the *Glory of the West* and her steam pipes were full. I stepped inside and sat down on the end of the richly upholstered settee that ran along the wall framing the doorway, leaving the door slightly open so that I could see almost the whole length of the deck forward and a wide stretch of waters alongside. Surely, I thought, from this point I should be able to detect and prevent any attempt at smuggling overboard; at least, nothing could be pulled off in the short time it would take to thaw some of the chill out of my bones. But would I be performing my strict duty?

While still debating this conflict between desire and duty, I heard a light step ascending the heavily carpeted stairs leading from the dining saloon. I turned and beheld a messboy lighting the two lamps in the smoking room in which I sat. I was still wondering at this proceeding, which was unusual at this time of the morning, when I heard voices and more footsteps. Three men came up from below.

I was fairly caught, and, though ashamed to be found in this equivocal position, pride would not permit me to seem to run away; so I assumed a look of indifference and kept my seat.

I wondered how it happened that passengers were already on board, for, although the vessel was to sail that day, it was not customary to allow them to come aboard so long before the sailing hour. I judged that they were passengers because they did not look like seafaring men. They wore no uniforms, nor any of the habiliments of seamen.

One of them said something I did not catch to the messboy, who nodded and softly retired below. No one noticed me, nor, indeed, even seemed aware of my presence.

Of the last comers one was a big, broad-shouldered man, with ruddy, bearded face and enormous hands; the second, small and dark-skinned with glistening black eyes and long mustachios; while the third was tall and slender, blond and smooth-shaven—evidently an Englishman from his speech and appearance.

The big man offered a cigar to each of his companions, and they all seated themselves at the starboard table near the opposite wall; the big man to the right, the dark man to the left, and the Englishman facing me where I sat on my settee shrinking against the wall near the door.

"Well, Mottingly," began the big man in a deep, booming voice which he tried to make low and subdued, "I hope that bite we've just had will change our luck. It's a new one on me. I generally sit through a game till I've had enough. A gambler would think it unlucky; but we ain't superstitious, are we? Anyhow, we can't have no worse luck than we been having. Garcia," turning to the dark man, "what're you goin' t'do with all your winnings? Lemme sell you a mine. Put your money back in the groun' where it come from, an' let her grow." He laughed; but the Englishman only frowned—the look on his face was stern, the muscles tensely drawn.

The man addressed as Garcia smiled, showing a set of very white teeth. Instinctively I disliked him.

"What, me?" he said, with a shrug. "Oh, I no can count my weenings till she be hatch; ha, ha, ha," he laughed at his own attempted witticism.

The big man laughed back. "Don't you try to hatch nothin' now, Garcia, 'cause you ain't no farmer."

Their pleasantry was here interrupted by the return of the messboy with a tray containing a bottle, three glasses and two packs of cards, which he set upon the table. The Englishman seized the bottle and poured a drink for each. I could see his hand tremble slightly as he drank. A gleam came into his eyes as he cried: "Now for our revenge, eh, Thompson? Let us be at it."

He shuffled a pack of cards and they cut for the deal. The big man dealt and I saw that the game was to be poker. No chips were used, only the hard coin, with which all appeared to be plentifully supplied.

They played steadily for a half-hour or more, the big man losing slightly, for he played very cautiously, the Englishman losing heavily; while the bright, yellow gold rose in ever-growing, glittering piles at Garcia's right hand.

The strained look in the Englishman's eyes grew more tense, the frown on his brow deeper. He drank often, and I could see that he was gradually losing his nerve.

At last the big man said: "Say, Mott, I think we've had enough, let's quit."

"No," exclaimed Mottingly testily, "you drop out if you want to. Luck is bound to turn for me sometime. Damme, I'll make it or break the blasted bank!"

"Verry well, *Señor*," spoke Garcia, yawning, "eef you weesh we queet, I queet. I am the so tire', I sleepy."

"No," said Thompson quietly, with a sharp glance at the last speaker, "I'll stay in."

THE game went on again, but much more silently, with an undercurrent of something sinister, some force not apparent on the surface of play and conversation.

I was becoming aware of a feeling I could not explain. A message—I could not yet comprehend what—was being telegraphed to me by my subconscious mind. Once, I thought—but no, I must be mistaken, else the others would have noticed it. Yes, there it was again. I was sure I could not be wrong this time. I was indignant, shocked. In my excitement I had almost risen to my feet and was pointing to Garcia, the words ready to shout on my tongue, when something in the Englishman's attitude held me spellbound. The blue tinge had faded from his face, it was now white as snow; his jaws were set, the lines deep-drawn, while the flesh seemed to have receded from the bones of his cheeks. But he was cool, ah, so cool! His hands were steady as a rock as he laid down his cards. So, then, someone else had seen it, too! His actions and appearance seemed silently to call a halt in the play. All waited for him to proceed. It was his move!

He coolly struck a match and lighted a fresh cigar. "I say, Garcia," he commenced, "I have no more money with me, you've cleaned me out. But here's the deed to the Lone Pine mine that I just paid Mr. Thompson $10,000 for. I'll stake the mine against your pile there and what you won from us last night, which ought to make it about even, as near as I can figure it——"

"Hell, no!" broke in Thompson; "don't do it, Mottingly. Let the stuff go, you can't buck against such a streak of bad luck as you've uncovered. But the mine is a good one and will pay it all back to you in a short time."

Mottingly raised his hand as if to command silence.

Garcia played thoughtfully with a stack of coins, letting them fall to the table with a rippling sound. "Ah," he observed softly, "I deed not think Meester Motting-a-ly she shall need one—ha—nurse."

Thompson flushed redly. Mottingly's jaw set more firmly, but he went on evenly, as though there had been no interruption: "Provided," he spoke slowly and distinctly, almost hissingly, "provided Mr. Thompson deals the cards——"

"What-a for that?" cried Garcia quickly, his teeth showing in an evil snarl, his eyes flashing luridly from the ghastly greenish yellow of his face.

All three were leaning forward in a crouching attitude and were, unconsciously, slowly rising. The light of understanding had broken on the face of Thompson, now livid with fury.

"Otherwise," went on the tense, slow, almost monotonous voice of Mottingly, "otherwise you will refund to him and to me every cent you have won from us."

There was an instant's pause. The situation was tense. The adversaries—now such in earnest—were keenly eyeing one another, each studying the situation and calculating chances. The sword of fate hung by a hair.

Garcia spoke coolly now, almost contemptuously; but there was a furtive, hunted look in the eyes that glanced rapidly from one to the other of his opponents and over and beside and beyond them. "For why you ask-a that, Meester Motting-a-ly, you spick verry—ha—strange—what-a for shall I to geeve to you the money I have win?"

They were now all on their feet.

"Because," thundered Mottingly, raking the spreading pile of gold to-

ward himself with one hand and making a quick backward movement with the other, "you've been dealing from the bottom of the pack. You're a damned cheat! I saw——"

There were three blinding flashes of light even before Garcia's hissed "You lie" was fairly uttered, followed by a crash.

"HELLO," said a voice, "ain't you afraid of the ghosts?"

The ship's watchman was holding a lantern up to my face with one hand, while the other was on the handle of the door, which evidently had just banked shut.

"What ghosts?" I gasped.

"Why, the ghosts of three men that killed one another over a game of cards in here about twenty years ago. I heard it from the mate that was on her at the time."

"Were they all killed?" I inquired regretfully.

"Yep, there was an Englishman, an American and a Chileno. There were two empty shells in the Chileno's gun an' one in the American's. The Englisher didn't fire a shot—wasn't quick enough on the draw, I guess. That Chileno was a bad one. Professional gambler. Had six notches on his gun already. They say their ghosts come back every once in a while, so you wanta look out for 'em."

"Say," I said, quite irrelevantly, "are there any passengers aboard?"

He gave me a strange, inquiring look as he answered, "No, not yet. Nobody aboard 'cept me an' you an' some o' the crew. Why?"

"Phew," I said, without answering his question, "it's close in here. Guess I'll go out and get some fresh air."

How grateful the damp coolness of the outside felt! I looked at my watch; it showed 3:45. Only five minutes since I had consulted it last! I could not credit it. I held it to my ear—yes, it was still running. I seemed to have spent hours in that accursed smoking saloon, and yet in reality it had been only five minutes.

The rest of that interminable watch I passed in deep thought, wondering, speculating, doubting. Up and down, up and down the melting deck I tramped, well forward, though; not venturing abaft the main saloon amidships. I shivered, but not from the cold alone.

I TOLD no one of my adventures, but made cautious and veiled inquiries at the steamship offices. The personnel of the company, naturally, had undergone many changes in the last twenty years and I could find no one who remembered any tragedy connected with the *Glory of the West*.

At last I bethought me of that treasury of pioneer Californian history, *The Daily Alta-California*, one of the first San Francisco newspapers. I spent many of my spare hours poring over its back files and eventually my industry was rewarded by the finding of an account of the death of three men, passengers on the American steamship *Glory of the West*, in a gambling row substantially as related by the ship's watchman.

In the cases of the American and the Chilean the coroner's jury had rendered a verdict of death by gunshot wounds each at the hands of the other. In the case of the Englishman, however, they had allowed that grim and perverted sense of humor, common in those days, even touching the most sacred and solemn subjects, to move them to bring in a verdict "that the deceased had come to his death by suicide consequent on paralysis of the dexter digits." The victim proved to be a remittance man, the second son of Lord C——, and the remains were turned over to the British consul.

I was so profoundly impressed that I determined to follow the matter up in an effort to learn just how accurate the details of my dream, or vision, might prove.

By inquiring at the consulate I learned that the father of the murdered Mottingly was still alive. Thereupon I addressed a long and carefully worded letter to Lord C——— in which I related my vision in detail, and added a copy of the newspaper account of the tragedy and of the coroner's distorted findings. I wound up my recital with a request for a photograph of his deceased son to identify and verify my dream picture.

So long a time passed that I had begun to believe my communication had gone astray when I received a reply as follows:

London, Engl. C. B.
March 2d, 188—.

John D. Stallard, Esq.,
Ahlborn House,
San Francisco, California, U. S. A.

Honoured Sir:

In behalf of my client, Lord C———, let me premise with a statement of his gratitude and appreciation of the great service you have rendered him and his family at such pains and labour to yourself.

Some twenty years ago the body of the unfortunate young man, the second son of his Lordship, arrived here accompanied by a copy of the death certificate containing a statement of the verdict of the coroner's jury as to the cause of death.

I may here state, *en passant*, that father and son had parted in anger several years previously after a stormy interview over the subject of the young man's drinking and gambling habits. His Lordship thereupon disowned him, denied him the use of the family residences, and dismissed him with a lump sum and the injunction never again to enter his presence until he had proven his manhood.

But, unfortunately, his failings had too strong a hold on him to be shaken off here, surrounded by his old associates, and he emigrated to the States, where he drifted about until his means were exhausted. His father turned a deaf ear to his appeals for further assistance but Lady C———, his mother, kept him liberally supplied with funds, as I happen to know, it being my province to attend to the remittances.

These circumstances, together with strong religious scruples and his stern, judicial temperament as a magistrate of the Queen's bench, caused his Lordship to refuse permission to place the body in the family vault. (No doubt you are aware that an ancient law of England, now obsolete, required that a suicide should be buried at a crossroads with a stake driven through his middle.)

The remains, perforce, were consigned to unconsecrated ground. From that time forward the suite in the C——— mansion formerly occupied by the deceased was, according to the servants, haunted by the spirit of the young master wailing and crying to be gathered to his ancestors.

Your experience, while it would be inadmissible in court as legal testimony, in conjunction with your interpretation and explanation of the grotesque and frivolous verdict of the coroner's jury and the mute evidence of the two guns, so strongly impressed his Lordship and the lay and ecclesiastical authorities that the body has been exhumed and placed in the family crypt with appropriate ceremonies.

His Lordship was also greatly moved by your graphic description of his son's manly stand in the last act of his life drama.

It may interest you to know that since the disinterment and re-burial the servants assert all ghostly manifestations by the young man's alleged spirit have ceased.

I have written you, by his Lordship's direction, thus fully and frankly in consideration of your kind and conscientious services which entitle you to every confidence.

I am posting, under separate cover, a photograph of young Mottingly, and if it be not too great a further trespass on your time and patience my client would greatly appreciate a report from you as to how it compares with the picturization of his son that appeared to you in your vision.

Assuring you again of his Lordship's deep appreciation and cordial acknowledgement of your distinguished favour, I am, with the highest personal respect,

Your most obedient servant,
JOHN N. D. ———, Q. C.

I opened the packet containing the photograph with mingled emotions, but surprize was not one of them when I beheld in the shadowy likeness an exact replica of the face of the man who had appeared in my vision as young Mottingly.

The CHAIRS OF STUYVESANT BARON

By
VICTOR ROUSSEAU

"His screams were those of a man in mortal agony."

AMONG the numerous investigations which Dr. Ivan Brodsky made in my company I recall the case of Stuyvesant Baron's furniture, because of the poetic justice which it brought about. Rarely, indeed, did any visitor from the unseen world so thoroughly justify his appearance as in this instance, or work such permanently beneficial effects upon the character of his victim.

We had seen no one for several days, being engaged upon a study of peculiar delicacy in connection with the pituitary body in the brain of a chimpanzee, when, one afternoon, a loud and important voice in the parlor followed the announcement of the doctor's servant. The visitor had insisted upon entering, he said, and he had been compelled to admit him rather than suffer a scene outside. Brodsky smiled rather grimly, put down the brain of the ape, and went out into the ante-chamber, motioning to me to follow him.

"Dr. Brodsky," began our visitor, "when I tell you that I am Mr. Stuyvesant Baron, you will at once know all about me. You have been recommended to me by a friend of mine, whose name is immaterial, as likely to serve my purpose, and you shall be well paid for your work. I want you to come down at once to my country home in Pennsylvania."

He was a pompous individual, some fifty years of age, well oiled and soaped and starched. A huge signet ring overlapped his little finger, a gold watch-chain stretched across his waistcoat, and he had that atmosphere of indescribable vulgarity and overbearingness that is associated with the newly enriched. I knew the man by reputation as a prominent politician at the capital, who had achieved a large fortune recently by rather dubious transactions. I looked to Dr. Brodsky to give him the *coup*

NOTE—This is the eighth in a series of stories, each complete in itself, dealing with Dr. Ivan Brodsky. "The Surgeon of Souls."

de grâce courteous; then from the twinkle in Brodsky's eyes I perceived that he was reserving this for our future delectation.

"Your name is well known to me, Mr. Baron," he answered. "But won't you take a chair and tell me first what your difficulty is? Pray be seated."

Mr. Baron reached toward a chair and sat down gingerly upon the extreme edge, apparently surprized that it did not collapse under him.

"Well, perhaps I'd better begin at the beginning and explain the matter," he said. "You have heard, no doubt, of my influence in the capital, and how I worked my way up, from quite humble beginnings, to my present position. Well, sir, it was always the dream of my life to own one of them country estates which it's the correct thing for a man of my status to have. I've had my eye on one for a long time, a fine place but sadly run down. It was owned by an old Southern family—plenty of ancestors, but beggarly as church mice and not a dollar to their credit. Yes, they'd fallen into disrepute, and let the place run down. I'd been waiting for them to put it on the market, and as soon as it was advertised for sale I went to see it and I said, 'Stuyvesant, that's yours.' My wife's away in Europe—comes back next month, and I thought I'd buy it and fit it up for a surprize for her. Well, Doc, I bought it.

"There's a hundred acres or more goes with it, and naturally when I bought the place I thought I'd gotten rid of those beggarly Southerners for good and all. Well, first thing I knew they'd moved to a little cottage they own just across the boundary and installed themselves there, spoiling the view of the crick for me. I've been trying to put them out ever since, and I think I've got them nailed now. However, that's by the way.

"When I looked inside of my new house I nearly died of laughing. Never saw such a ramshackle-looking interior in my life, Doc. Purse-proud snobs that they were, they'd sold off everything to keep up their station, and except for a score of dirty old chairs, two beds, and some tables, there wasn't hardly a bit of furniture in the house. First thing I did was to pitch that lumber out of the house. They saw it lying there and begged me to sell it to them. I told them to take it and decay with it, which they duly did. Then I sent for an upholsterer and ordered a fine suite in red plush for the dining room, blue plush for the bedrooms and green plush for the rest of the house. Yes, sir, I've fixed the place up fit for a gentleman.

"I moved in last week to warm up the house for my wife. Got the servants in and all, was ready to surprize her when she came back. I went to bed the first night and had a good sleep. In the morning, going round to make a final inspection, I saw one of them wretched old chairs that had been left in the hall by mistake. I'm a hot-tempered gentleman, Doc, and it made me so mad I kicked it over. Then I went into the dining room and sat down in an armchair to cool off. First thing I knew, something like a tack was sticking into me. I jumped up with a yell and my man came running in. 'You clumsy loon,' I cried, 'what'd you mean by leaving a tack in here?' The man looked at it. 'There's no tack here, sir,' he said.

"I tried another chair: same thing. It was like sitting on a red-hot poker. The man thought I was mad, I guess. Well, Doc, to cut the story short, there's not a chair in the house I can sit down on, except that dirty old broken affair that I kicked out into the lot. And there it rests. I've been sitting on it ever since. I couldn't go to a doctor and have him

call me a lunatic and lose my influence, so I came to you."

"May I ask how you happen to conclude that this trouble was of supernatural origin?" asked Brodsky.

"Why, to tell the truth," said Mr. Baron, "the house was supposed to be haunted. That's one of the reasons why I bought it; it gives it tone. And I didn't care to tell you, but the fact is they pinch me. I'm black and blue," he ended mournfully. Somehow his pompous demeanor seemed to be subsiding under the doctor's influence.

"When you sit down?" asked Brodsky.

"At all times, sir," cried the man angrily. "The only time they don't pinch me in that house is when I'm sitting in that dirty old chair. They pinch me when I'm sitting and when I'm standing, and when I'm in bed. Fancy me giving up the place because I'm pinched by ghosts! I'd lose my influence at once. There's mighty little place for cranks and lunatics in this world, sir. So I want you to come down right away, and if you can stop this game it will mean $10,000 in your pocket. If you can't, I'll give you five."

Brodsky looked at him rather sternly. "I do not accept money for this class of work," he said. "I will endeavor to allay the trouble if you will make me out a check for $10,000 to be devoted by me to any cause I please."

Baron stared at him for a moment; then his face softened into a grin.

"Oh, all right, Doc, all right," he said, writing a check and signing it. "There's some swallows their medicine straight and some wants it chocolate-coated. I've met both kinds. Here you are—and put it to any purpose you please," he continued, with a loud guffaw.

It was arranged that Brodsky and I should go down at the end of the week. About noon on the following Saturday we found ourselves at the little country village near which the mansion was situated. The coachman who drove us up was loud in his lamentations over the change of ownership.

"He's a low-down, mean cuss," he exclaimed emphatically. "The Darrells had owned it for nigh on a hundred and fifty years and he bought it over their heads when they couldn't pay the mortgage. I don't blame him for that so much, but he's trying to put them out of their cottage, too; that's mortgaged and he won't give them a month's extension; hates to see 'em, I reckon."

At the door of his new residence Mr. Baron received us somewhat moodily.

"Come in, gents," he exclaimed, rubbing his leg. "They've been at me like mosquitoes all morning," he continued. "Pinch, pinch—it ain't the pain, it's the indignity, and James thinks me crazy, hitting out at the air so much. This is the dining room."

It was the most fearsomely incongruous thing that I had ever seen. The old oak paneling had been covered with scarlet paper, furniture in bright red plush coverings was scattered throughout the room, and on two sides were huge mirrors with great gilt frames that reflected the vulgar aspect of the owner as he paced to and fro. Drawn up to the table was a plain wooden chair, apparently of antique workmanship, and singularly pleasing to the eye when contrasted with the rest of the paraphernalia. Suddenly our host leaped a foot into the air and struck out wildly. At the same instant, in the mirror that faced us, I saw for a fleeting second the horrified features of the footman in the hall.

"You'll excuse me if I sit down," said Mr. Baron, sinking into the wooden chair. "I give in. I'm here until you drive them away. James!" he called, and the footman appeared instantly at the door, his face again composed. "James, serve dinner here. I don't know whether they'll pinch you, gentlemen," he added, "but you can try if you like."

I sat down with some apprehension, but neither Brodsky nor I experienced the least uneasiness.

"With your permission," said the doctor, "we will take a short walk over to the Darrell's cottage and inspect these other chairs. Which way is it?"

"Over there, down by the crick," said Baron contemptuously. "I suppose you know your business. But say, Doc," he went on anxiously, "you're not going to let on about me, are you? Good Lord, what a scoop for them! They hate me like poison. It'd be my political finish."

"Not a word," said the doctor, and we went out.

A WALK of a few minutes brought us to the cottage, a pretty little place, from which the mansion was just visible. The wife received us with hospitality and without inquiring our business, after the Southern custom. Brodsky soon drew her out, while the daughter and young son sat by in silence.

"I don't blame Mr. Baron for buying the place over our heads," said the woman. "We couldn't have kept it up after my husband died, and we knew it had to go. But he's taken over the mortgage on this cottage and threatens to put us out next week and raze it to the ground. Heaven knows what will happen to us, for we're at the end of our resources. All our poor furniture wouldn't net us a hundred dollars."

"Ah! Pretty old chairs, eh?" said Brodsky, looking around him.

"They were good in their day," said Mrs. Darrell with some slight touch of pride. "Mr. Darrell's great-grandfather brought them over from England before the revolution. They made good furniture in those days—better than they do now—and if they don't look pretty, they've worn well. But they've about outlived their usefulness. Peters, the traveling peddler, has offered me fifteen dollars for the nine of them, and he'll be here tomorrow. I'm thinking of letting them go."

"They're an heirloom, I see, like the family ghost," said Brodsky pleasantly.

The woman started and cast a dubious glance toward him.

"You've heard about that, then?" she asked, coloring faintly. "They do say there is a ghost, although it never troubled any of us."

"Whose is it? The man's who made the chairs?"

"No, indeed," Mrs. Darrell answered. "It is supposed to be the spirit of the old gentleman who willed the chairs to my husband's great-grandfather. Mr. Darrell used to visit him constantly at his English estate before he died. The old fellow had become greatly attached to his chairs, and in his last days, when his mind had given way a little, he used to think he had made them. He told Mr. Darrell that he would always be near them, and that they should never leave his descendants as long as they lasted. He left them to Mr. Darrell because he was almost as proud of them as the old gentleman himself; they were both fond of good furniture, and the maker—I forget his name—had quite a reputation. He died the year before Mr. Darrell emigrated. We used to play at table-turning sometimes, and the chairs used to dance all round the table and rap out all sorts of nonsense in the form of acrostics. I thought it was the old

gentleman in his crazy moods, but my husband said it was nothing but animal magnetism.''

''Well, his prophecy has come true,'' said the doctor, ''for they have certainly followed you here, and I shouldn't be very surprized if they should remain with you after all. But now I have a favor to ask of you. There have been some curious manifestations in the mansion, and we are going to hold a seance there. Will you come and sit with us? It is imperative for its success.''

At first Mrs. Darrell stoutly refused. But when the doctor had set his mind upon anything he usually got it. What arguments he used to persuade her I can not recall; it seems to me now that it was his hypnotic powers that finally overcame her natural reluctance. Anyhow, five minutes later we three were strolling amicably toward the mansion.

We found Mr. Baron waiting for us in his chair, a gloomy expression upon his face. At the sight of Mrs. Darrell he sprang to his feet with an oath—and promptly collapsed with a yell and began rubbing himself.

''Mr. Baron,'' said Brodsky, ''Mrs. Darrell has consented to sit with us at our seance, and her presence is absolutely necessary for its success. She knows nothing,'' he added in a whisper. ''Sit in your chair and she will discover nothing.''

''She'll learn that they've been pinching me, won't she?'' shouted Mr. Baron, forgetting all caution.

''No, for I have already thrown her into a hypnotic condition,'' returned the doctor. ''I would not bring her under false pretenses, but I have already sealed her ears so she can not hear you.'' He turned to the woman. ''Mrs. Darrell,'' he said, ''there is nobody in that chair.''

''Why, of course not,'' she returned, looking at the doctor in some surprize.

Baron's mouth opened and his eyes almost protruded from his plump face. A low, wordless growl came from his throat.

''You told me I should meet Mr. Baron,'' said the woman.

''He is in the house, but you will neither see nor hear him,'' answered the doctor. ''But come, let us take our places for the seance.''

WE CLOSED the doors, drew up a small table into the center of the room, and arranged three chairs around it, Baron, remaining where he sat, making the fourth. At a signal from the doctor I lowered the gas jet, so that only a faint light remained, just strong enough to enable us to see each other's faces. Mrs. Darrell sat between myself and Brodsky, with Baron facing us. We sat there for about five minutes; then the table began to tremble, as though some convulsion were taking place internally. Then two faint raps were heard.

''Is anybody there?'' asked Brodsky. ''Louder, please. Now, my friend, we want to find out your grievances and draw up a peace treaty with you. What is your name?''

He ran slowly through the alphabet. When he arrived at the twenty-fifth letter a loud rap resounded upon the table.

''The letter Y,'' said Brodsky. ''Now the next letter please. A, B, C, D. . . . .'' The rap sounded at O. The next letter was U, and the next R. Then came five or six little raps together, indicating the termination of the word.

''Your!'' said the doctor. ''It sounds like the termination of an epistle. Let's have the next word, then.''

The rapping began again as Dr. Brodsky went through the alphabet.

The letters spelled out in succession were L, I, T, T, L, and E. Then again came the terminal sign. And the last word was "dahlia."

"Your little dahlia!" said Brodsky impatiently. "That's the worst of the seance," he continued to me, rather in an aside. "It attracts a mischievous and prankish form of elemental spirit whose messages, even when comprehensible, are mostly a tissue of lies. It is the least valuable of any means of psychic investigation, but, unfortunately, in this case our only resource. I suppose we have got to be duped by some half-human intelligence of the usual low order."

There came two thunderous raps upon the table—the accepted signal for "no."

"You protest, do you, my friend?" said Brodsky grimly. "Very well, then, you shall have another chance. Now, perhaps, you will tell us your proper name."

Three loud raps indicated willingness and Brodsky began to spell out the alphabet again. This time the signature was different. It contained three words, as before, and they were "Jim, the Penman."

"I fancy I see some method in this madness," said the doctor, ignoring the three raps that joyfully assented to this remark. "And I fancy that our prankish friend will have still another signature upon the third attempt. Now, sir, let us have the end of the charade."

The alphabet was slowly spelled out once more. This time the signature ran "Chips, the Carpenter."

"Aha!" said the doctor. "Just as I expected. Yes, my friend, I understand your carefully veiled allusions. And now, perhaps you will afford us some indication of your desires."

Hardly had the words left the doctor's mouth when a scream burst from Baron's lips. In the dim light, to which our eyes were now becoming accustomed, I saw him slide suddenly from his chair to the floor—or, rather, the chair seemed to be pulled violently from beneath him, as a mischievous schoolboy might have done to some venerable elder. And then the chair stood up solemnly upon its back legs and began tilting backward and forward, kicking the prostrate man, much as a thug might kick his wife when he returned home drunk. Drunk, indeed, seems to be the word most suitable, for the thing balanced itself gravely and deliberately, but withal with difficulty, in the intervals between the kicks. Then, as Baron slid forward, screaming, into the center of the room, I saw the thing begin to sidle at him, butting him like a goat. Finally, withdrawing a foot or more to gain momentum, it waddled solemnly forward, mounted his prostrate form, and executed a clumsy dance upon the most prominent portion of his waistcoat.

I am afraid that all the sympathy which I should have felt was extinguished in that burst of Homeric laughter that came from the doctor's lips, in which I joined. There we sat by the table, rocking to and fro, speechless and apoplectic, while the chair executed its solemn ritual, now performing a *pas de seul* upon his chest, and again balancing itself upon one leg, apparently irresolute what antic it should next perform. And all the while Baron screamed like an insane man, yet so paralyzed by his terror that he could not move. I knew that James would break into the room, for the screams outrang our laughter, and were those of a man in mortal agony. But I was not prepared for the denouement.

I heard a shuffling in the hall, the door was flung wildly open, and a towering figure appeared in the doorway, that of a woman. For one instant she hesitated; then without a

word, by instinct, as it seemed, she found the exact location of the low gas jet and turned it on. There were we at the table, red in the face, there was Mrs.. Darrell beside us, watching us in surprize and not understanding, there lay Baron upon the floor, dusty and battered, gripping with all his might the leg of the now innocuous chair that seemed to have become entangled with his head. And then I realized that Mrs. Baron had returned from Europe.

She drew herself up to her full six feet of height and glared at us with a single comprehensive gaze.

"Stuyvesant, get up," she hissed.

And the fear-stricken wretch rose slowly and painfully to his feet and stood before her like a delinquent schoolboy in the presence of his master.

"So this is the way you have been enjoying yourself while I have been away!" she cried. "These are the orgies you have been indulging in with these low creatures at your country seat, as you were pleased to call it in your letters to me! You thought you could hoodwink me, your wife, after twenty years of unhappy married life. But I'll keep my eyes on you from this night forward. You shall not get the divorce you have been counting on," she went on, becoming for the first time hysterical.

The doctor half rose from his chair. In an instant the woman had staggered to her husband's side.

"Oh Stuyvesant, protect me from these ruffians," she cried. "My poor Stuyvesant, they have lured you here to rob and murder you. Come, leave this house and never set foot in it again." She fell upon his neck. "My poor husband!" she sobbed; "hold me up, hold me up; I am going to faint."

She promptly did, and it required the united efforts of Brodsky and myself to brace her up.

We got her to a lounge at last in another room. Baron was at her side; outside I heard the chug-chug of the automobile as James prepared it for the night journey. Nothing would have induced Mrs. Baron to spend a night in the new home. In one interval between her almost constant hysterics her husband stole out to us. He looked very different from the pompous creature who had come into the doctor's office a few days before.

"I'm glad," he cried. "I'm glad. All hell seems loose tonight. I wouldn't stay here for—I wouldn't stay for—for a street railroad franchise," he spluttered. "And I'm ruined. I've been kicked by a chair. I've been kicked by a chair, an old, dirty chair that I threw out into the lot. What'll they say about me at the capital?"

"Nothing," said the doctor. "Neither of us will breathe a word of this, and nobody else sees or hears you."

"Whom are you speaking to, Mr. Brodsky?" asked Mrs. Darrell, nervously. "I don't see anybody."

Baron stared at her in wild incredulity and hope. Then his mind went working backward. "I've got a white elephant on my hands," he cried. "Nobody will buy the place, it's so out-of-the-way. I'd take ten thousand for it," he cried hopelessly.

"I'll give you ten thousand for it," said the doctor.

"A bargain. When?"

"Now," he replied. "A verbal agreement. Are you content?"

"Done," answered Baron. Then Brodsky took out the check he had received and handed it to him. Baron looked at it and his face turned green. He spun round on his heel and left us, and the fragments of the paper descended in a cloud behind us.

Brodsky turned to Mrs. Darrell. "This is your home," he said.

"BUT who was the spirit?" I asked the doctor a few hours later.

"Have you never played charades?" he asked. "What were the names? 'Your little dahlia;' 'Jim, the Penman;' and 'Chips, the Carpenter!' Reverse the order, and what syllables do we obtain?"

"Chip-pen-dale!" I exclaimed with sudden inspiration.

"Exactly," said Brodsky. "Of course, it was not the famous maker of chairs himself, but the old gentleman who, as Mrs. Darrell told us, imagined himself to be Chippendale, and talked in acrostics. No doubt the insult to his chair when it was flung into the lot inspired him with the desire to be revenged."

"But surely he would not still be insane after a hundred years of spirit life!" I said. "That offers up rather hopeless chances for those of us who die deranged in mind."

"Only when he returned to this earth sphere," replied the doctor. "Then he would naturally take on characteristics which he possessed on leaving it. But a hundred years is an unusually long period for a spirit to manifest itself upon this earth, and I think it is highly probable that, now that the Darrells are restored to their own home, he will pass on to higher spheres and cease to revisit us."

A strange tale indeed is the next story in this series, "The Man Who Lost His Luck," which will be published in next month's *WEIRD TALES*.

Ship Magic

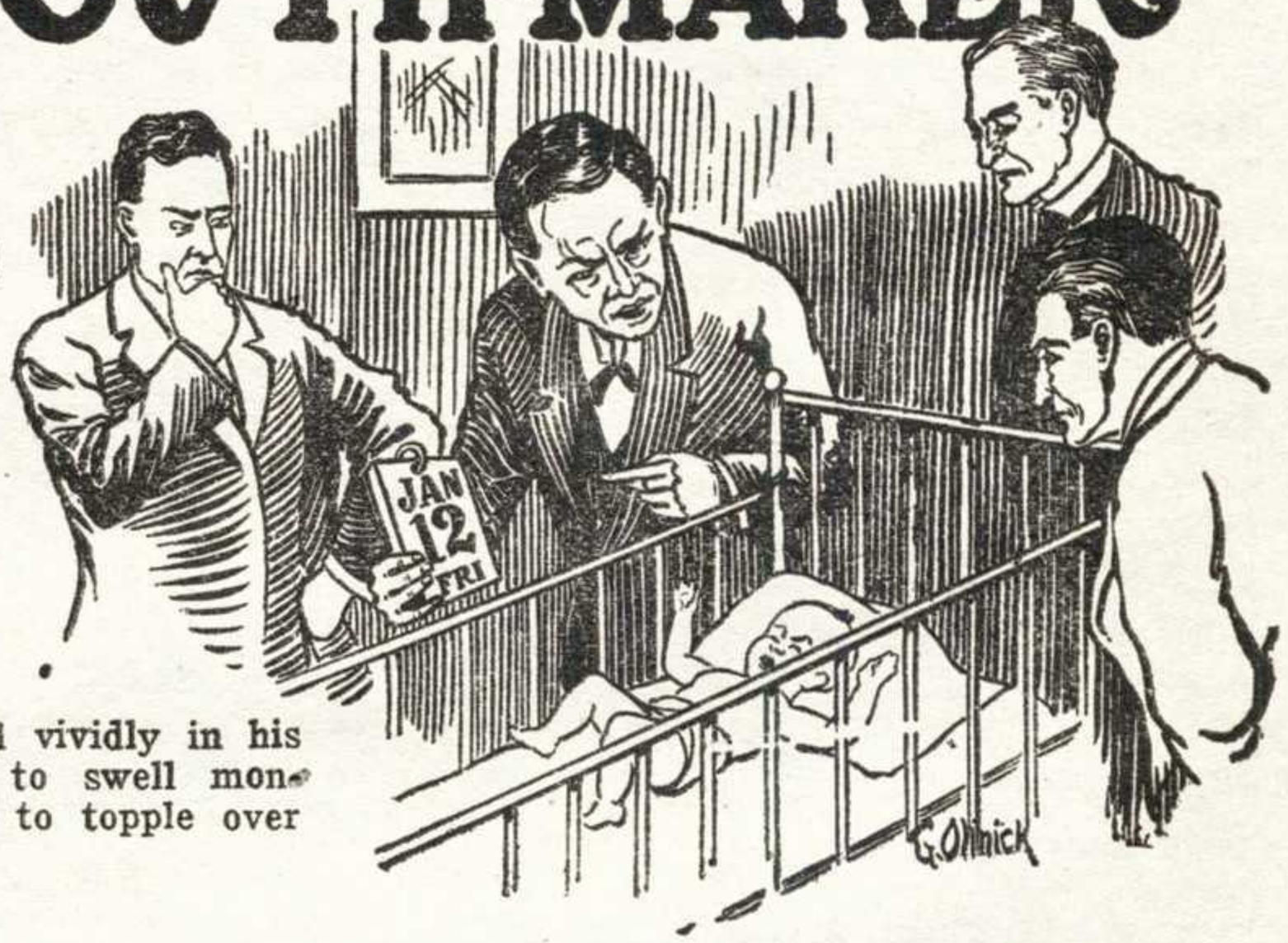
***By* A. LESLIE**

Out of the East, the wine-gold East,
Out of the crimson West,
Like hastening guests to a wedding feast,
Like knights on an errant quest—
The tall ships come as the wheat-white gulls
That wreathe in the wind-washed blue,
While the green wastes thunder on phantom hulls
In the mists of a dream come true:
Galleon, dragon, sun-warped dhow,
Sampan, and broad bireme—
From the gutted log in the freshet flow
To the canvas-cloud and steam!
Oh Raven Flag and clanking bench,
Shield-wall and flashing blade;
Choking reek of the slaver's stench,
Spice of the booming Trade—
They throng where the purple shadows wrap
The lee of the moon-drenched yards
As the sheets draw taut and the reef-points tap
The silvered silence to shards.
And ghostly sails blot out the stars
And darken the winy seas,
While the night wind hums on the shadowy spars
Of phantom argosies.

The YOUTH-MAKER

by

W. Elwyn Backus



"The figures registered vividly in his brain. They seemed to swell monstrously, to be about to topple over and crush him."

THE stairs creaked in dismal protest as Perry mounted the last flight. A musty odor pervaded the air, adding to his growing repugnance of the place. He recalled Latimer's esthetic inclinations at college despite his queer bent even then for certain mysterious chemical experiments, and he wondered at his living in such quarters. A shaft of sunlight, struggling through the dirty skylight overhead, threw the finger smudges on the blank wall at the top of the stairs into sharp relief. Perry halted there in momentary bewilderment. The oblong gallery seemed at first glance to be devoid of any doorway. Then he observed a recess in the shadow at the other end. A few steps brought him before a closed door in it.

His knock echoed eerily in the stillness of the hallway, but without response. Presently he rapped again. The door swung partly ajar, revealing one end of a disorderly room. A curious singing sound, like that of a simmering teakettle, was audible. Unconsciously he rested his hand against the door. It gave noiselessly, swinging inward before he realized what he was doing.

At a table by the window Perry saw the back of a man bent intently over something before him. A wisp of yellowish vapor rose above the silent worker, mingling with a cloud-like haze that hung low in the stuffy air of the room. Perry choked as it got into his lungs. The figure at the table raised an unkempt head and stared round at him.

"I beg pardon," Perry began, "I expected to find——"

Something familiar about the haggard countenance made him hesitate. Was it—why, yes it *was* Latimer. The other had already recognized him.

"Well, well, Perry, old fellow. What a surprize!"

Perry grasped his old chum's hand with a curious mingling of emotions. This was not the fastidious Latimer of old. His clothes hung on him like a scarecrow's; his once boyish face was drawn and deeply lined; strange eyes peered out of shrunken sockets —a little wildly, Perry thought. An uncomfortable feeling crept over

him. The hand he held was limp and moist and cold, unlike a living thing.

"Just learned the other day that you were located right here in my own home town, Lat," Perry said. "Thought I'd drop in and see how you're getting along."

His gaze rested on the amber solution bubbling in the crucible on the table and wandered over the room littered with the odd paraphernalia of a chemist. He wondered whether there was any truth in the rumor that this man had discovered a practical elixir of youth—and how best to tell him the real reason for his visit. He became aware that Latimer was talking, answering his query. ". . . . doing nicely. Working on high-explosive formula for the government . . . . blow Gibraltar off map. Great stuff——"

"But about this wonderful elixir of yours," Perry interjected. "How about your experiments with that?"

A strange look came into the overbright eyes of the emaciated chemist.

"Ah, yes," he said softly. "So you've heard of that. That elixir of youth. The fact is, Perry, that I have perfected it. I lack only a human subject to prove my theories, although I have already been able to change the age at will, so to speak, of guinea-pigs and mice."

"And you are still looking for a human subject for experiment?"

"Yes."

"How would I do?"

"You!"

"Me"—quietly.

"But, man, you have everything in life that is good: wealth, health, social position and all. Besides, you are the last of the Sutherlands. You would not be a proper subject for experiment. And you are not old. Far from it. About forty—aren't you?—though you don't look that."

"Forty-three. But I am going to try it, Lat. You see before you your first subject, if you will take me. I will sign a complete release for you, to cover any—ah—emergencies."

"Jove. I believe you are in earnest!"

"Your belief is correct."

The chemist's intense face lighted strangely.

"Very well. As you wish." A sly smile stole over his countenance. "I suppose there's a girl concerned in this?"

"I don't mind telling you that there is," said Perry, thinking of Alice. What an exquisite little thing she was! Her lovely dark hair and eyes, perfect features and delightful personality had captivated nearly every eligible male in her set. Yet, until recently, she had seemed to favor him over all the others, notwithstanding the difference in their ages—she was twenty; though Perry might easily have passed for thirty-two or three, coming from a family of those fortunate beings who seem to mature very slowly, in appearance at least. The change in Alice's attitude had been coincident with the return of Dal Arterburn, handsome and youthful, after a two-year absence. And now, apparently, she was lost to Perry. Lost because he could no longer fire her youthful imagination.

"When—when would you wish to begin this—er—treatment?" Latimer broke into his reflections.

"Now."

2

THE weeks that followed were fraught with excitement and suspense of the most acute sort for Perry. Always in the background of his consciousness lurked the specter of dread, a product of that universal instinctive fear of things unknown. After that first visit to Latimer's laboratory he had thrown himself into the whirl of social activities with an abandon that soon earned for him

the sobriquet of "the life of the party." All this while he continually received wondering comments from all sides on his changing appearance. If he continued the treatment much longer, the secret would have to come out. Latimer had said on Perry's last visit, a few days previous, that he was now approximately thirty years "young," and advised slowing up the rate of rejuvenation to, say, a couple of years a month, to avoid danger of passing the age of twenty-five. This was the mark Perry had set as his ideal.

"Of course, in that case you could grow older again at the regular rate until you reached the desired age again, after which you could remain at the same age, physically, for an indefinite time by the proper treatments," Latimer explained.

A sudden fear clutched at Perry's heart.

"Suppose something should happen to you unexpectedly. What then? Would I go on approaching closer and closer to infancy until I passed out into the unknown?"

"That is just what would happen, for the present rate of rejuvenation has now been well established. Only by somewhat drastic treatment can I even alter that rate."

A curious, mad glitter came into the chemist's eyes.

"What an interesting experiment that would be!" he murmured, as to himself. "One wonders what would become of the soul when the body returned to the age of zero—the absolute nadir of the point of birth."

"Don't, Lat! You give me the creeps."

The chemist seemed to shake himself out of a trance.

"I beg your pardon, Perry. Don't take my ravings too seriously."

But after Perry had gone, the chemist stood a long while gazing with unseeing eyes out of the window. He was thinking of what had happened once in the case of the guinea-pigs.

"What an experiment!" he repeated, softly.

3

OCTOBER fourth. That fateful date arrived without the slightest warning of the horror it was to bring and the terrible dread which was to stalk in its wake.

On this day Alice had finally yielded to Perry's plea to accompany him on a drive. He called for her at 2 o'clock. It was a delightful fall day. The sunlight fell softly through an almost imperceptible haze as they glided over the road behind the sweetly purring motor. For the first time in months, Perry felt absolutely at peace.

Something of his mood must have communicated itself to Alice, for she seemed to have returned, for the time, to her self of the first days when they began going together. Despite the exotic rambling of his imagination, Perry felt when he looked at her sitting there quietly beside him, that he might easily forego the trip abroad he had planned. For with unlimited youth at his command, and no encouragement from Alice, he was tempted to have one wild prolonged fling.

"Perry," she said, following a long silence during which their souls had seemed in perfectly peaceful and mutual accord, "you seem so different today."

In this she simply voiced his own thoughts of her. He told her so.

"I, too, feel different," she admitted. "But you are different in many ways. You act more like your former self today than you have for months. And yet, you are strangely changed since then." She looked at him critically.

"You look younger—much younger," she went on. "I can't just pick

out the actual changes. But you were a little thin, and were becoming tired-looking. At times you appeared to have lost interest in things, to be becoming prematurely 'settled'—if you know what I mean."

He nodded. Dull and uninteresting, like an old man, was what she meant.

"But now your face is filled out. You evince a keen interest in everything. Your eyes seem brighter and clearer. And you are not a bit 'settled' any more—or my observation of the last month or so have been all wrong. I really don't see how you keep up such a pace."

Almost he obeyed an impulse to tell her everything. The temptation —or the opportunity—passed, however. He couldn't bring himself to do it. Foolish of him to have considered it, he decided. Wouldn't do at all to let the secret out. Everyone would know it a day afterward.

"I am glad you like the change, Alice," he said. "I would rather please you than anyone else."

He suddenly realized that this was the truth.

"More than Irma Chadwick?"

Irma Chadwick was the ravishing blond who had recently dazzled the men of their set on a prolonged visit from Philadelphia. Perry and she had been much together while Alice and Dal were pairing up at the various social functions and driving about and playing golf together continually.

"Much more." Then some imp of perversity made him add: "Provided Dal doesn't object."

A hurt look clouded the dreamy hazel eyes. Her lashes dropped and she turned her head away from him.

Already sorry for the note of discord he had allowed to escape from him in that unfortunate moment of selfishness, Perry stole miserable glances at her between his watchfulness of the unwinding ribbon of road. Why couldn't he have been satisfied when matters were going smoothly? The realization came to him that all he had done during the past six weeks had been for her.

He was about to venture something conciliatory when a car, stalled in the road ahead, forced him to throw on his brakes.

"Can I help?" Perry called out, pulling up on the roadside just beyond the other car.

"Thanks. Maybe you can," hopefully smiled the young chap who had been tinkering about the car. "I think I'm out of gas."

A quantity of gasoline was soon drained from Perry's tank and put into the tank of the stalled car. A moment later the unfortunate motorist's guess was confirmed as his motor began to roar. He drove away voicing profuse thanks.

"I think we'd better turn round and start back," Alice suggested.

"But aren't we going to have dinner somewhere together, Alice?"

"Can't. I have another engagement, Perry."

He pondered gloomily.

"I'm mighty disappointed, Alice. Is—is it because——? I'm very sorry I made that remark about Dal. Won't you forgive me?"

"That had nothing to do with it" —coolly. "I simply have an engagement."

"Then will you let me see you some other evening this week? You know, Alice, you have been pretty hard on me for the last few months."

Even as he spoke, he realized that he had again said the wrong thing. He cursed himself inwardly for a bungling fool.

"You did not seem to be taking it hard. However, there was always the convenient Dal excuse—as you have already reminded me this afternoon."

He wanted to tell her that he had not understood. That he had really

preferred her all the time. That he thought she was acting just a bit unfairly. But she would not hear him.

"You needn't stammer excuses, Perry," she said. "You are mistaken in the presumption that any are required. Please take me home. It's growing late."

The trip back was made mostly in silence, broken only by occasional brief remarks on purely superficial subjects.

On the way home, after leaving Alice, Perry bought a newspaper. He tucked it between the folds of the upholstering at the end of the roadster's seat. Not until he reached his room did he open it.

A "scare" heading riveted his gaze. He stared at it a moment in growing alarm.

MAD CHEMIST BLOWN TO FRAGMENTS

Fearfully, he read:

A terrific explosion shook the entire lower section of the North Side this afternoon at 1:15, breaking many windows in the vicinity of 4708 Perkins Avenue, a boarding house, in which the explosion occurred. The upper part of the house was wrecked, immediately bursting into flames which totally destroyed the building before firemen could check them. All inmates of the house escaped except John Latimer, a chemist who occupied the attic. The terrific explosion in his laboratory evidently killed him outright, as his features were horribly disfigured. It is said that Latimer had been working on a high explosive formula, under the hallucination that his services were retained by the government.

John Latimer dead! The terrible significance of that catastrophe sank into Perry's consciousness like a white-hot iron. With Latimer gone he was doomed—doomed to a fate of unprecedented horror, more dreadful than ordinary death, or even torture. His vivid imagination magnified, a hundred times, his fears of the month past. He recalled the bizarre characterization of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde,* and Haggard's *She,* in the novels of those titles, neither of which could quite equal the horror of his own predicament; although, he reflected, there was a suggestion of similarity between his case and an incident portrayed in the latter of these wild tales.

In an agony of remorse, Perry realized that he could not again consider marrying—even if Alice would have him. For, utterly ridiculous as it may sound, within another month he would have reverted to the adolescence of a fifteen-year-old! In physique and appearance he would be just that old, though Latimer had told him that mentally he would remain the same. And he must expect the end some three months later, retaining his mentality till the last!

4

For pure irony the Fates win, hands down, in a walk, the elegant, all-wool crocheted drinking cup. At 8:30 o'clock on the morning of the fifth, Alice telephoned Perry to tell him that she knew she'd been horrid the previous afternoon, that she'd had a horrid time during the evening, and that she wished he'd play tennis with her that morning.

He made some excuse or other, for he felt that he ought not to see her again, though his heart was yearning for her. The wisdom of this decision was clear in the light of his hurried visit the evening before to Dr. Abbott, and its termination. The eminent nerve specialist had listened to his tale with surprizing credulity, considering the grotesque nature of it.

"Mr. Sutherland," he said, "I have been observing your case unbeknown to you. As you know, I am a fellow member of your Atalanta Club, where I see you occasionally, though I have not had the pleasure of knowing you personally. My interest was first aroused through a

mutual acquaintance a while back, who remarked on the spectacular change in you.

"I perceive that there has been a most unusual change in you, even since then. This change probably is less apparent to your close friends, who see you daily, than to me, because they see its gradual workings while I get the full effect of the gaps."

"You believe, then, that there is little doubt that I actually am returning to infancy?" Perry queried, his last hope slipping from him.

"I am inclined to believe so. Some years ago word of this man Latimer's experiments got around among members of the profession, and I was considerably impressed. I have long suspected that there was some means of arresting the march of age, and that it was but a short step farther to extending the process to pushing age backward. Your case confirms this. Very interesting, indeed. Very."

"Very interesting to you, Doctor, no doubt, but intensely inconvenient to me. What I want to know, quickly, is how to halt the action of this substance, or fungus, or whatever it is that my body has been treated with, before it is too late. What can you do?"

"Nothing. I am very, very sorry, Sutherland."

"Nothing? Surely science that can produce an elixir to combat age can also produce a chemical to kill it."

"Exactly, my dear sir. You state the situation exactly when you say that the way to combat it is to kill it. But, unfortunately, it was found in Latimer's experiments that to kill the action of the elixir it was necessary to kill the patient also, because the fungus had become an integral part of the living organism."

"In other words, I have the choice of s u i c i d e or this ignominious death?"

"I am afraid that is correct. Of course, there is the long chance that, through further experiments, some other counteracting agent may be discovered, which will make a cure possible. However, that would require time; and time is fatal to you."

"Will you undertake to direct such research with all haste?" Perry asked. "Naturally I am willing to devote as much of my present liberal resources as necessary to accomplish the feat."

"Gladly. I shall call together the best minds of the profession. This case will attract world-wide attention. You may be assured of its receiving the undivided attention of experts. But I will not misrepresent the outlook to you in a serious matter like this. There is scant chance of success."

"Thank you for your frankness," said Perry. "There is one other thing I wish to ask of you, however. Bind these men to secrecy until the case is concluded."

5

Followed fleeting days of alternating hope and despair, filled with intense mental anguish. Whatever doubt there may have been about his actually growing younger was dispelled from Perry's mind well before the end of the month. Already his beard was becoming noticeably less wiry and he found it unnecessary to shave as frequently as before. Surely and swiftly he was returning to adolescence.

Dr. Abbott had advocated first going to Brussels, where Ressnier, the famed Belgian specialist, could be consulted. Thither they journeyed accordingly. A brief stay there proving fruitless, they went on to Berlin, thence to Vienna, and finally to Paris. Corps of Teuton specialists had been intensely interested in Perry's case, most of them holding out

hope for him; but none was able to definitely check the relentless action of the mysterious elixir during the patient's stay. Several followed to Paris, there to continue their observation of the strange case. Dr. Abbott had advised remaining at Paris indefinitely, in order that an uninterrupted study of Perry's case could be made. Only a forlorn hope that one of the various European experts might be able to prescribe a positive cure, and the drastic march of time, had caused Abbott to advise the rapid moves.

The end of October saw Perry and the now-devoted Abbott as father and son when walking along the boulevards of Paris. Perry had been obliged to purchase an entirely new outfit of clothing, as his stature had shrunk considerably. His health continued good. And his mentality remained that of a matured man. His memory was unimpaired. Resigned to his fate, he had ceased dwelling upon it. He waited with astonishing calmness for the end.

Not since leaving America had Perry written to Alice.

From this time on, his clothes became a real problem. Plainly it was useless to attempt to maintain a complete wardrobe. For no sooner had he bought a garment than it began growing too large for him. He was kept busy buying clothes to fit him; boys' clothes! It became a sort of game to Perry, who welcomed it as a diversion to help keep his mind off his fate.

Experts continued theorizing and prescribing through Monsieur Thurbin, in whose hands Dr. Abbott had finally placed Perry's case, the two of them, however, continuing to collaborate with the best of the others studying it. The apparent partial checking of the elixir's action had given them renewed hope. But as time slipped by without further success, it became evident that the fateful race between practical science and the diabolical work of the departed chemist would be lost in the end.

CHRISTMAS saw Perry in pinafores! No longer was he able to procure his own clothing, Abbott now looking after everything. A month before, Perry had made his last will, after a thorough examination by alienists and in the company of two prominent jurists to attest his sanity, in order that there should afterward be no contest over the legality of the testament.

Obviously it was not possible to keep private the facts of so remarkable a case thus long. The news had leaked out, and newspapers and magazines in nearly every corner of the globe were crying with all the particulars. Of this Perry was quite aware. He shrank from public appearances because of the public curiosity he aroused on these occasions. He had had Abbott rent a small but beautiful château on the outskirts of Paris. Here Perry intended spending the rest of his few remaining days.

He had remembered each of his old friends in the usual manner for Christmas, directing Abbott to select and dispatch the different gifts. To Alice he had sent a valuable brooch in the shape of a delicately formed racket of platinum with a small diamond in the end of the tiny handle. Of course she already knew of the terrible fate hanging over his head.

Christmas morning arrived amid the chiming of the great bells in the cathedral near by, where Perry had once attended services on a former visit to Paris, years ago. A number of Americans from adjacent quarters of Paris usually attended this place of worship, which had become a sort of American shrine. On this morn-

ing in his little bed, for the first time since his affliction, Perry buried his head in his arms and sobbed as if his very heart would break. It was thus Abbott found him.

"Buck up, old man," he said, patting him on the back.

That "old man," and its incongruity brought him out of it. He dug the tears out of his eyes with his chubby fists and essayed a laugh in which there was a hint of hysteria.

"A letter for you, Perry," said Abbott, holding out a squarish gray envelope.

With a start Perry recognized the peculiar rounded style of handwriting. The postmark showed the missive to be from home. Alice! He tore it open feverishly, cutting his soft fingers in his haste.

Only she, Perry decided as he read, could know the painstaking taste and understanding that had sponsored the penning of that letter:

Perry dear—

An old friend understands and feels for you. If only I might help you, too! Most of all, I am glad when I read of the way you are bearing up. That is like you. I admire you tremendously for it. And, when I think that I may have been an influence in the step you made, I feel responsible in a way for your predicament. If I was, I am, oh, so sorry! At the risk of hurting more, I want to tell you while I can—for I must—that I loved you anyway, as you were. But I did not realize it fully until the damage was done. I always shall love you, Perry.

There seems so little I can say. Yet I want to cheer, in some way, this Christmastide. My heart is with you, will be with you Christmas day and always, dear. Think of me, too, then, won't you please?

And be brave. Your

ALICE.

Your—Alice! Ah, if he had only known in time that she did care. Well, of such things is the pattern of life; what was done was done. He had not much longer to wait. And now he had her letter to read over and over; to keep and treasure to the last. That would help. He wished he might see her when she received his own little remembrance.

New Year's came and passed on. Dr. Abbott stayed beside Perry now constantly, counting the days. It was one of Perry's last requests that all the specialists who had lately been in attendance upon him be permitted to be present at the end. He wanted them to be able to study every phase of his unearthly malady and to broadcast to the world the terrible folly of tampering with God's handiwork. That thought offered to him a measure of consolation—at least he was supplying a needed and dramatic warning to mankind.

January twelfth, that memorable day, was stamped upon Perry's brain with the fat black digits on the one-day calendar pad that Abbott had hung on the wall directly opposite the bed in his room. For the last two days, Perry had seen, as in a dream, a ring of faces about him—the specialists, watchful and expectant of the the finish, now imminent. Almost they seemed eager for its arrival, so avid was their interest. And always, over their shoulders, Perry saw the fat, prominent figures on the calendar, that were torn off each day.

Only in the last few days had his hitherto keen mentality suffered. He still retained his mature mind, but the awful nearness of the end—whether through physical or mental stress—had finally affected his consciousness. He seemed to be existing in a kind of hazy fairyland. There were times when he lay for hours in a stupor, for he had grown quite weak. Still, when Dr. Abbott would lean over to talk with him, his mind would clear temporarily, and he could answer the questions put to him.

On the last occasion when his friend questioned him, however, inquiring briefly as to his comfort and sensations, Perry had felt a sud-

den nausea as he tried to reply. One of the specialists took the calendar off the wall and held it close before Perry's eyes. As from a great distance he heard a voice asking whether he could read the date. The figures registered vividly in his brain. They seemed to swell monstrously; to be about to topple over and crush him! He tried to raise his puny arms to ward off the blow. But he could not move. An enormous weight seemed to be pressing upon him all over. His head felt as if it were gripped in rapidly shrinking bands of iron. He was conscious of a sinking feeling and a drawing sensation as if his whole body were suddenly shrunken into a very small bundle—a point, a speck in infinity. . . .

ABRUPTLY he found himself gasping for air. Was he to have a brief respite? Then, suddenly, he realized that his hands were free—he could move! He clutched at his body, and encountered—not a ball of shriveled flesh, but a body of normal proportions. With an effort he opened his eyes.

Gone was the ring of doctors, the threatening calendar. Dr. Abbott was standing before him. Then he observed that he was sitting in the doctor's reception room. Apparently he had fallen asleep in the comfortable Morris chair while waiting for the doctor.

"Well, you seemed to be having a right eventful dream," laughed Dr. Abbott. "I found you lying back, quivering and trying to talk, and looking as if you were experiencing a perfectly good nightmare. I'll bet you've been giving your stomach the worst of things."

"I'm afraid I have," Perry admitted.

"And trying to do with about half the sleep you should have. It's beginning to show on you."

"Guilty again, Doctor."

Then, at the other's request, he examined his case. The physician listened gravely enough, albeit with evident skepticism. When Perry had finished, he shook his finger at his patient in the brusk but friendly manner that was characteristic of him.

"Young man," he said, "you've been fed up on the rankest twaddle that it ever has been my privilege to listen to. I'm surprized that you gave it credence. Seekers of youth did not pass out with Ponce de Leon, as all well knew; but this is the first time I've heard of anyone claiming to know how to grow *younger*—much less to want to know how to *cease* growing younger!"

"But how do you account for the abnormal change in my appearance?"

"Abnormal—bosh! Just the natural result of being yourself. You'd been moping around and fossilizing until you woke up and gave your mind a chance to enjoy itself. You needed recreation, even at the expense of rest; though now it's time to slow up a bit and use some judgment in your daily program. Try to get at least six hours of sleep. Seven or eight would be better. You are simply one of those fortunate fellows who don't age as fast as the average and you look now about as you should look. If you think you look as if you've just cast your first vote, your vanity needs a jolt. However, you *don't* look older than lots of fellows do at thirty. Now you'd better let me examine you to make sure that that madman hasn't poisoned you with his so-called treatments."

Thirty minutes later Perry bounded down Dr. Abbott's front steps with a heart that felt at least ten years younger than when he had climbed them. He drove home with his head full of plans for the immediate future. Fortunately, the preliminary examination had shown no

ill effects from the treatments he had permitted Latimer to give him. The blood tests Abbott was conducting would settle this question finally.

One thing puzzled Perry considerably at first. How had he visualized Dr. Abbott accurately in a dream, when he had never seen him before? Then he recalled that he *had* seen him once several months back on the occasion of the specialist's making an address at a luncheon as a guest of the Lion's Club.

On the heels of this reflection Perry remembered the letter from Alice that he had dreamed about. Certain words had stuck in his mind vividly. "I want to tell you . . . . that I loved you anyway, as you were. I did not realize it . . . . until the damage was done." Suppose she *had* said those things. Maybe, as the dream letter had suggested, he had not made the most of things as they were. He determined to see Alice that very next morning—and he would not wait to see whether she would telephone him as she had in his dream.

6

PERRY obtained Alice's consent to play tennis with him the next morning, and he let her conquer him in the first and only set. After that they went driving.

He drew the car up on a quiet stretch of road where there was a magnificent view of the winding river. The red-and-gold hills rose beyond it in imposing grandeur, and their magnificence with the feathery cloudlets above was reflected in the unruffled surface of the water. A sense of great peace seemed to settle over the scene and them.

"Alice," Perry said, "I want you, dear. I've wanted you ever since I first met you. And, by George," he enthused, as she looked at him encouragingly, "I'm going to have you!"

He took her in his arms as he had so often longed to do, and kissed her. She did not resist. More, she slipped an arm round his neck and pulled him close as she kissed him back.

"Oh, Perry, why didn't you do that yesterday?" she asked, presently.

"Wha—what's the matter, dear?" he queried in alarm. Was she going to tell him she had since become engaged to someone else!

"Nothing. Only—only I thought you were going to—and—you didn't. That's why I got angry!"

WINDOWS of DESTINY

by
JAMES B. M. CLARK JR.

"Slowly the head came back to the left, until the eyes were fixed upon the ghastly countenance of Kupfer."

THE spectacles lay on the table between the two men, and for a time neither spoke. Each was busy with his thoughts. Winthrop, the younger, gazed at the glasses with eager curiosity not unmixed with awe, for Dr. Ransome had just been telling him strange things about them and his journalistic instinct was fired. Here was a "story" with a vengeance. . . . Magic glasses! . . . .

The spectacles were certainly uncommon. The frame, of solid gold, was of unusual design, heavy and strong, the metal encircling the lenses after the old style. The bars that clasped the sides of the wearer's head were bowed slightly to give a spring effect, and after a still older fashion were hinged in the middle so that they could be folded up very compactly. Beyond being rather dark in tint there did not seem to be anything to distinguish the lenses from ordinary "smoked" glasses — excepting perhaps their thickness. They were very heavy.

The case lay near Dr. Ransome's elbow. It also was of antique design and was quite a work of art. It was of light strong wood covered with red morocco leather and was in two pieces, the main body and a sliding end, which was removed completely when one inserted or withdrew the glasses, after the manner of the old-fashioned razor cases. Extending for about two-thirds of the length of the case proper there was clamped to one of its sides a kind of ivory tablet secured in place by little gold rivets. This tablet was inlaid with representations of fruits and flowers of remarkable perfection in form, coloring and artistic arrangement, betraying at once its Oriental origin.

"As I was explaining," said Dr. Ransome, "the mandarin brought the rock crystals over personally from Canton to Jena in Germany, having

heard of the fame of the optical workers there. I think I am right in saying that the crystals were spherical and had been used for crystal-gazing. Where they were actually mined I never heard. The mandarin, although a high and important dignitary in his own country, traveled to Europe without ostentation (for it was ordained that it should be done so) and proceeded to Jena, where he behaved rather singularly. Instead of going to the optical companies he went among the workers themselves, and by dint of persuasion and bribes ascertained that one Carl Werther, an elderly Swiss and a single man, was the cleverest and most accurate grinder in the district. Then he sought out Werther's employers and for a handsome payment obtained their permission to let him have the services of the Swiss on this particular job until it was finished. He would have taken Werther back with him to do the work in China, but it had been prophesied that it would be done in the west, and no true Chinaman would dream of disputing anything so sacred. However, he stipulated that he personally must be present during all the operations, that the unfinished work should be given to his care each night, that all particles of the ground crystals be gathered up and restored to him, and that no one should look through the finished glasses. In short he made himself a horrible nuisance to the optical people, but as he was willing to pay any price, they humored him and so he had his way."

"Didn't want anyone to see through the glasses, eh?" asked Winthrop with interest.

"No," said Ransome. "He was insistent on that point. But in that connection it is rather curious to note that the Swiss, Werther, developed some lung trouble not long after the mandarin had gone back east, and this soon carried him off. On his death bed he confessed to the parish priest that he had disobeyed the mandarin's injunctions and had contrived to pilfer a piece of the precious crystal out of which he had fashioned for himself a monocle. The deed seemed to have troubled his conscience—in fact it was stated he had been a changed man since working on that particular job. At his own request the monocle was buried with him."

Winthrop picked the spectacles up and unfolded them.

"May I?" he asked, with an enquiring look at Dr. Ransome.

"Certainly," said the doctor heartily. "I brought them out for that purpose."

Winthrop adjusted the heavy frame to his face with difficulty and blinked around the room.

"I don't see anything special," he said in disappointed tones. "Everything is darker than usual—that's all."

He took the glasses off and looked at the doctor half reproachfully. "And yet you say some people can see wonderful things through them?"

Dr. Ransome nodded.

"Try again," he said.

The young reporter again fixed the glasses in position and looked around. He stared out of the window for a few seconds and then, on turning his head sharply toward where Dr. Ransome was seated, he gave a start and an exclamation.

"Gee!" he said. "That was curious."

He remained staring.

"What was it?" asked Dr. Ransome, smiling slightly.

"As I turned round toward you there," said Winthrop, "instead of yourself sitting in the chair in everyday American clothes there was seated a Chinese gentleman in yellow robes ornamented with black dragons —I saw the dragons distinctly—and with some kind of a hat or skull-cap

on his head. The face and figure were yours—beard and all—but you had become a Chinaman. Then in a flash you were yourself again.''

He took the glasses off once more and examined them intently.

''I am glad you saw something after all,'' said Dr. Ransome, his plump cheerful face wearing an air of relief. ''It is a good sign. And what you saw was not so very ridiculous as might be supposed. For there is a certain amount of Chinese blood in my veins, as your father may have told you. My maternal grandmother was a full-blooded Chinese lady. When I was working on the staff of the *New Asia* in Hongkong, by virtue of my Chinese ancestor I was admitted to membership in a powerful Chinese society, and on state occasions we wore such robes as you have described. All this, however, is between ourselves. . . . .''

His keen blue eyes held those of his companion for a moment.

''Certainly,'' replied Winthrop. ''But you are not going to do me out of my story, I hope?''

''There will be no story out of these glasses, if you please,'' said Dr. Ransome firmly and impressively. And then seeing the disappointment on Winthrop's features he added kindly: ''But I will give you plenty of other stories, Harry, never fear.''

The young man thanked him gratefully. To have been sent for by the most noted traveler and correspondent of his day and not get anything out of him would, he felt, have been nothing short of a calamity.

''THE glasses are famous throughout the East, where they are known as the 'windows of destiny','' continued Dr. Ransome. ''Worn by an honest and earnest student and one who loves his fellows they will reveal the true nature of those on whom he turns his gaze. To those whose hearts are evil other sights may be revealed. But the flippant, the sacrilegious and the unbelieving can accomplish nothing at all with them. The glasses were stolen from a temple in Pekin during the Boxer rebellion (I was there at the time) and were found by a servant of mine on the body of a dead bandit. He brought them to me. I turned them over to the society of which I spoke, which numbers the best and most influential men in China among its members; and they commissioned me to perform a certain service with them in this country. But the glasses will ultimately go back to China, no matter whether I take them there or not. If they are in existence at all they will be recovered and taken there.''

''They are liable to be stolen, of course,'' said Winthrop, keenly interested.

''They are,'' said Dr. Ransome, ''although not altogether on account of their intrinsic value. There are many sects and secret societies in China that would give anything to have them—plotters and malevolent persons. Several lives have been lost over them already, and there is even danger in having them about one—although not so much in this country.''

''How curious and interesting!'' said Winthrop, drinking in every word.

''Rather,'' said Dr. Ransome soberly. ''And serious at the same time. For this is their theory of the purpose of the glasses: the 'windows of destiny' are to reveal to a great leader the manner in which to overcome the evils of mankind, and he is to open the eyes of the world to the true way out of the slough of hatred and enmity into which the peoples of the earth have fallen. Their faith in this is sublime, and their dream is that one of their race is to be the one chosen for the work.''

"Yes?" said Winthrop tensely.

"It is easy to speak of these things in a matter-of-fact way and to summarize them," said Dr. Ransome gravely. "But no words of mine could convey the faintest notion of the patient labor and care and love and devotion through long periods of time that finally resulted in the formulating of these theories—a formulation that might make many of our scientists blush. But it has finally been worked out to this. These people believe that somewhere in the world today there is what they call an 'imp of discord'—one man in particular who is making it his business to create strife and discord. Now I presume you know your history well enough to be aware of the mischief that one man or a few men can work—the case of Cæsar is a good enough illustration. You know how he repeatedly pardoned the handful of enemies who spent their lives balking him and who finally brought about his death and the disruption of the empire. Very well. There are in the world today a certain number of men whose business it is to create strife for their own personal ends. The Chinese believe that there is a kind of arch-chief who consciously or unconsciously affects the others—a kind of ringleader as it were. According to their calculations he is to be found in this country, and I have been commissioned to find him."

"And can I be of assistance to you?" asked Winthrop, his countenance betraying eagerness.

"You can," said Dr. Ransome decisively. "I have chosen you for the work. To get the best results from the glasses it is essential to have good and true eyesight. Now I am afflicted with a certain type of myopia which virtually prevents my using them at all. But you have good eyesight, and that is the first consideration. Secondly, your father was one of my dearest friends. And, last but not least, I have made enquiries about you and find you to be possessed of considerable discretion."

Winthrop blushed as he bowed his thanks. This was indeed praise from a high quarter.

"I have consequently arranged with your employers," continued Dr. Ransome, "that for the next month you will be at my disposal. With your newspaper affiliations, and letters I shall give you, you will be able to get access to certain public men with whose names I shall furnish you. Some are financiers, some senators, some judges, some manufacturers. All you will be called on to do will be to get an interview with each of these men and survey them one and all through the glasses. You will report your findings to me here a month hence. You can get in touch with me in the interval if need be at the Press Club in New York. This is Thursday. You may reckon your month as commencing on next Monday, the thirteenth. If you will call here on Saturday forenoon at 11 o'clock I will give you all the papers you need and also the glasses, which meantime I am going to have taken from this old-fashioned frame and fitted into a more modern one—I think a horn frame will be the most suitable."

Dr. Ransome smiled and waved his hand, signifying that the interview was at an end, and Winthrop took his departure.

So GREAT was the young reporter's excitement that he could scarcely sleep that night, and he counted the hours as they passed. To think that he should be selected for such a task—a task the like of which had never been heard of and which might involve all sorts of extraordinary adventures! He was in a fever of anticipation till the fateful Saturday forenoon wore slowly round, and

punctually at 11 o'clock he was at Dr. Ransome's room in the hotel. True to his promise the doctor had had the dark lenses taken from the heavy gold mounting, and they were now framed in common bone. The magnificent case, too, had disappeared and the spectacles were enclosed in one of polished aluminum. This the doctor handed to Winthrop shortly after his entrance, together with papers and letters of introduction.

"Take the names in the order in which you find them in the list," he said. "It is true this involves going back and forth from one town to another, but never mind. There is a reason for that particular order. And first of all you had better wear the glasses for a day or two (at intervals, that is, and not all the time) and get accustomed to their peculiarities. They take a little understanding. Be here a month from Monday with your report. Should anything very startling happen before then you can communicate with me as directed."

He shook hands with the young man and turned to his correspondence.

Winthrop's experiences before interviewing the first of his men may perhaps be best described by quoting from the report which he ultimately made to Dr. Ransome.

"I found at first that the glasses tended to give me a headache and even to cause a certain amount of dizziness. I could not wear them for more than about fifteen minutes at one time during the first day, but was able to increase this with each succeeding day until finally I could wear them as long as two hours at a stretch. My experiences on the first day (Saturday the eleventh) were so extraordinary that I was rendered rather nervous and excited, and went slightly easier on the next day. By the third day the 'breaking in' was complete.

"I began by viewing people on the public thoroughfares and in the street cars and subways. Many of these appeared ridiculously small, as if viewed through the wrong end of a telescope. These I assumed to be small people—unimportant, humbugs. Their number was distressingly and depressingly large. As sure as I turned the glasses on some well-dressed, impressive, prosperous-looking person whom one would have supposed to be of some importance, just so surely would he dwindle away. It would have been laughable had it not been rather sad on account of its commonness. Goodness seemed almost invariably to be found in inverse ratio to worldly circumstances—you got better results among the poor people.

"Ordinary everyday workpeople showed up well, that is to say they appeared very largely to be their normal selves, which I took to be a healthy sign. Some of them assumed quite a beatific appearance, and every now and again one would be discovered with a perfect aura or halo surrounding him or her. Almost invariably these were either artizans or simple office workers.

"One case in particular that quite stunned me was that of old Joe Leslie, who runs the little candy store near the university. There was such a light shining around this old man's head that one could hardly look at him. And yet when the glasses were removed it was just old Joe smiling at you. I felt inclined to go down on my knees. I have known for a long time that Joe was a good old scout, and I received kindnesses at his hands myself when at college. But now I think he must be a positive angel. I felt impelled to speak to him of those old days and to thank him again, but he could not remember having done anything in particular, he said. When I insisted he laughed and told me to forget it.

"Then I had an idea and told him to try on the glasses. He did so, and exclaimed almost at once on how bright everything and everybody looked. He went to the shop door and looked down the street, and he kept remarking all the time on the brightness and how beautiful everybody looked. He wanted to know where he could buy such glasses. I felt slightly ashamed to think that I should have seen most folks look the other way—that is at their worst.

"Wicked people, of whom there seem to be a great many, presented all sorts of appearances—mean, furtive, hypocritical, ferocious, and a few awful beyond description. These were chiefly in high places, and it used to scare me sometimes to see what power they had. Many of them seemed to move through a range of emotions according as their moods varied, from merely unpleasant to actually dreadful, just as the good varied from mildly good to beautiful. Even the small sometimes tended to grow larger. But the bad were always bad and the good never so.

"I was greatly interested in what I saw in the churches, which proved the most fascinating study. The ministers measured up poorly, most of them being small. An extra good type was found in a small denominational chapel down in the east end, the pastor of which, an old man, was said to be 'emptying his church.' It was admitted, however, that he did good work among the poor. It may perhaps have been significant here that the radiance which emanated from the person of this fine-looking old gentleman seemed to find a reflection in the countenances of nearly all of the limited number of worshipers who attended on the morning of my visit, and who seemed to be largely old women. The whole interior of the building was resplendent, and the worshipers seemed to laugh at one another with their eyes in a way that was very beautiful and made one feel happy. I felt refreshed after attending this service.

"The average congregation seemed to contain an unpleasantly large number of the crafty and cunning and even of the cruel. The types could all be easily distinguished. The pastor of one fashionable church presented a truly demoniacal appearance and positively filled me with terror. Yet his sermon was clever and created much merriment and even applause. But just as in the old man's church the radiance spread, so here did the evil—or rather this man had gathered evil ones about him. Here and there could be seen the white radiance shining (generally around some old head), but the general aspect of this church was dark and terrifying. A look of malevolent understanding seemed to sweep like wind on a field of corn across the upturned countenances as some clever point was made. Yet it was a wealthy and 'upper class' congregation.

"The business section showed up very badly—worst of all, with the possible exception of the town corporation. Heads of businesses, managers, partners, directors and officials of big companies were generally of the cunning and unscrupulous type, although here and there there were curious streaks of decency (very often among the younger men), and every now and again some splendid specimen. It is interesting to note that most of the men in this field who showed up well had good solid reputations. I did not find a single case of a fine man who was not known to be fine. A curious thing was that some of the very biggest magnates appeared quite small, while their lieutenants and right-hand men would be shockingly bad—indicating, I take it, that the great man was simply rather a harmless person who was being worked upon by scoun-

drels. Bankers as a class showed up well; lawyers the reverse.

"The city council, as a body, made the poorest showing, with deceit and dishonesty the order of the day, plus a certain amount of desperate villainy. But we have a good mayor. It was worth something to see him sitting there illuminating the whole chamber with his fine, honest, benevolent countenance. As I sat at the reporters' table a prominent member of the council came behind the mayor's chair (he was supposed to be one of the mayor's strongest supporters) and bending over whispered in his ear. For sheer malignity I never saw anything approaching this man's face as viewed through the glasses. The mayor frowned and dissented, and the look on the councilor's face became so diabolical that I took off the glasses in alarm, expecting to see him seize the mayor by the throat. But he was just standing there smiling—only it was a smile that I now understand thoroughly."

ABOUT the middle of the first week of the term of inquiry Winthrop interviewed the first of the men on his list, which contained in all twelve names that were household words all over the country. Left to himself Winthrop could scarcely have hoped to gain admittance to all of them, but Dr. Ransome was also working in his behalf and barriers were broken down in a way that Winthrop did not always understand. Sometimes there were delays and postponements, and of course time was lost by the order of the names on the list, which necessitated starting out at Washington, then journeying to New York, then back again to Washington, then to Chicago, then to New York again. But he kept steadily at the task, although so far the results were disappointing. Nothing very unusual developed until he tackled his ninth man, a world-renowned financier, at the beginning of the last week of the search. Immediately after seeing this man he wired to Dr. Ransome to meet him at once, and next day they were together.

Winthrop was pale and excited, and his eyes shone strangely. The work, while not exactly difficult, had been arduous and nerve-trying and had called for much discretion and patience. But this was not what worried him; it was what he had on his mind.

"I think we have got our man, Doctor," he exclaimed dramatically, after shaking hands. "At least if it is a man at all."

He commenced to stride nervously up and down the room.

Dr. Ransome, although calm and unperturbed, nevertheless manifested real interest.

"Better sit down, Harry," he said, drawing out a chair and leading the excited young reporter to it. "We must keep cool, for we may have serious work to do. Tell me exactly what you saw."

Winthrop sat down and passed his hand with a quick movement across his forehead.

"I can hardly believe it is true," he said. "It is like some horrible nightmare. I almost wish I hadn't seen the sight."

"Yes?" said Dr. Ransome quietly, taking a pencil and a pad of paper from his pocket.

"I was rather relieved, if the truth must be told," began Winthrop, "that my men were showing up so well. They were mostly cunning and tricky. One or two, of course, were really villainous, but not more so than other men in lower walks of life. I felt pretty secure about this financier, he was so well known and so famous. I was sure he would figure well. I called as per appointment, and had a little chat with him before I put the glasses on while I explained to him about that Asiatic Develop-

ment Company and gave him the prospectus and your letter. While he was busy with these I donned the spectacles and turned my gaze on him. One look was enough. I nearly fell off my chair. You will understand the horror I felt and still feel when I tell you that what I saw sitting before me in that office chair was a thing like a monstrous rat!"

"Ah!" said Dr. Ransome significantly. "A rat."

He made one deep and curious character in the notebook with his pencil and then shut the book and put it back in his pocket.

"You possibly know what the man is like," continued Winthrop, shuddering slightly. "A little thin man with a narrow head and rather a high, bald forehead — everything about him small, small hands, small frame—and wears rather tight-fitting clothes. He changed right before my eyes, and there was a kind of great rat decked out in clothes and sitting at a desk reading a paper. I tell you the very hands became paws—I sat spellbound watching them slowly change. His voice is a high-pitched squeaking voice at the best of times, and when he raised his head and squeaked at me my blood simply ran cold. I could only mumble something incoherent in reply, so great was my confusion, tearing off the glasses as I did so. And there was his normal self staring at me in astonishment and doubtless thinking I had taken a fit or something. I made excuses. . . . Blamed it on the heat. But I got away as quickly as possible. I was afraid. When he shook hands with me at parting I nearly yelled, thinking I felt the touch of a paw."

Winthrop hid his face for a moment, quite overcome. Dr. Ransome, now pale and troubled, came round and patted him on the shoulder.

"I know all I need to know now," he said gently. "You have done well and will be well rewarded. Don't speak of it any more."

"Yes, yes," said Winthrop with nervous eagerness. "Let me tell everything. It gives me relief. It is having the knowledge bottled up within me that is harmful."

Dr. Ransome resumed his seat.

"I once went into a show in my home town of Portland, Maine, when I was a boy," Winthrop said after a short silence, "to see something that had been caught on a ship in the harbor and was being exhibited as a curiosity. A nickel was charged for admission. It was a great monstrous rat of some kind—I forget exactly what they called it. But I wished afterward I had not looked at it at all—it haunted me for days. Its head and front paws were small—not so very much bigger than those of an ordinary rat, but it increased alarmingly toward the rear and had an enormous pair of haunches. The brute weighed, I think, about forty pounds. As you entered the tent in which its cage was housed you got a hind view of the thing, and it somehow made me think of the shoulders of a human being. I remember it gave me a kind of nausea at the time. Well, I experienced exactly the same sensation when I got my first glimpse of Kupfer through the glasses. He was sitting side on to me, and somehow it was his shoulders that first assumed the aspect of the hind quarters of the brute."

"It must have been dreadful," said Dr. Ransome sympathetically. "But I must see it too—if I can. It is part of my duty."

"The little paws handling the papers," said Winthrop, shuddering again. "The head with the snout in the air. . . . ."

He stopped, unable to continue. For some moments he struggled with his emotions and then burst out: "Good God, sir! This is too horrible! What on earth does it mean?"

"Something like this, as near as I can figure," said Dr. Ransome sadly. "The thing began with this man's grandfather, who made the family fortune. We will suppose him to have been an ordinary type of man—perhaps slightly more avaricious than usual. His son, who succeeds him, extends and enlarges the business (as we know he did) and makes it a world-wide organization. He possibly is abnormally avaricious, as we have reason to believe he was. Now in the process of two such lives, unless great care is exercised (which it rarely is) the human element in the make-up of the individual is apt to become flattened out. There are few who can successfully carry the load of such greatness or handle wisely and justly the prodigious power entailed by the possession of such fortunes. For aught I know, the grandfather of this man may have been abnormal to begin with. The father was sometimes called 'money-mad.' The son is apparently a person whose soul is almost completely atrophied. That I take to be the meaning of the picture revealed. Cunning reigns supreme. Its symbol is the rat."

"Do you mean that the man has really lost his soul?" asked the horror-stricken reporter.

"Something like that," said Dr. Ransome, "although it is a little difficult to express by the use of a word like 'soul.' If you knew a little more about the religions of the East you would grasp the significance more clearly. The Buddhists, for example, do not believe in a 'soul' as we understand the term. They believe in a kind of collective something passing down from one life to another, the collective good or collective evil of the father coming down to the son as it were—in other words the starting of one life from the point of development at which the last one left off."

"I think I understand—slightly at any rate," said Winthrop.

"Now," continued Dr. Ransome, "if you keep going backward from what we might call the 'goodness' point you will come presently to what may be termed the 'zero line.' By that I mean the character line, to be on the right side of which is still to be able to distinguish between right and wrong, though the predominating tendency may be to do evil. But when you go below zero the distinction between good and evil is lost—the person is no longer able to discriminate between them."

"Really incapable of discriminating?" asked Winthrop in horrified fascination.

"Really incapable," said Dr. Ransome, "or in acute danger of becoming so unless he can be resuscitated by a tremendous mental shock of some kind. This man, as you know, is a public character. Hardly a day passes without his appearing somewhere or other and making a speech. You must have seen many of these speeches and know how they are always bristling with expressions of good will toward mankind in general and the poor and needy in particular. The man has been trained that way. He knows how to play up to the crowd. You will find him giving large sums to charities—his name is on every list of any importance. He supports at least one church almost entirely by himself. And yet if you could just read his inmost heart—hear him confess what he actually thought—well, you would then understand why he is symbolized by the rat."

Winthrop nodded.

"I understand," he said.

"There were five 'evil things' that had to be located," Dr. Ransome went on. "These were: the Rat, symbolical of malevolent cunning, the most feared and hated of all; the Ass, representing stupidity; the Gorilla,

typifying ferocity and hatred; the Sheep, indicating fear; and the Snake, symbolical of mischief. One of these, the Snake, is in the East; two, the Ass and the Gorilla, are in Europe (I had a hand in discovering them); while this continent can claim two, the Sheep (whom I unearthed very quickly), and the Rat, whom you have just discovered. All are great and powerful men, wherein lies the danger to mankind. A secret bond unites all of them in a way they themselves do not dream of. It would be rather dreadful for the world if they did. It is to preclude such dire possibility that we are working."

"How extraordinary!" said Winthrop, sitting so still that he scarcely seemed to breathe. "One can hardly credit such things. Are there any good ones equally powerful?"

"Yes," said Dr. Ransome. "But they must stay concealed from the evil ones for a time. 'Great Ones' they call them in the East—and they are all located there, it is somewhat disappointing to confess. But you can imagine with what joy these devoted Orientals set out on making such discoveries—or rather you can not imagine it. For these people are devoted beyond all our knowledge. But you may ponder, my boy, those lines of Shakespeare's: 'There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy.' Nothing more truly significant was ever pronounced by a European. Just think of the men who are working in the East there, trying to save humanity from itself. Some of them are monks walled up in huts in Tibet from which they never emerge, but working—working. . . ."

"And we always think of these people as barbarians," said Winthrop with a rueful smile, "and think we have a monopoly of workers in human welfare."

"Just as they think of us as barbarians," said the doctor briskly. "Except that they are willing to admit our gain in things material—of which of course they take little stock."

"What is the next move in this wonderful business?" asked Winthrop curiously.

"We will go and see our man tomorrow together," said Dr. Ransome, pulling the telephone book toward him and starting to turn over the leaves. "I will call him up now and make an appointment. After that I will send a cable to Canton."

In a few seconds he had the number and the appointment was made.

"Ten-thirty tomorrow, Harry," he said. "Come around here at 10 o'clock. I must view him through the glasses. He is interested in that commercial scheme. I knew he would be. . . . ."

NEXT morning Dr. Ransome and his young co-worker set out on foot for the offices of the magnate. The day was warm and glorious, the sun shone brilliantly, and little old New York looked its best. The sparrows twittered and fussed, and the throngs rushed about their business—keen, eager, hurrying. Winthrop and Dr. Ransome seemed the only ones in sight whose conduct was leisurely. Yet Winthrop was looking about him with new eyes and a different vision. To his fancy it seemed that he was helping in the shaping of destiny—that he had been called to a great task. It struck him as rather strange, and indeed wounded his vanity somewhat, to think that all this change in his outlook could be brought about by simply looking through a particular pair of spectacles. Of course there was Dr. Ransome. He glanced at the sedate little figure by his side, calm and unruffled. How had he reached such a pinnacle of greatness? And yet it

was not necessary to ask. If you knew the man you knew the answer.

Dr. Ransome's card was enough to give them a preference among the throng that waited in the great man's anteroom, and they were ushered into his presence almost directly. He was, as Winthrop had described, a little, thin, wizened man with a high, dome-like forehead and a pair of ferretlike pale blue eyes. The room was plainly and simply furnished with good fumed-oak material, and a rich green carpet covered the floor. It was a typical office of its kind—the working-place of a modern commercial man of action. Here was no litter of papers and books or of baskets. A large, square, flat-topped desk stood over near the window. Kupfer was seated at one side. Before him was a blotting pad and perhaps half a dozen open letters. There were also two ink bottles, black and red, a small rack of pens and pencils, and a bottle of mucilage. That was all.

"Welcome to our city, Ransome," said Kupfer in his piping voice, rising and shaking hands with the doctor. "It's years since I have seen you. Been prowling around in the interval, I suppose, keeping your finger on the pulse of world affairs, eh?"

He laughed at his own facetiousness, at the same time motioning his visitors to chairs.

"Yes," said Dr. Ransome rather quietly, seating himself. "I have been doing a little of that, amongst other things."

He took the spectacle case from his pocket and proceeded to don the glasses.

"You wear those dark glasses, too," said Kupfer, who missed nothing. "It seems to me I noticed your young friend wore a pair yesterday. We all come to them sooner or later. I'm one of the lucky ones—I've escaped so far. 'Don't do any reading or writing yourself if you can help it,' a famous eye specialist advised me years ago. 'Make the other fellow do it for you.' Ha, ha! The advice was sound; I took it."

Dr. Ransome smiled in reply, at the same time surveying the financier steadily through the glasses. Winthrop watched him breathlessly. Although he did not change countenance or betray concern in any marked fashion, anyone who knew the veteran journalist well could have told that he was troubled, chiefly by the loss of his habitual quietude and poise. He made little restless movements that were unusual to him, and looked away from Kupfer from time to time. Presently he took the glasses off and replaced them in their case.

"You have looked over the proposition?" he said.

"Yes," said Kupfer, opening one of the drawers of his desk and taking out the papers which Winthrop had left. "I am interested, of course. The potentialities are tremendous. I am inclined to put in a couple of millions myself—that is, to raise it in my own circle. The granary idea is very sound in view of the food conditions over there. 'The key of the supply chest is the key of the house' is one of my maxims. I have never known it to fail."

In spite of himself Winthrop could scarcely repress a shudder.

"Can this state governor be trusted?" asked Kupfer, after further examination of the papers.

"Absolutely," said Dr. Ransome curtly. "Any of the Chinese whose names are mentioned can. However, things are developing rather quickly over there, and even since I left there have been changes. My latest advice, by cable this morning, is that two of their men are on their way over here with further particulars. You will see them when they come, I suppose? They will be here in about three weeks, but I can advise you definitely later and make an appointment."

"Certainly," said the financier. "I'll be interested to hear the latest news."

He fixed his eyes on the doctor. "You seem to have a way with those fellows, Ransome," he said, half enviously. "I remember how they stuck by you in that Southern China proposition. You didn't know I was the power behind the Whaley interests, eh? But I was watching you all the time. And they certainly stayed with you."

There was some further talk of a business nature, and the visitors rose.

"Breaking the youngster in, are you?" asked Kupfer, his little eyes darting from one countenance to another in a way that made Winthrop wonder uneasily if he could read their thoughts. "Can't begin too young. I was seven when I first lent a fellow a dime and got back two of his Saturday nickels and a chunk of candy. Ha, ha! You can't begin too young. I'll wait your further word, Doctor. Glad to have seen you."

In a few moments they were in the street again.

"Let's go and have some refreshment, Harry," said Dr. Ransome. "I feel slightly unwell after that experience. I can well understand your being upset. He is our man, sure enough."

THEY adjourned to a café near by and ordered drinks, while Dr. Ransome pulled out his cigar case and they both proceeded to light up.

"Are these men actually on the way from China?" asked Winthrop.

"I sent off a cable yesterday after you left me," said Dr. Ransome, "and just got word before we set out this morning that they had been able to get passage at the last minute on a C. P. R. steamer for Vancouver. I knew they wouldn't lose much time. Until they arrive, however, we can do nothing but wait. You can go back to your reporting meantime, Harry, and I will send for you again when the time is ripe. I will possibly need you at hand. What action the Chinese will take I do not yet know, but I will see what they propose when I have had a talk with them."

"How does Kupfer use his power for evil, may I ask?" said Winthrop, for whom the subject had a fascination. "Does he create wars?"

"Oh, no," said Dr. Ransome. "That would be too crude and too dangerous. But the same result can be achieved by simply creating or maintaining discord. When you have seen as much of the world as I have, Harry, you will understand why Carlyle marveled that people of good will (and the great mass of the people of all countries have good will), who have never even seen one another, should yet be found confronting each other with weapons of destruction and killing each other off. You may remember he asks 'Why?' and then says: 'Have they any quarrel? None in the world. Indeed in an indirect way they are useful to one another. Ah! But their masters told them to do it!' That is the secret, and it is as true today as then. You don't know the power that this man, for instance, wields in the newspaper world—few do. But I know it. He can inflame a whole nation with ease on any given issue."

"But why should he?" persisted the younger man.

"If you were to suggest to him that he was deliberately doing such a thing he would possibly be highly indignant and even genuinely astonished," said Dr. Ransome. "That is what I meant by going below zero spiritually. In a sense the man is perhaps not morally responsible. The real evil lies in the concentration of power in the hands of people who haven't the least idea how to employ

it properly. That is one thing these Orientals can not understand—how with all our fine talk about freedom and liberty (and goodness knows there is enough of that, both spoken and written) we should still put power into the hands of irresponsible private persons—power that might make an Alexander or a Napoleon green with envy. They can not understand it in the East. And although they are all the time looking to us for guidance and counsel, we never attempt to explain it—we only make excuses."

"But in what way does discord serve Kupfer's purpose?" asked Winthrop.

"It begins chiefly in trade rivalries," said Dr. Ransome, "and trade rivalries are really the cause of most international troubles. Then trade rivalry is followed by outside monopoly and control—a thing an Oriental loathes and abominates above everything. They know the meaning of Kupfer's 'key of the supply chest' well enough. Just think what a foreign financier with unlimited means can do. He can make his tools and his minions capture and corner anything, and he can not be stopped so long as the prime mover or guiding spirit is beyond your control. And in the East they are satisfied that the master minds who are keeping the nations of the world from amity and brotherliness are really very few—perhaps not more than the five I spoke of. For, as I have said, they work together and are interlocked. Possibly the man we have just seen is the biggest force for disruption in the whole round world today."

"Is he in so many things as all that?" asked Winthrop, half convinced.

"In virtually everything that it is possible to be in," said Dr. Ransome. "And in all of them simply and solely for what is to be made. Do you think a world can be run on such lines—that you can shape the destinies of mankind by the tricks of the moneylender?"

"But getting a monopoly even of vital things," said Winthrop, to whom much of the doctor's talk was anathema, "why need that have an injurious effect?"

Dr. Ransome smiled.

"You are young, Harry," he said, "and you live in a highly organized country. Have you ever seen a small trader crushed out—even here? Have you tried to gage the feelings engendered? Do you know the meaning of the term 'harvest of hatred?' Is the knocking of a man's feet from under him—destroying his livelihood—a thing to be done lightly? And if it is bad here (and it is bad enough) what do you suppose it is like in the East, where the same business has been in the same family for generations, where things are still more or less chaotic, and where famine stalks periodically? I can not begin to tell you of the mischief wrought. No; while these 'imps of discord' have a free hand there is no hope for humanity. That is the plain English of the business."

"But what will these men who are coming over do?" asked Winthrop with a faint sense of uneasiness.

"I don't know," said Dr. Ransome gravely. "But you may rest assured you will not be an 'accessory after the fact' to any violence or wrong-doing. These people do not believe in bloodshed. They say, and they say rightly, that just and upright men need never fear. There is nothing can hurt them. But the guilty man fears his guilt."

"But if this man does not know—is not responsible?" asked Winthrop.

"Let us await developments," said the doctor. "He is perhaps not so far gone as we suppose."

In the intervening weeks Winthrop went about his reporting duties without much energy. His mind was entirely taken up with the problem of the financier. What was to happen now? It could hardly fail to be sensational, he felt. His impatience increased with the passing of the days, and it was with relief that when a call came for him on the telephone one evening about a month after his visit to Kupfer with Dr. Ransome, he heard the doctor's quiet voice asking him to call at the hotel next day.

"Our friends are here, Harry," he said in matter-of-fact tones. But he might have spoken in more sounding phrases for an hour without conveying so much as he did by this simple sentence.

Next day found Winthrop in Dr. Ransome's room, being introduced to two grave, elderly Oriental gentlemen—gentlemen in the finest sense of the term, gentle, amiable, courteous. Both were in conventional American clothes, and were, to Winthrop's eyes, very similar in appearance excepting that one was taller than the other. Their quiet air and kindly faces rather relieved the excitable young reporter, who had made up his mind for something rather formidable. In addition to resembling one another, it seemed to Winthrop that the two men also bore a striking resemblance to Dr. Ransome. They might, he thought, have been three brothers. Dr. Ransome introduced them jocularly as "Ho" and "Hi," "for," he said, "their real names would be too hard on your jaws. So the tall gentlemen will be Mr. Hi, since he is the higher of the two, and the other will be Mr. Ho."

The Chinese smiled their amusement at the doctor's fun.

"Mr. Kupfer is to meet us here at 3:30 this afternoon, Harry," said Dr. Ransome. "I will want you to take some notes—to act as our amanuensis. You will please attend. It is my desire and that of my friends here."

Winthrop bowed and murmured his thanks and gratification. The simplicity and yet the seriousness of the whole proceedings were having an effect upon his character, he felt. He had become more thoughtful, and in the interval had taken to studying sociological problems, at which he had always laughed in the past. It was being borne in upon him that there was work to be done and only too few to do it. He felt that he had a place in the scheme of things. Previously he had been a unit; now he was a man.

Promptly at 3:30 the financier drove up in his car. He was accompanied by his secretary, a tall, pale, repressed-looking man, who entered with him. On finding, however, that Winthrop was to be present to take notes, of which he would have a copy, Kupfer sent his secretary back to the office, and the five men proceeded to a small parlor attached to the suite of rooms occupied by the Chinese. It was a homely little room with mahogany furniture and red hangings. No more prosaic place could have been imagined for so momentous a gathering.

Although Winthrop had seen the veteran journalist on several occasions since their last long talk, no mention had been made of the spectacles, and beyond knowing that the doctor had had them restored to their gold frame, Winthrop had not asked any questions about them. He somehow felt that they had served their purpose, and indeed, he was not curious to look through them any more. This state of mind sometimes puzzled him slightly. He now observed, however, that the glasses were being worn by Hi, the taller of the two Chinese.

Introductions were quickly made, and all sat down together at the lit-

tle square table in the center of the room, Kupfer at one end with Hi opposite, while Ho was on his left, and Dr. Ransome, with Winthrop by his side, on the right. Kupfer had a portfolio of papers, as had also the Chinese gentlemen, from which various documents were produced and passed around. No time was lost, and the business part of the transaction was soon completed. The Chinese talked very little, Dr. Ransome acting as their spokesman. But Winthrop observed in the intervals of his note-taking that Hi rarely took his eyes from the face of the financier opposite. It gave him a slight thrill, which he did not like to class as fear.

A TENTATIVE form of agreement was quickly drawn up, which Kupfer offered to take to his office for final drafting prior to the affixing of signatures. Dr. Ransome produced a box of cigars from somewhere and passed them around. Everything seemed to be going along in a natural and normal manner, and Harry Winthrop began to be conscious of a sense of disappointment. Hi had taken the spectacles off, and they lay on the table at his elbow. A ray of sunlight coming through a corner of the window fell squarely upon them and brought dazzling reflections from the gold framework. The keen eyes of Kupfer were attracted immediately.

"A curious pair of spectacles," he said. "May I look at them?"

They were passed across and he examined them with interest.

"Try them on," Dr. Ransome suggested casually.

Kupfer did so and looked around the assembly with a faint smile of amusement until his eyes rested upon the countenance of Hi, sitting opposite, when he appeared to become suddenly transfixed. His face went ashy pale and his mouth fell open slightly.

"My God!" he said in a voice shrill with terror. "Who's that sitting there? Who—who are you all? What are you?"

His glance was darting from one to another now, and he half rose from his chair.

"What's the matter, Kupfer?" asked Dr. Ransome.

The financier tore the glasses from his face and threw them violently upon the table.

"Take these damn things away," he said roughly. "They make me see things." Then, quickly recovering, he added hastily: "Excuse me, gentlemen. I haven't been too well lately—been working too hard, I guess."

He seized a cigar and busied himself with lighting it. Winthrop deemed, however, that he turned his chair slightly so as to avoid looking in the direction of the calm and stately figure sitting opposite.

For a few moments no one spoke, and then Hi leaned forward slightly across the table, and addressing himself to Kupfer said clearly and distinctly: "There shall be two men at work in the field; one shall be taken and the other left."

Kupfer went paler than ever and said sharply: "What's that?"

"A scriptural quotation," said Dr. Ransome equably.

"But what on earth is its application here and now?" asked Kupfer, his eyes darting round the assembly once more.

"It is written in your Book that it shall come to pass," said Hi in his level unemotional tones. "Perhaps the time of trial is at hand. Another of your prophets has said:

> "For East is East and West is West,
> And never the twain shall meet,
> Till two strong men stand presently
> At God's' great judgment seat.

And I am ready."

In spite of the calmness with which this was said, there was such a tre-

mendous atmosphere of concentration about the man as he sat there that Winthrop's hand trembled as he wrote. His flesh crept, and he was conscious that the hair on his head bristled. He felt as if he was in the midst of mighty forces that tossed him hither and thither.

"What the devil's all this rot, Ransome?" asked Kupfer angrily. "What's the man quoting that stuff to me for? Doesn't he know it refers to fighters?"

"Who said it referred to fighters?" said Dr. Ransome sternly. "Why should it refer to fighters? The world's affairs are not settled by fighters, as you know well enough. The master minds do not fight. They make others fight for them just as they make others read and write for them."

"I am not here to discuss such things," said Kupfer furiously. "Come—our business is finished. . . ."

He rose from his chair.

"Sit down," said Dr. Ransome authoritatively.

Winthrop gasped. This was a new Dr. Ransome that he did not know.

"What's this?" said Kupfer with an uneasy laugh, but sitting down nevertheless. "A holdup or a kidnapping game or something?" His eyes were roving around the room after the manner of a hunted animal's. "Have you gone mad, Ransome?"

"You will sit down there, sir, and listen to what I have to say to you," said Dr. Ransome in a tone that stirred Winthrop's blood by its passionate feeling. "You boasted not long ago that you watched me. Very good. I have been watching you, too. I know you. I have seen your handiwork in every corner of the civilized globe, and nowhere has it been good. You are one of the cords that is strangling the soul of my country. I know you. You thought the trial between East and West was to be one of fighters, did you? You hoped so, no doubt. Poor fool! Do you think the masses can be forever set on to slaughter one another—that there is no destiny working slowly and certainly to raise poor deluded humanity from such a slough?"

In his righteous indignation and blazing anger Ransome was magnificent. Winthrop felt half afraid of him.

"I am ready," said Hi once more.

The dreadful calmness of his tone after the fiery eloquence of Dr. Ransome produced on Kupfer an effect that was nothing short of terrifying. He cowered in his seat.

"Observe the man before you," continued Dr. Ransome, speaking more gently, and indicating Hi by a nod of his head. "He is one of the greatest men the world has ever known. If you but knew, man, the extent to which you are honored that the trial should be between you two—that you may be the very man of destiny if you will but play a proper part! Come, Kupfer; do your duty. Do you think for a moment that I, your fellow countryman, would stoop to such a thing as the foul play I can see your mind suspects? Try to compose yourself. How gladly would I play the part for you could it but be done! Why, there may await you a glory that might make even your ambitious soul rejoice! What is it that you fear?"

"Death," said Ho, suddenly.

It was the first time he had spoken, and the effect of his voice was startling.

"Death?" said Dr. Ransome contemptuously. "Don't tell me, Kupfer, that you fear death! I couldn't believe it of you—you who have gambled with life and death on a colossal scale, have 'held the keys of supply chests'—have juggled with men like pawns and puppets, making here and breaking there as suited the

purpose. *You* fear death! Don't tell me!''

Kupfer sat silent, but his ashen face told the tale only too well. Yet he still strove to bluster.

''This is all damned nonsense,'' he said in the tone that he usually employed to strike terror—and which generally did. ''It is madness. You will be sorry for your little joke, Ransome, for I can break you easily enough.''

''You certainly can,'' said Dr. Ransome, smiling compassionately. ''Poor fellow! You certainly can.''

THE Chinese meantime had been acting. From somewhere about his person Hi produced an object wrapped in yellow silk. He proceeded to unwind it, and presently he laid upon the table a quaint and beautiful little chalice in the form of a golden dragon, the four legs of which constituted the stand or support, while the arched back bore the little golden bowl itself, the capacity of which appeared as if it might be about an ordinary mouthful. The dragon's body was beautifully carved and inlaid. The head, facing forward and tilted upward at a slight angle, was embellished with two small but brilliant green zircons which took the place of the eyes. The brightness of these stones, combined with the open jaws and protruding forked tongue of the image, produced an effect at once ferocious and sinister, which truly bespoke Oriental workmanship and design. The whole thing did not stand more than six inches high nor weigh in excess of twelve or fourteen ounces, although so exquisite was the workmanship that a suggestion of heaviness and solidity was conveyed. Ho had in the meantime taken from one of his pockets a tiny gold phial, the top of which he unscrewed, and rising from his seat he poured the contents, a dull red liquid, into the little bowl. Then, placing the dragon in the center of the table facing across to where Dr. Ransome was sitting, he resumed his seat. Kupfer's eyes were riveted in fascinated horror to the thing on the table. Dr. Ransome continued to speak.

''There is the draft that may mean either paradise or perdition,'' he said solemnly. ''One of you must drink. We await but the sign.''

He made a peculiar sweep with his right arm and said something in a strange tongue. Then he folded his arms and stood silent.

All eyes were fixed upon the dragon. For a few moments there was tense silence, and then a cry broke from Kupfer, accompanied by an exclamation from the young reporter. For the head of the image was moving, moving slowly and tremblingly, as if the brute was shaking itself from some kind of lethargy. The tongue was withdrawn, the mouth closed, and the green eyes flashed balefully as the head turned slowly, first to the left slightly, and then round to the right, as if surveying the countenances of all present. Little streams of green light like the widening rays of small searchlights seemed to issue forth from the brilliant eyes, as they were fastened in turn upon the orbs of each person. As Winthrop met the flash he felt his hair bristle again on his head, and after the eyes had passed him he had a sense of being left in the darkness.

Round went the head, round and still farther round to the right, until the creature appeared to be looking right over his shoulder in the direction of Ho, who was seated behind. Then slowly the head came back again to the left, round, round, until the eyes were fixed upon the ghastly countenance of Kupfer. There they remained fixed while the mouth opened once more and the tongue shot forth in the direction of the financier. For about fifteen sec-

onds this attitude was maintained, and then the head slowly resumed its normal forward position.

"You are the man, Kupfer," said Dr. Ransome quietly. "Drink!"

The financier was by this time in a pitiable condition, but he still strove desperately to master himself. From time to time he licked his lips, and his eyes darted frequently in the direction of the door—a fact that did not escape the observation of Dr. Ransome.

"There is the key of the door, Kupfer," he said, taking it from his pocket and laying it on the table. "You are free to go whenever you choose and to take what proceedings you may see fit. What you are expected to do here you must do of your own volition. But you will have to face this test some day, somewhere. You can not escape it." He said this in a tone of solemn conviction that was impressive in the extreme.

"If I fail there shall come another," said Hi in his passionless voice. "And after him another—and then another. They will be more numerous than the grains of sand in the desert. And ever they will present you with the cup."

"Bluff and intimidation!" snarled Kupfer, clutching the door-key but yet remaining with his eyes fixed upon the golden dragon. "Trickery and nonsense! You shall all answer for it—every one of you. . . . ." He writhed in his seat, yet seemed incapable of rising from it.

"Come, Kupfer," said Dr. Ransome again after an interval of silence, during which Winthrop was sure that the beating of his heart must have been audible to all present. "Take the draft. As I said before, I would take it for you if I could—for the credit of the West. But I can not. You have seized the power and not I."

"The power!" said Kupfer, almost with a shriek, and commencing to twist his hands one about the other. "Leave me the power! Take the wealth if you want it. . . . But I must have the power!"

His hands were extended before him now, stretching in the direction of the dragon, his eyes still glued upon it. His attitude was almost one of supplication, Winthrop thought with a shudder of terror and wrath.

"I must have the strings in my own hands—the wires. . . . ." the squeaking voice continued. "Must feel them slacken and taut in my grasp. . . . with a movement pull down or stiffen up some figure across continents—oceans . . . . make them dance! Ha, ha!"

The tension went from his rigid figure and his arms and head collapsed weakly on the table. Winthrop laid down his pencil; the sight sickened him and he could write no more.

"But it's all damned nonsense, I tell you!" said Kupfer, recovering himself once more and starting to his feet. "I'll teach you all! Somebody will pay for this. . . . ."

He seized the key, and rushing to the door began to fight frantically with the lock, his panic returning as he found the key refusing to work. Curses and imprecations broke from him.

"The door isn't locked, Kupfer," said Dr. Ransome quietly. "Go right out."

In his frenzy, Kupfer did not hear, or could not comprehend. Still the rattling and scrambling continued and still he cursed and tugged, until presently he actually locked the door. Then in a trice he unlocked it again and was gone.

SILENCE reigned for some time after the financier's sensational departure, and then Dr. Ransome said

rather sadly: "Thus conscience doth make cowards of us all."

No one made any reply, but both Chinese smiled a trifle grimly. Obeying a sudden impulse the doctor drew the golden dragon toward him, and placing it before the startled young reporter said authoritatively: "Drink it, Harry!"

The young man took the little image in his hand, and for a moment hesitated. To his excited and overwrought fancy it seemed as if the very claws of the brute were winding around his fingers, while the little green eyes sparkled with added fire. Then putting the bowl to his lips he drank off the contents with a mighty gulp. The liquid seemed to course like fire through his veins—then he glowed all over.

"Never tasted better port wine in your life, did you, Harry?" said Dr. Ransome, laughing, while broad smiles illuminated the faces of the Chinese.

"No, sir," replied Winthrop in rather a shamefaced tone as he thought of his momentary funk. "I certainly never did."

The nervous reaction brought upon him by the sudden change from horror to bathos actually caused him to tremble in spite of himself. He laid the dragon upon the table and surveyed it solemnly.

"But I am ready to swear, Dr. Ransome," he said, "that I saw this creature turn its head and look around at all of us."

"If you had had a camera, Harry, and had taken a snap, you would have found something different," said the doctor, laughing again. "The trick is an old one in the East. The little fellow's head, as you can see, is quite rigid."

"And all the marvelous things I saw through the glasses," said Winthrop incredulously and in some disappointment. "Were they all the result of hynotism too?"

"To a certain extent," said Dr. Ransome. "If you surround the commonest kind of an object with sufficient mystery, wonderful results can be achieved. The subject himself, in his interest and excitement, supplies most of the energy, while another mind guides."

"And what do you suppose will happen now, if I may ask?" said Harry, thinking again of Kupfer.

"It is a little difficult to tell," replied Dr. Ransome. "Kupfer may retire from business shortly on the score of ill health; or he may continue his activities on a less aggressive scale; or he may carry right along on his present lines, and I may have a new and ferocious enemy. Either of the first two courses seems the most probable, but in the event of the third some further action may be necessary."

Again he spoke in the strange tongue and both Chinese bowed their heads in acquiesence.

"And in that case there may be something further for me to do?" enquired the young man eagerly.

"Perhaps," said Dr. Ransome smiling. "One never knows."

FACES

A Ghost-tale of Santo Domingo

By ARTHUR J. BURKS

PEOPLE who know me say that I am insane. Many of them tell me so to my face. They do it jokingly, but in their eyes I read that they half believe it.

But who wouldn't be crazy after going through what I experienced during those dread hours when, huddled in the after cockpit of a wrecked airplane, in the very center of the dread Gran Estero, the pilot dead in the seat ahead of me with his brains dashed out, I sat the hours away with my eyes peering into the shadows of the great swamp?

Perhaps I did not see all the things memory brings to mind from that dread page of the past. For the silver plate in my head suggests many things, added to which there is a long blank in it somewhere during which I somehow won free of the mysterious region of rotting slime and bubbling ooze—a blank that I find myself glad I can not fill. For it must have contained terrible things.

We had taken off from the flying field at Santo Domingo City with plenty of time to spare ere we should be due at Santiago. It only takes a little over an hour, and it still lacked three hours of sundown when we lifted, in a series of climbing turns, into the sunny sky of the Dominican Republic.

But we had forgotten the fog which sometimes rises suddenly in the Pass through the Cordilleras.

We were half-way through when the fog was upon us, shutting us out from the ground below as effectually as though we both had suddenly gone blind, and were hurtling through a sea of mist at more than a hundred miles an hour—quite too fast to think of piling up on some unseen mountainside. I could scarcely see the pilot in the seat ahead. He looked back at me once and shook his head. Then he tried to see the ground below us, as did I. But whichever way we looked there was nothing but that sea of impenetrable white. Even the roaring of the engines was muffled by the density of the fog.

The pilot came back on his stick, and I knew by the way my back pressed against the cowling in rear that he was pointing her nose into the sky in the hope of climbing above the clouds.

Minutes that seemed like hours passed as we continued to climb, on a slant just great enough to keep from stalling, but great enough that I knew we had already cleared the tops of the mountains on either hand. Yet the fog held steadily. It must have been miles high.

Then the aviator got confused. I don't blame him. Though I have never flown a plane I have ridden in planes many times, and know what it means to be caught in a fog or among heavy clouds which shut out the earth. Had he flown straight he might have ridden through the fog; but he did a turn or two in an attempt to find an opening, and lost us completely. Only by the slackness of the belt which held me in could I be sure that we were flying right-side up—which was all I did know!

The altimeter said 10,000 feet, with the needle crawling slowly toward the 11,000 mark! And still the fog.

Finally the flyer held her nose in one direction, at least he tried to, and plunged like a mad thing through the fog. Yet we didn't penetrate the mist wall.

Long after we should have reached Santiago we were still in the fog, still above 8,000 feet, and darkness was settling down upon us.

There was enough gas in the tanks when we left the field to keep us in the air for four hours. My wrist-watch told me that we lacked but fifteen minutes of that time! In God's name, where were we? We might as easily have been far out over the Atlantic Ocean, the Caribbean Sea or Mona Passage.

I know now that we came down within five miles of Bahia de Escocesa, which is an arm of the Atlantic, and that, had our luck held for a few minutes more, we might have made a fairly safe landing on the broad shelving beach. Just a few minutes, as time is figured, and a life is lost—while another man lives to hear himself called a madman!

The engine spluttered and died. What a dread silence after the roaring of the motors!

The humming of the wind through the wires and braces told me that we were spiraling downward. We might be headed for a mountaintop or for the open sea and certain drowning—or might be heading directly into the field at Santiago, though only a fool could have hoped for such great good fortune. And still the fog about us held.

The pilot flung his helmet and goggles over the side and looked back at me, grinning widely.

"We're through, kid!" he said. "Ain't one chance in ten thousand of getting out of this with our hides. Let's hope that they find the remains sometime."

I am not ashamed to confess that I could not take it so light-heartedly as this; but then I am not made of the stuff of which flyers are constructed.

The aviator turned his eyes back to the instruments on the board before him, and our spiral continued to the tune of the wind in the struts, a tune that had a sinister meaning, a tune that sang of death up-rushing to meet us. The altimeter said 1,500 feet now, with the needle fairly dancing down toward zero.

WHEN we broke through the fog we were directly above a forest of nodding treetops, with scarcely a breathing space before the inevitable crash, which could have been avoided only did a miracle happen and the propeller start whirling again.

It seemed to me that we leveled and seemed to sink straight into the forest, though common sense told me that we must have struck at a speed of not less than ninety miles an hour. We hit the treetops and crashed through.

My head banged against the cowling when we hit, and I remember nothing afterward—until I opened my eyes in the shadows which hold sway in El Gran Estero, and found that the safety belt still held me in my seat. What was left of our right wing was above the dank waters of the vast swamp, while on my left I could see nothing but shadows, and the oozy slime of the dread quagmire. Only the main part of our ship had held together, and this was steadily sinking forward because of the dead weight of the motor.

The aviator was asprawl in the forward cockpit, his arms hanging over the side. I noted that blood dripped from the fingers of his right hand.

I unfastened my belt and leaned forward, swaying dizzily as a terrible feeling of vertigo seized me.

I shook the aviator roughly by the shoulder.

"McKenzie!" I shouted. "Are you bad hurt, boy?"

He was. For, as I shook him, pulling him around by the shoulder, I caught a glimpse of his face. It was not a face, but a bloody smear, with a gaping wound in the forehead. His body was still warm, proof that I had been unconscious but a short time. There was no mark of blood on the cowling before McKenzie's face, and I wondered what had dealt him that blow which had dashed out his brains. Leaning forward carefully I strove to peer down into the cockpit.

When I saw what had done it I all but collapsed. For the forward cockpit had fallen squarely upon the jagged stump of a tree and this had gone through the light fabric and penetrated McKenzie's body in a way that I find myself unable to mention in cold print. He had been dead even before that blood-stained stump had come on through to bash out his brains.

There was nothing I could do for him. And there seemed little chance of saving myself.

I knew that I was somewhere within mysterious Gran Estero, in a plane that was gradually sinking of its own weight—and that I was mighty fortunate to have lived even this long. Besides which I knew that I was badly hurt, how badly I could only guess—as you can do when I tell you that a goodly portion of my skull is silver at the present moment.

How to get out, and what direction to take? How to reach land solid enough to support my weight? In the daytime I knew I could have done it, somehow—had I been in full possession of my faculties and my strength.

I studied the swamp around me, but as far as I could see in the darkness there was nothing but oozy morass, into which I should have disappeared within a few minutes at most. Ever the plane seemed to sink lower, as though a great mouth were relentlessly sucking it down.

My head was aching terribly, and oddly colored dots were dancing before my eyes. Any moment I expected to lose consciousness—and rather hoped that, did I do so, I would never regain it. Death would be easy, and would save me untold trouble and privation, to say nothing of unplumbed suffering.

"Well, why don't you climb out of there and find us a way out?"

I started as though someone had suddenly placed a hot iron against my quivering flesh. In my mind I heard the words, yet I swear that my ears had heard nothing at all. Just an impression that someone had spoken—an impression that had the force of actuality.

The hair at the back of my neck seemed to lift oddly as I whirled and stared into the gloom which was now so deep in Gran Estero that I could scarcely see my hand before my face.

Under a tree with many great branches, in the very midst of an area acrawl with the ooze of the vast quagmire, stood Lieutenant McKenzie, boyishly smiling as he had smiled before the crash! From his puttees to his helmet and goggles he was dressed for flying—save for that ghastly red weal across his forehead!

My eyes must have bulged from their sockets as I stared at him; for he smiled again and the smile froze on his lips, never again to leave them. This time when he spoke his voice sounded hollow, and as cold as a voice from the tomb.

"Well, get going! We must get out of here!"

Yet I couldn't move a muscle!

Will you understand why when I mention that the dead body of McKenzie still lolled motionless in the forward cockpit?

McKenzie was dead, killed in a manner that has many times since caused me to waken from horrible nightmares with screams on my lips; yet he couldn't be dead when I could see him, as plainly as you see this page, standing there beneath that tree in the midst of Gran Estero!

I screamed aloud when I found that I could look through that figure under the tree and see the bole of the tree itself. Still that frozen smile rested upon those white lips; still that red weal showed on the forehead beneath the helmet—a red weal that seemed to be steadily dripping, dripping, dripping.

Then I began to laugh, a horrible laugh, in which my body shook so convulsively that I all but fell out of the cockpit into the slime.

And as I laughed the phantom of McKenzie disappeared as though a breath had erased it, leaving me alone in the sinking plane with the dead body for company.

But my laughter was short-lived.

For, looking around again for some possible footing place, my eyes found something in the swamp which had at first escaped my notice—a pair of bare feet, with their water-whitened soles just above the surface of the ooze! By some weird necromancy I could look down through the mud to the body which hung upside-down below those feet—the skeleton of a native who had been lost in the swamp.

For some reason my eyes darted back to where I had seen the phantom of McKenzie, to see the figure of a ragged native in his place. This one looked at me out of sunken eyes, and slowly his arm upraised as he pointed to the bare feet, which were all that I could now see of the gruesome thing just outside the plane. A voice issued from the motionless lips of the native—a voice that spoke soft words in gentle Spanish.

"*Si, Señor,*" said the voice, "it is I whom you see there!"

Wildly I laughed, and the phantom of the native vanished as the shade of McKenzie had done at the sound of my maniacal laughter.

Wildly, since I knew that my mind was going because of this weird horror, I searched the jungle wall with frightened eyes.

THE night drew on apace, and I will not dwell on it unduly, for I know that in that direction lies madness—madness more mad, even, than is now mine.

For I discovered that El Gran Estero is the trysting place of countless shades!

Out of the shadows they came to stare at me—out of the shadows to stare, to smile coldly, and to vanish—while I laughed at each in turn.

It is strange that I laughed; but I could not help it, for my head ached abominably, and I laughed to ease the pain. Is that a good reason? To me at the time it seemed so; but perhaps I laughed at the faces.

The faces?

I lost count of their vast number, for assuredly there must have been many who have lost their lives in El Gran Estero—whose faces came up before me, for the lips to smile coldly, to smile coldly and to vanish, while others came to take their places.

As it grew cooler as the night drew on, will-o'-the-wisps came up from the ooze. Balls of weird flame, balls that had the shape of faces with smiling lips—all sorts of faces. Faces of negroes, men and women—yes, and children; faces of Dominicans, bronze-burnished by a smiling sun, with here and there the pale, staring faces of white men. Thank God there were but few of these! For I found myself unable to look into their staring eyes. It was as though the white men were brothers of mine, and that I had somehow failed them in the weary search for a way out of the vast quagmire. When they smiled

coldly, reproachfully, and I could give them no aid, they would shake their heads sadly and disappear, only to show again down some vista through the tree-lanes, always looking back at me sadly before they disappeared for good.

The saddest of them all was a white woman with a babe in her arms. She stood for many minutes where McKenzie and the native had stood, and her eyes were sunken caverns ablaze with a vast reproach. Her eyes searched ceaselessly the wall of trees, seeking, seeking, seeking. At last she wandered down a lane through the trees, gliding softly atop the ooze. She looked back several times as she wandered aimlessly away, and once I fancied I could hear the subdued wailing of the babe in her arms. She must have heard it, too, for her head bent as though she soothed the phantom infant. She did not look up again, and, thus soothing the baby with which she must have died, she vanished into the vastness of the swamp. I wondered what man had been the cause of her going to her death in Gran Estero. For there was that in her eyes that told me a man was to blame.

Faces, faces, always the faces! And the dead blackness of El Gran Estero.

When all the shades I had seen, together with a host I had never seen before, some of the latter aborigines who must have gone to their death in the swamp during the regime of Columbus and his governors, came at last and gathered in the ooze about me, to smile coldly and sadly into my face, I must have gone clear out of my head, for that is the last dread happening which I remember.

The plane had sunk so low that slime was beginning to trickle into the cockpit in which I still sat huddled, when the army of shades gathered about me—silent and motionless as though they waited for something. Did they wait for me to lead them out of this never-ending thraldom of theirs? I do not know. I do not know anything about it.

I only know the next thing I remember is that I awoke in a cot in the hospital in Santiago, and that the colonel of the regiment occupying the city was sitting at my bedside. When I opened my eyes the colonel turned to the doctor.

"Can he talk now, Doctor?"

The doctor nodded.

I told the colonel all that had befallen me. As I talked I saw a queer light come into his eyes, and knew that he doubted my story, may perhaps even have blamed me a little for what happened. I wonder why. His questions took a queer trend at the last.

"Why didn't you go back into the swamp with McKenzie and help him salvage the engine of the plane?"

"But McKenzie is dead, sir! He was killed in the crash!"

Again that queer light in his eyes.

"But the natives who found you at the edge of the swamp swear that a man in uniform was with you—a man in helmet and goggles, a man answering in every detail the description of McKenzie. They say he led you out; but that as soon as he had attracted their attention and saw that you would be taken in charge, he turned back into the swamp before they could come close to him. You should have gone back in with him."

But assuredly the colonel must have been mistaken. Perhaps his limited Spanish caused him to misinterpret the reports of the natives. I *know*, in my heart, that McKenzie never left that forward cockpit after the crash into El Gran Estero.

But do I know? After all there is that blank to be accounted for, and often I waken in the middle of the night and lie awake until dawn, wondering.

DROME

A Weird-Scientific Serial

By JOHN MARTIN LEAHY

The Story So Far

MILTON RHODES and Bill Carter penetrate the caverns of horror beneath Mount Rainier, and kill a huge demon—an ape-bat—that has attacked them. They rescue Drorathusa, the Sibylline priestess of the Dromans, from being dragged to death by the dying struggles of the ape-bat, and in company with Drorathusa and her companions they wander into a veritable Dante's Inferno beneath sea-level, on their way to Drome. Carter, waking suddenly as the Dromans and he are slumbering, sees a monstrous ghostly shape coming straight toward him from the roof of the cavern.

CHAPTER 30

THE MOVING EYES

I JERKED out my revolver; I reached over and gave Rhodes a shake that would have awakened Epimenides himself, then grabbed the electric light and flashed it upon the descending monster.

I could scarcely believe my eyes. Nothing but the empty air. The monster had vanished.

"What's the matter?" came the sudden voice of Rhodes. "What in paradise is going on now?"

I rubbed my eyes and stared upward once more.

"Look there!" said I, pointing. "Tell me, do you see nothing there?"

"There isn't anything there, Bill —*now.*"

"But there was something there a second ago—and it didn't go away."

"What did you see?"

"I thought at first that it was a demon, phosphorescent or something. It was up there. I tell you it was up there. And it was coming down, coming down straight toward this very spot."

"Great Cæsar's spook!" exclaimed Rhodes.

"I can't understand," I told him, "where the thing went. It was there, and the next instant it wasn't."

"Turn off your light," said Rhodes quickly. "Turn it off, Bill."

"Great Zeus, what for? You'd better have your revolver ready."

"Revolver fiddlesticks! Off with it, Bill; off with the light!"

The light went off. And look! There it was again—almost directly over us. It was not descending now but was hovering, hovering, as though watching, waiting. Waiting for what? And it seemed, too, to thrust out arms or tentacula. And look! Something started to drop from it—phosphorescence (I shall call it that) dropping to the floor, where it writhed and crawled about like a mass of serpents. Writhed and crawled and grew dimmer—faded, faded.

We sat staring at this mysterious, inexplicable phenomenon in amazement, fascination and horror.

"What on earth can it be?" I asked, my voice a whisper.

"Who," said Rhodes, "would ever have dreamed of such a thing as that?"

"I'm afraid," I told him, a shudder passing through my heart, "that our revolvers can't hurt a thing like this. It seems to be watching us. Look! Aren't those eyes—eyes staring at us, moving?"

"Eyes? Watching us? Oh, Lord, Bill!" said Rhodes.

"As for sending a bullet into it, don't," he added, "do anything so foolish."

He arose, stepped over and awoke

Narkus. The monster was still hovering over the spot. The Droman bestowed upon that ghost but a cursory, careless look, then yawned sleepily.

"Yam-yump!" said Narkus, stretching himself.

Rhodes laid a hand upon the other's shoulder and pointed an interrogative finger up in the direction of the phantom. The Droman gave a careless, airy toss of the hand.

"Drome," said he, then lay down again.

It was obvious from this monosyllabic answer, to say nothing of the manner of Narkus, that there was nothing to apprehend from this mysterious apparition hovering above us. Certainly, though, there had been no remarkable clarification. Indeed, in a way, Rhodes and I were more puzzled than ever. Drome, Drome! What could be the meaning of that word? Drome!

"It seems, Bill," said Rhodes, "that we are on our way to a very strange place. As for that ghost up there, it must be a fragment, as it were, of the *light* of this subterranean land."

"Suppose it is—a harbinger, so to speak—then what on earth can that light be?"

"That, of course, we can not tell. It may be phosphorescent or auroral, or its origin may be one of which no man of our own world ever has even dreamed. I believe that I forgot to mention, when we were speaking of this the other day, that even human beings sometimes evolve light.* One thing, however, is certain: there is light somewhere in this underground world. And I believe, Bill, that we are drawing near to it now."

"I certainly hope that we are. But look at our ghost. It is moving again—thank heaven (even if it is only a mass of light) away from us!"

"Yes," said Rhodes. "But look down there. There is another one coming."

It came, and another and another. I don't know how many. On they came through the cavern, now lingering, now hovering; on they passed like some unearthly, ghostly procession. And, even though one knew that these phantoms, so dim and so misty, were perfectly innocuous, were as natural (as though there is anything that can not be natural!) as the light of the firefly, as the glow of the auroral arches and streamers—all the same, I say, the sight of that spectral company, passing, passing, was one indescribably strange and uncanny.

However, a man can get used to anything. I got used to them and ere very long was asleep once more. In the morning, not a single ghost was to be seen. Nor did we see one until near midafternoon. That ghost was all by its lonesome and so dim that it vanished when our lights drew near. But soon they were about us in all directions. One of these phantoms, large, amorphous, writhing (its light so strong that it was visible in the rays of the lamps but not of the electric ones) came crawling along the floor straight toward us. Rhodes and I, as if by instinct, moved aside; but Drorathusa and the others walked right into it. As they emerged from the spectral, phosphorescent mass, the light clung to them like wraiths of fog, to be slowly dissipated as they advanced in little streams and eddies behind them.

It was during this afternoon, too, that Rhodes made the first discovery

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* "A very decided luminosity has been observed to proceed from dissecting-room subjects, the light thus evolved being sufficient to render the forms of the bodies, as well as those of muscles and other dissected parts (which are peculiarly bright), almost as distinct as in the daylight. . . . Three cases are recorded by Sir H. Marsh, in which an evolution of light took place from the living body. . . . The light in each case is described as playing around the face, but not as directly proceeding from the surface; and in one of these instances, which was recorded by Dr. D. Donovan, not only was the luminous appearance perceptible over the head of the patient's bed, but luminous vapors passed in streams through the apartment."—Dr. Carpenter.

of life in this fearsome place—little fish, totally blind, like those in the Mammoth Cave. But, though they could not see, they could *feel* the light. When the rays fell upon the stream, they would drop to the bottom and seek the concealment of the shadow-places. Poor little blind things! What an existence! And yet how like them, after all, are we poor humans!

Yes, blind are we, though we have eyes; our souls shrinking from the light to wander, lost and happy, in psychic caves and labyrinths more terrible even than this cavern through which we were making our way—making our way to we knew not what.

WE JOURNEYED on until about 7 o'clock, when we reached another depot and halted for the night. All were much fatigued, but the Dromans were in high spirits, and ours rose, too. Whether we were drawing near the end of our strange journey was not clear; but there could be no doubt that a great change was imminent.

To the surprize of Rhodes and myself (nothing in the place seemed to surprize Drorathusa and her companions) not a single light-wraith was anywhere to be seen. The cavern was as black as the deepest pit in Erebus.

And it was still the same when we awoke. How I would have welcomed the appearance of the faintest, loneliest ghost—as we called these apparitions of light.

We noticed that Narkus and Thumbra, and the ladies also, were at some pains to have their bows in such a position that they could be drawn from the quivers at an instant's warning. Narkus saw us watching, and, sweeping a hand toward the darkness before us, he said: "*Loopmuke.*"

That, as we well knew, is the Droman word for ape-bat. Also, he tried to tell us about something else; but the only thing intelligible in his pantomimic explanations was that it was about a creature even more formidable than a wild *loopmuke.*

It was with keen anticipation on the part of Rhodes and myself that we set out that morning. For an hour or so, there was no change. Not a single light-wraith had shone in the awful blackness. Then, after passing through a particularly broken and tortuous place, be began to see them, not many, however, and all were faint. Another hour passed, and of a sudden the walls drew together, and the roof came sloping down, down and down until we had to go bent over. Narrower and narrower grew the way, crowding us at last to the water's edge and then into the very stream itself.

Drorathusa and Narkus were leading, Rhodes and I bringing up the rear. Fortunately the current was a gentle one; had it been otherwise, the place would have been simply impassable.

"I certainly," said Milton at last, "admire the man (maybe he was a woman) who first came through this awful place."

The next instant he made a rush forward. Delphis, the white-haired girl, had slipped out into deep water. Rhodes caught her just in time to save her from immersion and drew her back to the shallow water by the wall. Not a cry, not the faintest sound had escaped her, and now she only laughed. Beauty was not the only quality that these Droman ladies possessed to win your admiration.

For ten minutes or so, we toiled our way down that tunnel, now hugging the wall, now following the shallows out into the stream and at times to the other side. Then of a sudden there was an exclamation from Drora-

thusa, and the next moment we had issued from the tunnel and the stream and found ourselves in a great lofty cavern.

"Great Rameses!" I exclaimed as we stepped forth. "Look at those things."

Rhodes, I found, had already halted and was gazing up at them—two colossi, one on either side of the mouth of the tunnel. These carven monsters (we were, of course, standing between their bases) were seated, and one was a male, the other a female. They had not been fashioned *in situ* but clearly had been brought to the spot in sections. But how had those massive pieces of rock, the smallest of which weighed tons, been raised into their places? Who can tell? It remains, and probably always will remain, one of the mysteries of that lost and mysterious land.

We were getting rather used to strange things now; but, so remarkable were these great statues, for some minutes we lingered there before them.

The Dromans had moved on. We followed, to find ourselves in a few moments before a monstrous carven human head. There was the great pedestal, and there, lying face upward before it, was the great head—that and nothing more.

"Poor fellow," said I as we walked around the caput, "where is the rest of him? And why did they leave the head lying like this?"

"I have an idea," Milton returned, "that there was no rest of him, that this head was all that was to be placed upon that pedestal."

I suppose that Rhodes was right. One wonders what happened there so long ago, why the great caput was never raised to the place which they had prepared for it. No man can tell that now. All we know is that there the great head lies, that there it has lain for untold thousands of years.

At last Milton Rhodes climbed up and stood upon the chin, in order, as he said, "to get a good view of the poor gink's phiz." And not only that, but he stood upon the poor fellow's nose—yes, balanced himself on one foot on the very tip of it!

I turned my look to the Dromans with some apprehension, for I did not know what superstitious ideas they might entertain, feared that to them this acrobatic stunt of Rhodes might be sacrilege itself. My misgivings, however, were groundless. The Dromans were delighted. They burst into merry laughter; they applauded vociferously. Even Drorathusa laughed outright.

Little wonder, forsooth, for a pretty figure Rhodes made balanced up there on the poor fellow's olfactory protuberance. A fine posture truly for one of the world's (I mean *our* world's) great scientists; and I could not help wondering what certain dignified old fellows (Milton called them fossils) would have thought could they by television or some miracle have seen him there. And what would the Dromans themselves think? Well, I was glad when he came down and there was an end to that foolishness.

And I put in a prompt remonstrance.

"We," I told him, "have—or, at any rate, we *ought* to have—a certain dignity to uphold. For we are the representatives, as it were, of that great sunlit world above, the world of Archimedes, Kepler, Galileo, Newton, Darwin, Edison—not a world of Judys and Punches!"

"Aw, Bill," said Rhodes, "now quit your kidding."

What can you do with a man like that?

We soon quitted the spot. The light-masses were all about us now. Some came slowly gliding, some crawling along the floor; some

along the walls and the roof. Others floated along overhead or hung motionless in the air. The changes of form were sometimes very rapid and certainly as unaccountable as the masses themselves. Occasionally we would see a mass slowly take form in the darkness and as slowly fade into darkness again. Where did the light come from, where did it go? And the explanation of this uncanny phenomenon? Undoubtedly some electric manifestation, said Rhodes, analogous perhaps to the light of the aurora. That, I objected, really explained nothing, and Rhodes admitted that that was just what it did explain—nothing.

The spirits of the Dromans rose higher as we toiled our way onward and down. They quickened their pace, and, as we swung along like soldiers marching, they suddenly broke into a song or rather a chant, the wonderful contralto voice of Drorathusa leading, the sounds coming back from the dark secret places of the cavern in echoes sweet as the voices heard in fairyland.

The light-masses were steadily increasing in number and volume. Especially was this pronounced in the great chambers. Fungoid growths were seen, coleopterous insects and at last a huge scolopendra of an aspect indescribably horrible. From this repulsive creature, the Dromans and myself drew back, but Milton Rhodes bent over it in a true scientific scrutiny and ecstasy.

"Look, Bill, look!" he cried suddenly, pointing. "The body has thirty-five somites or segments."

"Thirty-five segments?" I queried, scratching my head and wishing that the scolopendra was in Jericho. "What is there so wonderful about that?"

"Why," said he, "in the Scolopendridæ of our own world, the segments of the body never exceed twenty-one. And this one has thirty-five. Really, Bill, I must keep so remarkable and splendid a specimen."

"Great Gorgons and Hydras! Keep it? Don't touch the horrible thing. It may be venomous, deadly as a cobra. And, besides, you'll have plenty of time to collect specimens, and probably some of them will make this one look like the last rose of summer. Leave the hideous thing alone. Why, the Dromans will think that you are dippy. Fact is, I believe that they are beginning to think so already."

"Let 'em!" said Rhodes with true philosophic indifference. "People thought that Galileo was crazy, and Newton and Darwin; Columbus was *non compos mentis*,* Fulton was dippy and Edison was looney. Yes, at one time the great inventor bore the beautiful sobriquet of Looney Edison. Listen to me, Billy, me lad: the greatest compliment that a scientist can ever receive is to be called a sap by sapheads."

All that, I admitted, was very true and truly cogent in its place; but this was not its place, and the Dromans certainly were neither sapheads nor saps. To my relief and, indeed, to my surprize, I dissuaded him from taking the thing as a specimen, and on we went once more.

At length we left the stream, which went plunging into a more fearsome place, into which no man could ever dream of following it. Soon after that, the descent became very steep. The going, however, was good, and we went down at a rapid pace. This lasted for two or three hours, and we had descended many hundreds of feet. The slope then suddenly became gentle, and we were making our way through a perfect maze of tortuous galleries and passages, which at times opened into halls and chambers.

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* "The very children, it is said, pointed to their foreheads as he passed, being taught to regard him as a kind of madman."—Irving.

The light was no longer in masses but in streams—streams that crawled and shivered and shook, as though in it spirit things were immersed and were struggling to break from it. The fungal growths were everywhere now. There were mushrooms with pilei bigger than umbrellas. Shapes as grotesque as if seen through the eyes of madness. There were growths, too, that one could almost think beautiful, and masses hideous and slimy as so much octopi. A strong and most unpleasant odor filled the place. And here and there, almost everywhere in the strange fungoid growth, were things creeping, crawling—things for which I can find no name, and for some of them I am glad that I can not.

It was a weird scene, an indescribable scene, one horrible, mysterious and yet strangely wonderful too. A place gloomy and weird as any ever conceived by Dante or Doré. And through it human forms were moving, and its stillness was broken by human voices, raised in song; and moving with these human beings, these inhabitants of a world as alien as that of Venus or of Mars, were Rhodes and I, we two modern men from the great modern world above—the wonderful, the awful world of the sun.

Of a sudden an exclamation rang out—an exclamation that stilled the song on the instant, brought the party to an abrupt halt and the bow of Narkus and that of Thumbra from the quivers.

The exclamation had broken from Rhodes; he was pointing into the gloom off to our right, a tense, expectant look on his face.

I peered with straining eyes but could see nothing there. A few moments passed, and nothing was seen. I then turned to Rhodes to ask him what it was; but the words I was about to speak were never uttered. Instead, I gave something like a cry and whirled round. For a sound had come from out the fungoid growth and the darkness behind us—a sound as of a slimy thing moving, slipping.

Nothing, however, was to be seen there, and silence, utter silence had fallen upon the spot—silence suddenly broken by another exclamation from Rhodes.

"Great heaven!" I cried as I whirled back to the direction in which he was pointing. "They are all around us!"

"Look, Bill—*look at that!*"

I saw nothing for a second or two. And then, off in the darkness beyond the reach of our lights, it was as though, in one spot, the darkness itself was moving—yes, the darkness itself.

"See that, Bill?"

I saw it. And the next instant I saw two great eyes, eyes that were watching us—and moving.

CHAPTER 31

"GOGRUGRON!"

THEY were visible for a second or two only—those great eyes burning with a greenish fire.

"Where did they go?" exclaimed Rhodes.

"And," said I, "what can it be? An ape-bat?"

"That is no ape-bat."

He turned to Narkus.

"*Loopmuke?*" he queried.

No; it was not a *loopmuke*. But what it was neither Narkus' pantomime nor Drorathusa's could tell us.

"I don't think," Milton said, "that they know what it is themselves."

"There!" I cried, whirling round. "There's that other thing again—the thing behind us!"

"I heard nothing."

"I heard something, I tell you. That mystery with the eyes is not the

only thing that is watching us, watching us and waiting.''

Some moments passed, perhaps minutes, in expectant waiting, our glances incessantly darting about the cavern, through which the light-mist was moving in troubled, writhing streams, the nebulous, spectral glow of it seeming to enhance the fearsome gloom of that dreadful place.

''I see nothing,'' Rhodes said at last, ''and the cavern is as silent as a tomb.''

''But we are *seen*. And, if we don't get out of this, it may be *our* tomb.''

''I don't think it's so bad as that. But the Dromans are signing to us to come on—let us hope to a place more pleasant than this one.''

I had turned to quit the spot, my look, however, lingering in that direction whence had come those low, mysterious sounds—a direction right opposite to that in which the moving eyes had shone. And scarcely had I taken a step forward when I fetched up, cried out and pointed.

''See that! See it moving?''

A large fungous tree, its form one indescribably grotesque, was quivering. It began to shake violently. Some heavy body, hidden from our eyes, was moving there—moving toward us.

Of a sudden the tree was thrust far over, there was a squashy, sickening sound, then down it came, the spot where it fell involved in a cloud of phosphorescence, which thinned and faded in the air like dust or mist as it settles.

''Shades of the Gorgons,'' I cried, ''what is in there?''

A sound from Rhodes turned me round on the instant.

''The eyes again!'' he cried. ''There they are. Have we at last got into Dante's Inferno itself?''

I was beginning to think that we had got into something worse.

Yes, there the eyes were—nearer this time. And yet the thing itself was hidden in the shadows.

Rhodes raised his revolver, rested it on his left arm, took careful aim and fired.

The report seemed to bellow like thunder through the cavern. There was a scream from the Dromans, none of whom, save Drorathusa, had ever heard a firearm before; and I doubt that even Drorathusa knew what had killed her demon. On the instant, whilst the report of the weapon and the cry of the Dromans were ringing in our ears, came another sound—came a shriek high, piercing, unearthly, one that seemed to arrest and curdle the very blood in our hearts.

It sank, ceased. But almost instantly it came again, rose until the air seemed to quiver to the sound.

The effect upon the Dromans was most sudden and pronounced.

A nameless fear and horror seized upon me as I saw it.

They started from the spot as if in a panic, signing to us with frantic gestures to follow.

I started; but Rhodes, for some inexplicable reason, stood there, his look fixed on the spot whence came those horrible, demoniacal shrieks. The eyes had disappeared, but, in almost that very instant that I turned, they shone again. I gazed at them as though in fascinated horror, forgetting for the moment that there was something behind me.

Up the eyes rose. A black thing was visible there in the darkness, but its shape was amorphous, mysterious. Up the eyes rose, seeming to dilate, and the fire in them grew brighter and brighter, became so horribly unearthly that I began to wonder if I were going insane. The eyes swayed, swayed back and forth for some moments, then gave a sudden lurch into darkness. The shrieks broke, then came again, more hor-

rible, if that were possible, than before.

"Come on!" I cried, starting. "For heaven's sake, let's get out of this, or I'll go mad!"

"What in the world," said Rhodes, reluctantly turning to follow, "can it be?"

"Let's get out of this hellish place —before it's too late. Remember, there is something *behind us!* Maybe things in other directions too!"

"Well," said Rhodes complacently as he followed along in my wake, "we have our revolvers."

"Revolvers? Just see what your revolver has done! A revolver is only a revolver, while that thing—who knows what that monster is?"

"The Dromans know—or think that they do."

"And look at the Dromans! Fear has them. Did you ever see fear like that before? See how they are signing to us to come on. Even Drorathusa is shaken to the very soul."

"After all, 'tis no wonder, Bill, that she is. Those shrieks! How can it continue to shriek and shriek like that?"

Ere long we had come up with the Dromans, who at once quickened their pace. On we went, casting apprehensive glances into the gloom about us. The frightful sounds sank as we moved onward. They became faint, fainter still, and at last, to my profound thankfulness, were no longer to be heard, even when we paused to listen.

"If that," said I during one of these pauses, "is a good sample of what we are to have here in Drome, then I wish that, instead of coming here, I had stepped into a den of cobras or something."

Drorathusa's eyes were upon me. As I ceased speaking, she raised a hand and pointed in the direction whence we had come.

"*Gogrugron!*" she said.

And I saw fear and horror unutterable well up in her eyes as she said it.

CHAPTER 32

"LEPRAYLYA!"

STEADILY we made our way along and downward. The light-streams were increasing in volume, the luminosity becoming stronger and stronger, the vegetation more abundant, the weird shapes larger and more unearthly than ever. The silence was broken by the drone of insects—creatures meet inhabitants, forsooth, for a place so indescribably strange and dreadful.

The cavern we were following was very tortuous, our route even more so, what with the twists and turns which we had to make in order to get through that fantasmagoria of fungal things. I do not mean to say that all of those growths were horrible, but most of them were, and some were as repulsive to the touch as they were to the sight.

As we toiled our way through them, my heart was replete with dire apprehension. I could not banish the horror of those great burning eyes, the horror of those shrieks, which perhaps were still ringing out. What if we were suddenly to find ourselves face to face with one of those monsters (or more than one) here in this nightmare forest?

Gogrugron! Gogrugron! What on earth was that monstrosity known to the Dromans as a *gogrugron?* Well, most certainly, I was not desirous of obtaining first-hand knowledge upon that interesting item for the great science of natural history.

At length the light no longer lay in streams and rifts in the darkness, but the darkness, instead, lay in streams through the light. The Dromans quickened their already hurried pace, and there were exclamations of "Drome! Drome!"

"Drome!" echoed Milton Rhodes. "I wonder what we are going to find."

"Something wonderful," said I, "or something worse, perhaps, than anything that we have seen."

Rhodes laughed, and I saw Drorathusa (Narkus was leading the way) turn and send a curious glance in our direction.

"Well," I added, "anything to get out of this horrible forest of fungi."

Some minutes passed, perhaps only fifteen, perhaps a half-hour. Of a sudden the great tunnel, now as light as a place on a sunless day, gave a sharp turn to the right; a glad cry broke from the Hypogeans.

"Drome! Drome!" they cried.

We all hurried forward.

"Look!" I said as we reached the turn. "The mouth, the mouth! *The tunnel ends!*"

There, but two hundred feet or so away, was the great yawning mouth of it—nothing visible through the opening but light, pearly opalescent light, mystic, beautiful.

"Drome!" cried Delphis, clapping her hands.

A few moments, and we were standing at the entrance, gazing out over the weird and beautiful scene.

"Drome!"

I turned at the sound and saw Drorathusa, her figure and mien ineffably Sibylline and majestic, pointing out over the strange landscape, her eyes on the face of Milton Rhodes.

"Drome!" she said again.

"Drome!" echoed Milton. Then to me: "I wonder, Bill, what this Drome really is. And I have an idea that this is only the outskirts that we see. Can we at last be near our journey's end, or is that end still far away?"

"Who can tell? This place seems to be a wilderness."

"Yes; a forest primeval."

"What," said I, "are we destined to find down there?"

"Things stranger, Bill, than explorer ever found anywhere in that strange world above us."

"No *gogrugrons*, I hope."

Rhodes laughed.

"*Gogrugron!*" said Drorathusa.

And I saw that horror and fear again in her eyes.

The cavern had come out high up on a broken, jagged wall, which went beetling up for hundreds of feet, up to the roof, which arched away over the landscape before us. We were fully half a thousand feet above the floor, which was a mass of luxuriant tropical forest. Glimpses were caught of a stream down to the left, perhaps the one which we had followed for so long. I judged the place to be more than a mile wide; Rhodes, however, that it was perhaps not quite a mile in the widest part. Down this enormous cavern, the eye could range for three or four miles, at which distance the misty light drew its veil over the forest, the dark walls, and the roof arching across.

At times the light quivered and shook, and there were strange flickerings and dartings of opalescent streaks through it—streaks ineffably beautiful and yet, strangely enough, terrible too, terrible as the blades of plunging swords in hands savage and murderous.

Once more Drorathusa raised a hand and pointed into the misty distance.

"*Lepraylya!*" she said.

Again her eyes were on Milton Rhodes, and, as she spoke that name, I saw in those wondrous orbs of hers the strangest look, I do believe, that I have ever seen. I wondered if Rhodes too saw it. I found his eyes upon Drorathusa, but there was in them so abstracted an expression that I believed his thoughts were far away and that he had not noticed. When I turned to Drorathusa again, it was to find that the strange look was gone.

What a mysterious creature this woman was! Try as I would, yet I feared her.

"Lepraylya!" she said again.

"Lepraylya," Milton nodded. "I wonder who or what this Lepraylya can be, Bill."

"King maybe—or s o m e t h i n g worse."

"Queen, I hope," said Milton Rhodes.

He drew forth his note-book and pencil and handed them to Drorathusa, pronouncing as she took them that mysterious name: "Leprayl-ya?"

A few strokes with the pencil, and Drorathusa had given us the answer.

"You see, Bill?" said Rhodes, smiling. "A woman—undoubtedly, too, the queen."

Drorathusa's Sibylline look was upon him once more—and *she* did not smile.

CHAPTER 33

FACE TO FACE

We found the wall even more broken and savage than it had appeared from the entrance. It was almost destitute of vegetation, a circumstance that contributed not a little to the difficulties of the descent. Indeed, making our way down over those pitching naked rocks was a ticklish, unpleasant business, I want to tell you—at times really precarious.

We had halted to rest above one of these difficult spots, and everyone was either seated or leaning against the rock, when of a sudden Milton, who was nearest the edge, arose and pointed, pointed down and off to the right.

"Hello!" said he. "What's that?"

All of us arose, moved forward and looked.

"Where?" I asked.

"Down there by that strange clump of sycadaceous trees. But 'tis gone now."

"What was it?"

"I haven't the faintest idea, Bill. But there was something there, something moving. And, if I were imaginative, I would probably say that it was watching us, that, the moment I arose and pointed, it glided back to the concealment of the trees."

"Well, *did* it?"

"It certainly seemed to do so, Bill."

I peered down there again, but I could not see anything moving. There was silence for some moments. The Dromans stood watching, waiting; stood expectant, puzzled.

"Oh, well," Rhodes said, turning a quizzical look in my direction and then to the face of Drorathusa, "we must expect to find live things in that forest."

I saw Drorathusa's eyes fixed upon his face, then, a few moments after he ceased speaking, return to the clump of cycads.

"Live things?" said I. "There may be things in this place of mystery more terrible than any live thing."

"Come, Bill, come. It can't be so bad as you think it, or our Dromans wouldn't be here. I wish," he added, "I knew what that thing is that I saw."

"Hello!" I cried the next moment, my look raised up to the vaulted roof, "what does *that* mean? Good heaven, what next?"

The light, which was brightest up along the roof—in fact, it seemed *pressed* up against the rock canopy like glowing, diaphanous mist—was changing, fading. The wonderful opalescence of it was disappearing before our eyes.

Of a sudden the spot where we stood was involved in a gloom strange, indescribable, unearthly. Up above, the light-mist was quivering and flickering, pale and dreadful.

"What on earth is it?" I said.

"Queer place, this!" said Milton Rhodes.

"What can it mean?"

He did not answer. He sent a questioning look toward Drorathusa and her companions. Mine followed. The faces of the Dromans seemed to glimmer ghostlike in the thickening, awful darkness. Upon those pale features, however, was no discoverable sign of alarm, uneasiness even.

The gloom deepened. Pitchy darkness came down with a rush. Far away, and up along the roof, there were pale flickerings and flashes. Then the light burst out, so sudden and so strong that pain shot through the eyes.

Came a cry, and I turned to see Drorathusa pointing, pointing down toward the cycads.

"There it is, Bill!" said Milton. "There it is again! See it moving?"

I saw it but for a fleeting moment only. And, I thought, I saw something else.

"Nearer this time," Rhodes told me.

"It is moving over," I said, "to lie in wait for us. And, unless I'm much deceived, it isn't alone."

"Hum," said Rhodes. "Queer place, Bill, to go into. Our Hypogeans don't seem to know what to make of this apparition."

They were conversing in low tones, casting searching, apprehensive looks along the ragged margin of the forest.

The gloom was falling again. Denser and denser it grew about us. Fainter, more and more dreadful became those distant flickerings. The stillness was utter, terrible. There was not the gentlest movement of air. The light gave a last faint, angry gleam and went out altogether.

Abruptly, from out of the darkness, a voice came sounding, and, though I knew that the voice was Drorathusa's, I started violently and almost gave a cry. I pressed the button, and the rays of the lamp flashed out, lighting up the spot and showing the tall figure of Drorathusa with arms extended upward in some mystic invocation. The others were kneeling, and the words that Drorathusa spoke were echoed, as it were, in their low responsive voices. It was a strange scene—the dark, savage masses of rock, the tall Sibylline figure of the woman, the kneeling forms of the others and we two men from the sunlit world looking on in wonder and in awe.

Minutes passed. The wondrous, eery voice of Drorathusa never ceased, though there were moments when those echoing voices were silent.

Look! Far away, there was a faint, ghostly flicker. Another and another. Brighter they became and brighter still, at last opalescent; soon rocks and forest, the whole weird landscape was again bathed in the mystic pearly light.

"What in the world," I said, "was it?"

"An eclipse," smiled Rhodes. "Queer place, this."

"Queer place? Can't you hit another tune? You don't have to keep telling me that this is a queer place. I am not likely to forget that fact. And I wonder if these 'eclipses' are a frequent phenomenon. Certainly I hope that they are not."

"I wish that I could tell you, Bill."

"And," I added, "that forest, when the light goes, must be a queer place truly—gosh, I'm catching it from you! But I'll tell you what: I wouldn't like to find myself, in the depths of those woods, face to face with a *loopmuke* or a *gogrugron* or *something* and in that instant have the darkness come down."

"It would be rather unpleasant, I fancy. But unfortunately our likes or our dislikes are not likely to alter in any way the scheme of things."

The Dromans, all standing now, were singing a low and sweet song of thanksgiving and gladness. Yes, so sweet were the tones that they seemed to linger in the air, for some moments, even after the song had ceased.

We cast our looks along the margin of the forest, but not a single glimpse was caught of that mysterious object, or objects, that we had seen moving down there.

It was patent that the Dromans knew no more what to make of that apparition than we did ourselves and that they looked forward with no little apprehension to our entry into those trees.

The descent was resumed. Were eyes, somewhere below, watching our every movement? I feared that it was indeed so, and, as I well knew, every other member of our little band feared it, too. There was nothing, however, that we could do except descend and face the issue. To turn aside would be futile, for the watcher, or the watchers, would turn aside also to meet us.

Ere long we reached the talus, and our troubles were then over—that is, as regards the descent. But heaven only knew what troubles were awaiting us somewhere in that forest, to which we were now drawing so very near. As we made our way down over the rock-fragments, amidst which shrubs and stunted trees were growing, more than once did we pause and send keen, searching looks and glances into the silent recesses of that mysterious wood. Some of those sylvan depths were enshadowed, gloomy; others were pervaded with the strong, transparent light-mist—the objects involved in which *cast no shadows*.

At the foot of the talus, almost beneath the branches of the great palm-trees, there was a pause.

"Now for it!" said Rhodes solemnly.

The Dromans were clustered together in earnest but laconic dialogue, their eyes employed the while in a keen scrutiny of the forest aisles and recesses, before us and on either hand.

Insects were in the air about us; one or two shadowy butterflies flitted past; and that was all. Not a leaf stirred; the air was without the slightest movement. No song, no call of a bird broke the silence, which seemed to press down upon us and about us as though it were a tangible thing. It was as if the spot, the forest itself had never known either the voice or the movement of any sentient thing. But, somewhere in that forest, hidden and close at hand, there was something sentient—something, in all likelihood, watching us, watching us and waiting. Waiting for what? Or, came the sudden thought, even now it was stealing toward the place where we stood.

"This suspense," said I to myself, "is simply awful—as terrible even as that we knew when moving across the bridge."

Drorathusa turned to us and pointed in a rather vague direction out into the trees.

"*Narranawnzee,*" she said.

"They plan to strike that stream," said Milton.

"I pray heaven," I told him, "that we live to see it."

Whereupon Rhodes laughed outright—the effect of the sudden sound curious and startling, so great was the tension of our nerves.

"One would think, Gloomy Face," said he, "that you had just issued from the Cave of Trophonius. 'And he never smiled again.'"

"I have an idea, grinning Shaky Knees," I retorted, "that we have got ourselves into a place more awful than any Cave of Trophonius. I don't blink, that's all."

"Nor, Bill, do I," said Milton soberly. "You know, I'd feel more at ease if it wasn't for the presence of the ladies. Why did they come on a journey so hazardous and so terrible?"

How often had we wondered that! We didn't know the ladies of Drome.

We at once got in motion—Narkus and Rhodes in advance, Drorathusa just behind them, then Delphis and Siris, whilst Thumbra and I brought up the rear. This disposition of our little party was as Drorathusa herself had desired it, and she had been at some pains to impress upon Rhodes and me (though there was no necessity for that) the expediency of keeping our weapons ready at any instant for action.

On we went, deeper and deeper into the wood. Strange forms of tropical vegetation, strange flowers and insects were everywhere. How interesting we should have found the place! But there was that *thing*, somewhere hidden, watching us perhaps—following.

Came a sharp exclamation, a dull sound from above; but it was only a bird, a thing of silver and gold, launching itself from off a branch of one of the trees which we were approaching. Away it went sailing, lovely as a vision from fairyland, and disappeared amongst the tree-trunks and foliage.

Five minutes or so passed. Another sound, an exclamation from Drorathusa, and the party came to a sudden halt.

Everyone had heard it—a clear, unmistakable but inexplicable sound, from behind. We were being followed!

We stood listening for some moments, waiting; but the sound did not come again. Save for the low, melancholy drone of insects, the spot was as silent as a tomb.

We resumed our advance, every sense on the alert. A few moments passed, and then we heard it. This time it was off to the right, almost abreast of us, it seemed.

We waited, but nothing was seen, nothing was heard.

We had advanced but twenty or thirty feet when a sudden gloom involved the forest. The scene on the instant turned weird, unearthly. This, however, was but for a few seconds; then came the light. The advance was at once resumed. But we had gone only a short distance when the gloom came once more, grew so dense that we had to come to a halt.

It lifted, just as I was on the point of switching on my light. Then like a bolt came utter darkness. And, even as the darkness fell, there was a velvety sound and a faint rustling from amongst the foliage beside us. With frantic haste I sought and pressed the light-switch. At the same instant Rhodes flashed on his light. A cry of horror broke from me. There, thrust over the top of a great log and but a few yards distant, was a long snaky head with a pair of great blazing eyes fixed upon me.

We were face to face at last!

CHAPTER 34

ANOTHER!

I JERKED out my revolver, took swift aim, right between those great blazing eyes, and fired.

There was a fearful roar, which seemed to end in a scream, and the long snaky head and neck (no more of the animal had been visible) disappeared.

"Good work, Bill!" applauded Rhodes.

But he had spoken too soon. Hardly had the words left his lips when the monster came. A dark form, with

a gleam of something white, rose into the air and came driving straight toward us. I sprang aside and turned to fire but did not do so for fear of hitting the Dromans or Rhodes. There was a heavy, sickening thud; a piercing shriek from Drorathusa, the sound of rending cloth. The monster had her!

I leaped toward it and emptied the revolver into its side, whilst Narkus and Thumbra sent each an arrow into the body. That of the former was driven with such force that the feathered end of the shaft must have been half-way through the lungs. And down the thing fell dead, though still quivering, there in our very midst.

I turned and hurried to Drorathusa. Rhodes was already beside her. The claws of the monster had ripped her dress, from the thigh down, literally into ribbons; strangely enough, the flesh had escaped even a scratch.

Drorathusa was badly shaken, and little wonder, forsooth. It had been a miraculous escape from terrible injury, from a most horrible death. A few moments, however, and she was as composed as though nothing had happened. Truly there was much to admire in this extraordinary woman.

Rhodes and I turned and examined the body, now lying quite still. It was that of an enormous cat. Strictly speaking, it was not, I suppose, a cat; it was not like anything that we had ever seen or heard of. But a cat I shall call it, not knowing what other word to use. The head was long and of an aspect strikingly, repulsively snakelike. This reptilian resemblance was enhanced by the head's being absolutely destitute of hair, save for the vibrissæ, which were really enormous. The body was a dull, shadowy gray and most curiously mottled. The breast and the belly were snowy white.

"Hum," said Milton Rhodes. "A strange and terrible creature, Bill. This wilderness must be a real one when we find a carnivore like this—and goodness only knows what others—subsisting in it."

"Yes. And, with such creatures in the woods, our journey through them is likely to prove an interesting one."

"Oh, well," said Rhodes, "we have our revolvers, and the Dromans have their bows and arrows, to say nothing of the swords. And they know how to use them, too."

"And that reminds be," I told him: "I haven't reloaded my blunderbuss."

"Save those shells, Bill."

"What for?"

"So we can reload them."

"Reload them? Do you think we'll be able to do that in this world called Drome."

"Why not?"

"But how——?"

Rhodes turned like a flash.

"Hear that?" he said. "By the great Nimrod, another one!"

The darkness still lay impenetrable, pitchy. We flashed our lights into the trees, this way and that, all about us; but no eyes were seen gleaming at us, nothing moving save the shadows, and not the faintest sound was heard.

The Dromans were listening intently, but it was patent that they had not heard that sound which had whirled Rhodes about; nor had I heard it myself.

"Sure," I queried, "that there was a sound?"

"I certainly thought that I heard something."

"Look!" I cried, pointing upward.

Through the openings in the foliage, pale flickerings of light were to be seen.

"Thank goodness," Rhodes said, "we'll soon have it again!"

And we soon did—the strong, mystic, and yet strangely misty, light pervading the mysterious and dreadful wood, the flickerings and flashes overhead soon opalescent and beautiful as ever.

We at once (Narkus and Thumbra having drawn their arrows from the body of the cat) left that spot, to make our way deeper and deeper into that weird forest, which harbored enemies so terrible and so treacherous.

"Why," I queried, "didn't we camp up there on the rocks, where it would have been impossible (save in darkness) for anything to approach us unseen? We had made a day's good journey; and here we have gone and left a place of safety to camp somewhere in this horrible wood."

"What," returned Rhodes, "would that have been but postponing the inevitable? For into these trees we should have had to go, sooner or later, and the thing would have been watching for us just the same. As you say, we had made a good journey for the day; well, aren't we making it better?"

"It isn't ended yet."

"This place, after all, Bill, may not be so bad as it seems."

"Well, there is one consolation," I remarked: "there is no danger of our starving to death in this lovely Dante's Inferno. Look at all the fruit and nuts and things."

"Yes. From that point of view, the place is a veritable Garden of the Hesperides."

AT LENGTH we reached the stream, considerably larger than I had expected to find it. At this point where we struck it, the water was deep, the current a gentle one. The rich forest growth hung out over the surface for some distance. There was a soft rustling of leaves, for some of the branches dipped into the water and were swaying to and fro. This and the faint, melancholy whisper of the gliding element were all that broke the heavy deathlike stillness. It was a placid, lovely scene.

The attainment of this their objective seemed to give our Dromans much pleasure; but, save for the fact that there was now no danger of our perishing of thirst, I could not see that we were any better off than we had been.

I thought that this would be the end of our march, now a long one indeed. But the Dromans merely paused, then started down the stream; and, of course, along with them went Rhodes and myself. At times we had literally to force our way through the dense and tangled undergrowth; then we would be moving through lovely aisles—

> "And many a walk traversed
> Of stateliest covert, cedar, pine, or palm."

We pushed on for perhaps two miles, never moving far from the stream, and then made camp in a beautiful open spot, over which, however, the great branches formed an unbroken canopy of leaves.

A guard was arranged for the night. Rhodes had the first watch.

It was during my vigil that it came—a sudden, fierce, frightful scream, which awoke every member of our little party. It came from somewhere down the river and was replete with terror and agony, a sound that made the very air quiver and throb. It seemed human, and yet I told myself that it simply could not be. And then it ceased, as suddenly as it had come, and all was still again, save for the gentle, sad whispering of the water.

"What," I exclaimed, my voice, however, low and guarded, "was it?

It sounded human, but I know that that sound did not come from the throat of a man or a woman."

"It wasn't human, Bill. What it was—well, that seems to be a mystery even to the Dromans."

I turned and saw Drorathusa, who had just issued from the tent, standing beside Narkus and engaged in hurried and whispered dialogue, the troubled looks which she incessantly directed into the forest, in that quarter whence had come that fearful sound, advertising dread and something for which I can not find a name.

"Evidently," Rhodes observed, "they know but little more about this place and the things in it than we do ourselves."

"And that is virtually nothing."

"Did you," he asked suddenly, "hear something else?"

"Something else? When?"

"Something besides that scream. And while it was filling the air—and just afterward."

"I heard nothing else. Did you?"

"I believe that I did."

"What?"

"I can not say," was his answer. "I wish that I could."

"Well," said I, "all we know is that there is something sneaking or prowling about in this wood, that it has just got a victim and that, in all probability, it means to get one of us —or all."

Rhodes nodded, rather rueful of visage.

"We were fortunate enough," he said, "to kill one monster; I wonder if we shall be as fortunate the second time. For there is another waiting perhaps—biding its time."

An icy shudder went through me.

Another? Yes; but another *what?*

CHAPTER 35

A SCREAM AND—SILENCE

I AM afraid that no one slept very well after that.

It was about 7 o'clock when we left that place. And I confess that I was more uneasy, more troubled than I would have cared to acknowledge. For we were headed toward the spot —at any rate, in the direction— whence had come that frightful scream. What would we find there, or would we find anything?

We did.

We had gone about an eighth of a mile. The disposition of our little party was as it had been the day before—Rhodes and Narkus, that is, were in the lead, followed by Drorathusa, then came Delphis and Siris, whilst Thumbra and myself formed the rear-guard. Had my own wishes in the matter been followed, Rhodes and I would have been together. The formation assumed was, as I believe I have mentioned, the one that Drorathusa desired. The idea, of course, was to have the front and the rear protected each by one of the mysterious weapons of the mysterious strange-men—weapons undoubtedly far more formidable in the imagination of Drorathusa and her companions than they were in reality.

Certainly our revolvers were in every way excellent weapons, but I could not help wishing that they carried a more powerful bullet.

As has been said, we had proceeded about a furlong. The dense and tangled undergrowth had forced us away from the stream, to a distance of perhaps three hundred feet.

At the moment a sound had fetched me up and my exclamation had brought the party to a sudden halt.

"What is it?" Rhodes asked.

"We are being *followed!*"

He made no immediate response to that dire intelligence. We all stood listening, waiting; but a silence pervaded the forest as deep as though it had never, since the day of creation, been broken by the faintest pulsation of sound.

Then, after some moments, Rhodes asked: "Sure, Bill, that we are being followed?"

"Yes! I tell you that I know that we are!"

"Well," said he, turning slowly, "I don't see that we can do anything about it, save keep a sharp lookout; and so on we go."

Whereupon he and the others started. I had turned to follow when that sound, low and mysterious as before, stopped me in my tracks. And in that very instant came another—a sharp interjection from Rhodes, instantaneously followed by a scream, the short, piercing scream of a woman.

I should have explained that we were in a dense growth of fern, a growth some ten or twelve feet in height—a meet place indeed for an ambuscade. Overhead, too, the branches met and intertangled—affording an excellent place for a bald-headed cat or some other arboreal monster to lie in wait and drop or spring upon any human or brute passing below.

Now, as I whirled to that exclamation and scream—the danger there behind forgotten in what was so imminent before—it was to find, to my indescribable fear and horror, that my companions, every single one of them, had vanished.

And that horror and fear which chilled my heart were enhanced by the fact that before me, where Rhodes and the Dromans *must* be, there was no agitation amongst the ferns, not the slightest movement amongst them. I was alone, alone in that fearful place of dense, concealing vegetation, of silence and mystery. But no; they were there, my companions, right there before me. The ferns hid them, that was all. But why were they so still? What had happened? That exclamation, that scream—the silence that had fallen!

It has taken some space to set this down, but it must not be imagined that the space itself during which I stood there was a long one. It was, in fact, very brief; it was no more, I suppose, than five or six seconds. Then I was moving forward through the crushed ferns, as swiftly as was consistent with caution and, of course, with the revolver gripped ready for instant action.

I had covered perhaps three yards, had reached the point where the way crushed through the fern-growth turned sharp to the left to pass between two great tree-trunks; then it was that I heard it—a low, rustling sound and close at hand.

Something was moving there—moving toward me!

CHAPTER 36

GORGONIC HORROR

ALMOST that very instant I heard it, that low, rustling sound made by something moving through (as I thought) the fern growth, ceased. My companions! What had happened to them?

I began moving forward, every second that passed enhancing that horrible fear which chilled my heart. For each step took me nearer to, though not directly toward, that spot from which had come that mysterious sound.

Just as I was passing between those great tree-trunks, came a sound that fetched me up in my tracks, came a sudden low voice: "Oh, Bill!"

I gave a smothered cry and dashed forward. Rhodes was safe; at any rate, he was alive. A second or two, and I burst from the fern-growth. Surprize, amazement brought me up, and the next instant an indescribable horror had me in its grip.

The surprize, the amazement will be explained when I say that there before me stood my companions, every one of them, safe and sound. There they stood, moveless and silent as so many statues, gazing, as though held in a baleful charm, upon that horror before them. Rhodes was the only one that moved as I burst into the scene.

"I wondered, Bill, why you didn't come."

"And I wondered why you all were so silent—after that exclamation and scream. I understand it now."

Shuddering, I pointed with my alpenstock.

"In the name of the Gorgons, what is that?"

"I wish that I knew, Bill."

A silence of some seconds followed, and then I remembered—that rustling sound.

I turned, and another shudder went through me. Drorathusa was standing very near that spot from which that rustling sound must have come.

"What is there?" I asked, pointing.

Rhodes whirled in the direction I indicated.

"Where?"

"In the ferns—behind Drorathusa. I heard something in there, something moving."

"When?"

"Some moments ago—just before you called."

A wan smile flitted across the face of Milton Rhodes.

"That was Drorathusa herself moving through that tangle of flowers."

"But I tell you that it was moving *toward me!*"

"It was Drorathusa," said Rhodes. "You only thought that the sound was moving toward you, away from us. No, Bill; it was Drorathusa. There was no other sound. To that I can swear."

So my imagination had tricked me! And yet how could I be sure that it had? For, in such a moment, with such a sight before him, Rhodes himself might have been the one deceived. In that case, any instant might see Death come leaping into our very midst.

"Who gave that scream?" I asked.

"One of the girls, when we broke out of the ferns and she saw *that*. Delphis, I believe."

This turned me again to that thing of horror. No wonder that that piercing, terrible scream had broken from the girl!

The spot into which we had stepped was, for a distance of perhaps one hundred and fifty feet, almost free from undergrowth. The twisted trunks and branches had a gnarled and savage aspect; the light had faded, and what with the gloom that had fallen and the weird shapes of the trees and the branches, the scene was a strange and terrible one. A fitting setting truly for what we saw there in the midst of it.

For, sixty feet or so distant, still, white and lifeless, naked save for a skin (spotted something like a leopard's) about the waist, the toes four or five feet from the ground, hung the body of a man.

That itself was horrible enough, but what we saw up in the branches above—how I shudder as that picture rises before me! It was a shape amorphous, monstrous, of mottled

green and brown, with splotches of something whitish, bluish.

There were splotches, too, upon the branches and upon the ground beneath. It was like blood, that whitish, bluish stuff, and, indeed, that is what it was. In the midst of that amorphous mass were two great eyes, but they never moved, were fixed and glassy. One of the higher branches had been broken, though not clean from the trunk, and, wound around this branch, the end of which had fallen upon those in which the monster rested, were what I at first took to be enormous serpents. They were, in fact, tentacula. There was a third tentacle; it hung straight down. And it was from this, the coils wrapped around the neck, that the body of the unfortunate man hung, white and lifeless, like a victim of the hangman's noose.

"A tree-octopus!" I cried.

"I suppose one might call it that, only it seems to have but three tentacles. And that scream we heard last night—we know now what it was."

I shuddered.

"No wonder we thought that the sound was unhuman—in the grip of that thing, the coils around his neck! So near, and we never stirred to his help!"

"Because we never dreamed. And, had we known, Bill, we could not have saved him. Life would have been extinct, crushed out of him, before we could have got here and cut him down."

"I thought of some dreadful things," said I, "but never of a monster like that."

"A queer place, a horrible place, Bill," said Milton Rhodes, glancing a little nervously about him. "But come."

He started forward. The Dromans hung back, but I moved along after him, whereupon the others followed, though with great apparent reluctance and horror.

"What I don't understand, Bill, is this: what happened?"

"Why, the poor fellow was passing beneath the branches, the octopus thrust down its tentacle, wound it around the victim's neck and started to pull him up."

"All that is very clear. But then what happened—to the octopus?"

"The limb to which the monster had attached itself broke under the added weight, and down it came crashing into those branches in which we see it."

"That too is clear," said Rhodes. "But what killed the thing? The fall itself, it seems to me, could not have done so."

The next moment we halted, a few yards from the spot where hung the still, white body of the Droman.

"I see it now," said Rhodes, pointing. "As the monster came down, it was impaled upon that swordlike stub of a branch. See it protruding upward from the horrible body."

This, there could be no doubt, was what had happened. And that Gorgonic horror, in the shock of the fall and its impalement, even in its death throes, had never loosed the grip on its victim.

"We can't leave the poor devil hanging like that," I said.

"Of course not. And to give him burial will mean the loss of time probably more precious even than we think. This is a wood horrible as any that Dante ever found himself in!"

"We must risk it. We can't leave him like that, or the body lying on the ground for the beasts to devour."

Rhodes and I still had our ice-picks, and we at once divested ourselves of the packs and started the grave. And, as we worked, try as I would I could not shake it from me—

the feeling that, concealed somewhere in the trees, something was lurking, watching us.

Thumbra, mounted upon the shoulders of Narkus, cut down the victim. It took three strokes to cleave his sword through the tentacle. Along it ran two rows of suckers, like those of a devil-fish. So powerful was the grip upon the victim's neck, we could not remove the severed end of the tentacle; and so we buried the poor Droman, in his shallow grave, with those coils around his throat.

Forthwith we quitted the cursed spot, though Rhodes, I believe, wanted to climb up into that tree and subject the monster to a scientific scrutiny!

And, as we pushed on through that dreadful wood, it was as though some sixth sense bore to my brain a warning vague but persistent, sinister:

"It is following!"

This story comes to a glorious conclusion in next month's fascinating chapters.

WEIRD STORY REPRINT

Markheim

By ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

"YES," said the dealer, "our windfalls are of various kinds. Some customers are ignorant, and then I touch a dividend on my superior knowledge. Some are dishonest," and here he held up the candle, so that the light fell strongly on his visitor, "and in that case," he continued, "I profit by my virtue."

Markheim had but just entered from the daylight streets, and his eyes had not yet grown familiar with the mingled shine and darkness in the shop. At these pointed words, and before the near presence of the flame, he blinked painfully and looked aside.

The dealer chuckled. "You come to me on Christmas Day," he resumed, "when you know that I am alone in my house, put up my shutters, and make a point of refusing business. Well, you will have to pay for that; you will have to pay for my loss of time, when I should be balancing my books; you will have to pay, besides, for a kind of manner that I remark in you today very strongly. I am the essence of discretion, and ask no awkward questions; but when a customer can not look me in the eye, he has to pay for it." The dealer once more chuckled; and then, changing to his usual business voice, though still with a note of irony, "You can give, as usual, a clear account of how you came into the possession of the object?" he continued. "Still your uncle's cabinet? A remarkable collector, sir!"

And the little, pale, round-shouldered dealer stood almost on tiptoe, looking over the top of his gold spectacles, and nodding his head with every mark of disbelief. Markheim returned his gaze with one of infinite pity, and a touch of horror.

"This time," said he, "you are in error. I have not come to sell, but

to buy. I have no curios to dispose of; my uncle's cabinet is bare to the wainscot; even were it still intact, I have done well on the Stock Exchange, and should more likely add to it than otherwise, and my errand today is simplicity itself. I seek a Christmas present for a lady," he continued, waxing more fluent as he struck into the speech he had prepared; "and certainly I owe you every excuse for thus disturbing you upon so small a matter. But the thing was neglected yesterday; I must produce my little compliment at dinner; and, as you very well know, a rich marriage is not a thing to be neglected."

There followed a pause, during which the dealer seemed to weigh this statement incredulously. The ticking of many clocks among the curious lumber of the shop, and the faint rushing of the cabs in a near thoroughfare, filled up the interval of silence.

"Well, sir," said the dealer, "be it so. You are an old customer after all; and if, as you say, you have the chance of a good marriage, far be it from me to be an obstacle. Here is a nice thing for a lady now," he went on, "this hand glass—Fifteenth Century, warranted; comes from a good collection, too; but I reserve the name, in the interests of my customer, who was just like yourself, my dear sir, the nephew and sole heir of a remarkable collector."

The dealer, while he thus ran on in his dry and biting voice, had stooped to take the object from its place; and, as he had done so, a shock had passed through Markheim, a start both of hand and foot, a sudden leap of many tumultuous passions to the face. It passed as swiftly as it came, and left no trace beyond a certain trembling of the hand that now received the glass.

"A glass," he said hoarsely, and then paused, and repeated it more clearly. "A glass? For Christmas? Surely not!"

"And why not?" cried the dealer. "Why not a glass?"

Markheim was looking upon him with an indefinable expression. "You ask me why not?" he said. "Why, look here—look in it—look at yourself! Do you like to see it? No! nor I—nor any man."

The little man had jumped back when Markheim had so suddenly confronted him with the mirror; but now, perceiving there was nothing worse on hand, he chuckled. "Your future lady, sir, must be pretty hard-favored," said he.

"I ask you," said Markheim, "for a Christmas present, and you give me this—this damned reminder of years, and sins and follies—this hand-conscience! Did you mean it? Had you a thought in your mind? Tell me. It will be better for you if you do. Come, tell me about yourself. I hazard a guess now, that you are in secret a very charitable man?"

The dealer looked closely at his companion. It was very odd, Markheim did not appear to be laughing; there was something in his face like an eager sparkle of hope, but nothing of mirth.

"What are you driving at?" the dealer asked.

"Not charitable?" returned the other, gloomily. "Not charitable; not pious; not scrupulous; unloving, unbeloved; a hand to get money, a safe to keep it. Is that all? Dear God, man, is that all?"

"I will tell you what it is," began the dealer, with some sharpness, and then broke off again into a chuckle. "But I see this is a love match of yours, and you have been drinking the lady's health."

"Ah!" cried Markheim, with a strange curiosity. "Ah, have you been in love? Tell me about that."

"I," cried the dealer. "I in love! I never had the time, nor have I the

time today for all this nonsense. Will you take the glass?''

''Where is the hurry?'' returned Markheim. ''It is very pleasant to stand here talking; and life is so short and insecure that I would not hurry away from any pleasure—no, not even from so mild a one as this. We should rather cling, cling to what little we can get, like a man at a cliff's edge. Every second is a cliff, if you think upon it—a cliff a mile high—high enough, if we fall, to dash us out of every feature of humanity. Hence it is best to talk pleasantly. Let us talk of each other; why should we wear this mask? Let us be confidential. Who knows, we might become friends?''

''I have just one word to say to you,'' said the dealer. ''Either make your purchase, or walk out of my shop.''

''True, true,'' said Markheim. ''Enough fooling. To business. Show me something else.''

The dealer stooped once more, this time to replace the glass upon the shelf, his thin blond hair falling over his eyes as he did so. Markheim moved a little nearer, with one hand in the pocket of his greatcoat; he drew himself up and filled his lungs; at the same time many different emotions were depicted together on his face—terror, horror, and resolve, fascination and a physical repulsion; and through a haggard lift of his upper lip, his teeth looked out.

''This perhaps may suit,'' observed the dealer; and then, as he began to re-arise, Markheim bounded from behind upon his victim. The long, skewerlike dagger flashed and fell. The dealer struggled like a hen, striking his temple on the shelf, and then tumbled on the floor in a heap.

TIME had some score of small voices in that shop, some stately and slow as was becoming to their great age; others garrulous and hurried. All these told out the seconds in an intricate chorus of tickings. Then the passage of a lad's feet, heavily running on the pavement, broke in upon these smaller voices and startled Markheim into the consciousness of his surroundings. He looked about him awfully. The candle stood on the counter, its flame solemnly wagging in a draft; and by that inconsiderable movement, the whole room was filled with noiseless bustle and kept heaving like a sea: the tall shadows nodding, the gross blots of darkness swelling and dwindling as with respiration, the faces of the portraits and the china gods changing and wavering like images in water. The inner door stood ajar, and peered into that leaguer of shadows with a long slit of daylight like a pointing finger.

From these fear-stricken rovings, Markheim's eyes returned to the body of his victim, where it lay both humped and sprawling, incredibly small and strangely meaner than in life. In these poor, miserable clothes, in that ungainly attitude, the dealer lay like so much sawdust. Markheim had feared to see it, and, lo! it was nothing. And yet, as he gazed, this bundle of old clothes and pool of blood began to find eloquent voices. There it must lie; there was none to work the cunning hinges or direct the miracle of locomotion—there it must lie till it was found. Found! ay, and then? Then would this dead flesh lift up a cry that would ring over England, and fill the world with the echoes of pursuit. Ay, dead or not, this was still the enemy. ''Time was that when the brains were out,'' he thought; and the first word struck into his mind. Time, now that the deed was accomplished—time, which had closed for the victim, had become instant and momentous for the slayer.

The thought was yet in his mind, when, first one and then another,

with every variety of pace and voice —one deep as the bell from a cathedral turret, another ringing on its treble notes the prelude of a waltz— the clocks began to strike the hour of 3 in the afternoon.

The sudden outbreak of so many tongues in that dumb chamber staggered him. He began to bestir himself, going to and fro with the candle, beleaguered by moving shadows, and startled to the soul by chance reflections. In many rich mirrors, some of home designs, some from Venice or Amsterdam, he saw his face repeated and repeated, as it were an army of spies; his own eyes met and detected him; and the sound of his own steps, lightly as they fell, vexed the surrounding quiet. And still as he continued to fill his pockets, his mind accused him, with a sickening iteration, of the thousand faults of his design. He should have chosen a more quiet hour; he should have prepared an alibi; he should not have used a knife; he should have been more cautious, and only bound and gagged the dealer, and not killed him; he should have been more bold, and killed the servant also; he should have done all things otherwise; poignant regrets, weary, incessant toiling of the mind to change what was unchangeable, to plan what was now useless, to be the architect of the irrevocable past. Meanwhile, and behind all this activity, brute terrors, like the scurrying of rats in a deserted attic, filled the more remote chambers of his brain with riot; the hand of the constable would fall heavy on his shoulder, and his nerves would jerk like a hooked fish; or he beheld, in galloping defile, the dock, the prison, the gallows, and the black coffin.

Terror of the people in the street sat down before his mind like a besieging army. It was impossible, he thought, but that some rumor of the struggle must have reached their ears and set on edge their curiosity; and now, in all the neighboring houses, he divined them sitting motionless and with uplifted ear—solitary people, condemned to spend Christmas dwelling alone on memories of the past, and now startlingly recalled from that tender exercise; happy family parties, struck into silence round the table, the mother still with raised finger: every degree and age and humor, but all, by their own hearths, prying and harkening and weaving the rope that was to hang him. Sometimes it seemed to him he could not move too softly; the clink of the tall Bohemian goblets rang out loudly like a bell; and alarmed by the bigness of the ticking, he was tempted to stop the clocks. And then, again, with a swift transition of his terrors, the very silence of the place appeared a source of peril, and a thing to strike and freeze the passer-by; and he would step more boldly, and bustle about among the contents of the shop, and imitate, with elaborate bravado, the movements of a busy man at ease in his own house.

But he was now so pulled about by different alarms that, while one portion of his mind was still alert and cunning, another trembled on the brink of lunacy. One hallucination in particular took a strong hold on his credulity. The neighbor harkening with white face beside his window, the passer-by arrested by a horrible surmise on the pavement— these could at worst suspect, they could not know; through the brick walls and shuttered windows only sounds could penetrate. But here, within the house, was he alone? He knew he was; he had watched the servant set forth sweethearting, in her poor best, "out for the day" written in every ribbon and smile. Yes, he was alone, of course; and yet, in the bulk of empty house above him, he could surely hear a stir of delicate footing—he was surely con-

scious, inexplicably conscious of some presence. Ay, surely; to every room and corner of the house his imagination followed it; and now it was a faceless thing, and yet had eyes to see with; and again it was a shadow of himself; and yet again behold the image of the dead dealer, reinspired with cunning and hatred.

At times, with a strong effort, he would glance at the open door which still seemed to repel his eyes. The house was tall, the skylight small and dirty, the day blind with fog; and the light that filtered down to the ground story was exceedingly faint, and showed dimly on the threshold of the shop. And yet, in that strip of doubtful brightness, did there not hang wavering a shadow?

Suddenly, from the street outside, a very jovial gentleman began to beat with a staff on the shop-door, accompanying his blows with shouts and railleries in which the dealer was continually called upon by name. Markheim, smitten into ice, glanced at the dead man. But no! he lay quite still; he was fled away far beyond earshot of these blows and shoutings; he was sunk beneath seas of silence; and his name, which would once have caught his notice above the howling of a storm, had become an empty sound. And presently the jovial gentleman desisted from his knocking and departed.

Here was a broad hint to hurry what remained to be done, to get forth from this accusing neighborhood, to plunge into a bath of London multitudes, and to reach, on the other side of day, that haven of safety and apparent innocence—his bed. One visitor had come: at any moment another might follow and be more obstinate. To have done the deed, and yet not to reap the profit, would be too abhorrent a failure. The money, that was now Markheim's concern; and as a means to that, the keys.

He glanced over his shoulder at the open door, where the shadow was still lingering and shivering; and with no conscious repugnance of the mind, yet with a tremor of the belly, he drew near the body of his victim. The human character had quite departed. Like a suit half-stuffed with bran, the limbs lay scattered, the trunk doubled, on the floor, and yet the thing repelled him. Although so dingy and inconsiderable to the eye, he feared it might have more significance to the touch. He took the body by the shoulders, and turned it on its back. It was strangely light and supple, and the limbs, as if they had been broken, fell into the oddest postures. The face was robbed of all expression; but it was as pale as wax, and shockingly smeared with blood about one temple. That was, for Markheim, the one displeasing circumstance. It carried him back, upon the instant, to a certain fair day in a fishers' village: a gray day, a piping wind, a crowd upon the street, the blare of brasses, the booming of drums, the nasal voice of a ballad singer; and a boy going to and fro, buried over head in the crowd and divided between interest and fear, until, coming out upon the chief place of concourse, he beheld a booth and a great screen with pictures, dismally designed, garishly colored: Brownrigg with her apprentice; the Mannings with their murdered guest; Weare in the death-grip of Thurtell; and a score besides of famous crimes. The thing was as clear as an illusion; he was once again that little boy; he was looking once again, and with the same sense of physical revolt, at these vile pictures; he was still stunned by the thumping of the drums. A bar of that day's music returned upon his memory; and at that, for the first time, a qualm came over him, a breath of nausea, a sudden weakness of the joints, which he must instantly resist and conquer.

He judged it more prudent to confront than to flee from these considerations; looking the more hardily in the dead face, bending his mind to realize the nature and greatness of his crime. So little a while ago that face had moved with every change of sentiment, that pale mouth had spoken, that body had been all on fire with governable energies; and now, and by his act, that piece of life had been arrested, as the horologist, with interjected finger, arrests the beating of the clock. So he reasoned in vain; he could rise to no more remorseful consciousness; the same heart which had shuddered before the painted effigies of crime, looked on its reality unmoved. At best, he felt a gleam of pity for one who had been endowed in vain with all those faculties that can make the world a garden of enchantment, one who had never lived and who was now dead. But of penitence, no, not a tremor.

With that, shaking himself clear of these considerations, he found the keys and advanced toward the open door of the shop. Outside, it had begun to rain smartly; and the sound of the shower upon the roof had banished silence. Like some dripping cavern, the chambers of the house were haunted by an incessant echoing, which filled the ear and mingled with the ticking of the clocks. And, as Markheim approached the door, he seemed to hear, in answer to his own cautions tread, the steps of another foot withdrawing up the stair. The shadow still palpitated loosely on the threshold. He threw a ton's weight of resolve upon his muscles, and drew back the door.

The faint, foggy daylight glimmered dimly on the bare floor and stairs; on the bright suit of armor posted, halbert in hand, upon the landing; and on the dark wood-carvings, and framed pictures that hung against the yellow panels of the wainscot. So loud was the beating of the rain through all the house, that, in Markheim's ears, it began to be distinguished into many different sounds. Footsteps and sighs, the tread of regiments marching in the distance, the chink of money in the counting, and the creaking of doors held stealthily ajar, appeared to mingle with the patter of the drops upon the cupola and the gushing of the water in the pipes. The sense that he was not alone grew upon him to the verge of madness. On every side he was haunted and begirt by presences. He heard them moving in the upper chambers; from the shop, he heard the dead man getting to his legs; and as he began with a great effort to mount the stairs, feet fled quietly before him and followed stealthily behind. If he were but deaf, he thought, how tranquilly he would possess his soul! And then again, and harkening with ever fresh attention, he blessed himself for that unresting sense which held the outposts and stood a trusty sentinel upon his life. His head turned continually on his neck; his eyes, which seemed starting from their orbits, scouted on every side, and on every side were half-rewarded as with the tail of something nameless vanishing. The four-and-twenty steps to the first floor were four-and-twenty agonies.

On that first story, the doors stood ajar, three of them like three ambushes, shaking his nerves like the throats of cannon. He could never again, he felt, be sufficiently immured and fortified from men's observing eyes; he longed to be home, girt in by walls, buried among bedclothes, and invisible to all but God. And at that thought he wondered a little, recollecting tales of other murderers and the fear they were said to entertain of heavenly avengers. It was not so, at least, with him. He feared the laws of nature, lest, in their callous and immutable procedure, they should preserve some damning evi-

dence of his crime. He feared tenfold more, with a slavish, superstitious terror, some scission in the continuity of man's experience, some wilful illegality of nature. He played a game of skill, depending on the rules, calculating consequence from cause; and what if nature, as the defeated tyrant overthrew the chessboard, should break the mold of their succession? The like had befallen Nalopeon (so writers said) when the winter changed the time of its appearance. The like might befall Markheim: the solid walls might become transparent and reveal his doings like those of bees in a glass hive; the stout planks might yield under his foot like quicksands and detain him in their clutch; ay, and there were soberer accidents that might destroy him: if, for instance, the house should fall and imprison him beside the body of his victim; or the house next door should fly on fire, and the firemen invade him from all sides. These things he feared; and, in a sense, these things might be called the hands of God reached forth against sin. But about God himself he was at ease; his act was doubtless exceptional, but so were his excuses, which God knew; it was there, and not among men, that he felt sure of justice.

When he had got safe into the drawing room, and shut the door behind him, he was aware of a respite from alarms. The room was quite dismantled, uncarpeted besides, and strewn with packing cases and incongruous furniture; several great pier-glasses, in which he beheld himself at various angles, like an actor on a stage; many pictures, framed and unframed, standing, with their faces to the wall; a fine Sheraton sideboard, a cabinet of marquetry, and a great old bed, with tapestry hangings. The windows opened to the floor; but by great good fortune the lower part of the shutters had been closed, and this concealed him from the neighbors. Here, then, Markheim drew in a packing case before the cabinet, and began to search among the keys. It was a long business, for there were many; and it was irksome, besides; for, after all, there might be nothing in the cabinet, and time was on the wing. But the closeness of the occupation sobered him. With the tail of his eye he saw the door—even glanced at it from time to time directly, like a besieged commander pleased to verify the good estate of his defenses. But in truth he was at peace. The rain falling in the street sounded natural and pleasant. Presently, on the other side, the notes of a piano were wakened to the music of a hymn, and the voices of many children took up the air and words. How stately, how comfortable was the melody! How fresh the youthful voices! Markheim gave ear to it smilingly, as he sorted out the keys; and his mind was thronged with answerable ideas and images; churchgoing children and the pealing of the high organ; children afield, bathers by the brookside, ramblers on the brambly common, kite-flyers in the windy and cloud-navigated sky; and then, at another cadence of the hymn, back again to church, and the somnolence of summer Sundays, and the high genteel voice of the parson (which he smiled a little to recall) and the painted Jacobean tombs, and the dim lettering of the Ten Commandments in the chancel.

And as he sat thus, at once busy and absent, he was startled to his feet. A flash of ice, a flash of fire, a bursting gush of blood, went over him, and then he stood transfixed and thrilling. A step mounted the stair slowly and steadily, and presently a hand was laid upon the knob, and the lock clicked, and the door opened.

Fear held Markheim in a vise. What to expect he knew not, whether

the dead man walking, or the official ministers of human justice, or some chance witness blindly stumbling in to consign him to the gallows. But when a face was thrust into the aperture, glanced round the room, looked at him, nodded and smiled as if in friendly recognition, and then withdrew again, and the door closed behind it, his fear broke loose from his control in a hoarse cry. At the sound of this the visitant returned.

"Did you call me?" he asked, pleasantly, and with that he entered the room and closed the door behind him.

Markheim stood and gazed at him with all his eyes. Perhaps there was a film upon his sight, but the outlines of the newcomer seemed to change and waver like those of the idols in the wavering candle-light of the shop; and at times he thought he knew him; and at times he thought he bore a likeness to himself; and always like a lump of living terror, there lay in his bosom the conviction that this thing was not of the earth and not of God.

And yet the creature had a strange air of the commonplace, as he stood looking on Markheim with a smile; and when he added: "You are looking for the money, I believe?" it was in the tones of everyday politeness.

Markheim made no answer.

"I should warn you," resumed the other, "that the maid has left her sweetheart earlier than usual and will soon be here. If Mr. Markheim be found in this house, I need not describe to him the consequences."

"You know me?" cried the murderer.

The visitor smiled. "You have long been a favorite of mine," he said; "and I have long observed and often sought to help you."

"What are you?" cried Markheim: "the devil?"

"What I may be," returned the other, "can not affect the service I propose to render you."

"It can," cried Markheim; "it does! Be helped by you? No, never; not by you! You do not know me yet; thank God, you do not know me!"

"I know you," replied the visitant, with a sort of kind severity or rather firmness. "I know you to the soul."

"Know me!" cried Markheim. "Who can do so? My life is but a travesty and slander on myself. I have lived to belie my nature. All men do; all men are better than this disguise that grows about and stifles them. You see each dragged away by life, like one whom bravos have seized and muffled in a cloak. If they had their own control—if you could see their faces, they would be altogether different, they would shine out for heroes and saints! I am worse than most; myself is more overlaid; my excuse is known to me and God. But, had I the time, I could disclose myself."

"To me?" inquired the visitant.

"To you before all," returned the murderer. "I supposed you were intelligent. I thought—since you exist—you would prove a reader of the heart. And yet you would propose to judge me by my acts! Think of it; my acts! I was born and I have lived in a land of giants; giants have dragged me by the wrists since I was born out of my mother—the giants of circumstance. And you would judge me by my acts! But can you not look within? Can you not understand that evil is hateful to me? Can you not see within me the clear writing of conscience, never blurred by any wilful sophistry, although too often disregarded? Can you not read me for a thing that surely must be common as humanity —the unwilling sinner?"

"All this is very feelingly expressed," was the reply, "but it regards me not. These points of con-

sistency are beyond my province, and I care not in the least by what compulsion you may have been dragged away, so as you are but carried in the right direction. But time flies; the servant delays, looking in the faces of the crowd and at the pictures on the hoardings, but still she keeps moving nearer; and remember, it is as if the gallows itself were striding toward you through the Christmas streets! Shall I help you; I, who know all? Shall I tell you where to find the money?''

''For what price?'' asked Markheim.

''I offer you the service for a Christmas gift,'' returned the other.

Markheim could not refrain from smiling with a kind of bitter triumph. ''No,'' said he, ''I will take nothing at your hands; if I were dying of thirst, and it was your hand that put the pitcher to my lips, I should find the courage to refuse. It may be credulous, but I will do nothing to commit myself to evil.''

''I have no objection to a deathbed repentance,'' observed the visitant.

''Because you disbelieve their efficacy!'' Markheim cried.

''I do not say so,'' returned the other; ''but I look on these things from a different side, and when the life is done my interest falls. The man has lived to serve me, to spread black looks under color of religion, or to sow tares in the wheat-field, as you do, in a course of weak compliance with desire. Now that he draws so near to his deliverance, he can add but one act of service—to repent, to die smiling, and thus to build up in confidence and hope the more timorous of my surviving followers. I am not so hard a master. Try me. Accept my help. Please yourself in life as you have done hitherto; please yourself more amply, spread your elbows at the board; and when the night begins to fall and the curtains to be drawn, I tell you, for your greater comfort, that you will find it even easy to compound your quarrel with your conscience, and to make a truckling peace with God. I came but now from such a death-bed, and the room was full of sincere mourners, listening to the man's last words: and when I looked into that face, which had been set as a flint against mercy, I found it smiling with hope.''

''And do you, then, suppose me such a creature?'' asked Markheim. ''Do you think I have no more generous aspirations than to sin, and sin, and sin, and, at last, sneak into heaven? My heart rises at the thought. Is this, then, your experience of mankind? or is it because you find me with red hands that you presume such baseness? and is this crime of murder indeed so impious as to dry up the very springs of good?''

''Murder is to me no special category,'' replied the other. ''All sins are murder, even as all life is war. I behold your race, like starving mariners on a raft, plucking crusts out of the hands of famine and feeding on each other's lives. I follow sins beyond the moment of their acting; I find in all that the last consequence is death; and to my eyes, the pretty maid who thwarts her mother with such taking graces on a question of a ball, drips no less visibly with human gore than such a murderer as yourself. Do I say that I follow sins? I follow virtues also; they differ not by the thickness of a nail, they are both scythes for the reaping angel of Death. Evil, for which I live, consists not in action but in character. The bad man is dear to me; not the bad act, whose fruits, if we could follow them far enough down the hurtling cataract of the ages, might yet be found more blessed than those of the rarest virtues. And it is not because you have killed a dealer, but because you are Mark-

heim, that I offer to forward your escape."

"I will lay my heart open to you," answered Markheim. "This crime on which you find me is my last. On my way to it I have learned many lessons; itself is a lesson, a momentous lesson. Hitherto I have been driven with revolt to what I would not; I was a bondslave to poverty, driven and scourged. There are robust virtues that can stand in these temptations; mine was not so: I had a thirst of pleasure. But today, and out of this deed, I pluck both warning and riches—both the power and a fresh resolve to be myself. I become in all things a free actor in the world; I begin to see myself all changed, these hands the agents of good, this heart at peace. Something comes over me out of the past; something of what I have dreamed on Sabbath evenings to the sound of the church organ, of what I forecast when I shed tears over noble books, or talked, an innocent child, with my mother. There lies my life; I have wandered a few years, but now I see once more my city of destination."

"You are to use this money on the Stock Exchange, I think?" remarked the visitor; "and there, if I mistake not, you have already lost some thousands?"

"Ah," said Markheim, "but this time I have a sure thing."

"This time, again, you will lose," replied the visitor quietly.

"Ah, but I keep back the half!" cried Markheim.

"That also you will lose," said the other.

The sweat started upon Markheim's brow. "Well, then, what matter?" he exclaimed. "Say it be lost, say I am plunged again in poverty, shall one part of me, and that the worse, continue until the end to override the better? Evil and good run strong in me, haling me both ways. I do not love the one thing, I love all. I can conceive great deeds, renunciations, martyrdoms; and though I be fallen to such a crime as murder, pity is no stranger to my thoughts. I pity the poor; who knows their trials better than myself? I pity and help them; I prize love, I love honest laughter; there is no good thing nor true thing on earth but I love it from my heart. And are my vices only to direct my life, and my virtues to lie without effect, like some passive lumber of the mind? Not so; good, also, is a spring of acts."

But the visitant raised his finger. "For six-and-thirty years that you have been in this world," said he, "through many changes of fortune and varieties of humor, I have watched you steadily fall. Fifteen years ago you would have started at a theft. Three years back you would have blenched at the name of murder. Is there any crime, is there any cruelty or meanness, from which you still recoil?—five years from now I shall detect you in the fact! Downward, downward, lies your way; nor can anything but death avail to stop you."

"It is true," Markheim said huskily, "I have in some degree complied with evil. But it is so with all: the very saints, in the mere exercise of living, grow less dainty, and take on the tone of their surroundings."

"I will propound to you one simple question," said the other; "and as you answer, I shall read to you your moral horoscope. You have grown in many things more lax; possibly you do right to be so; and at any account, it is the same with all men. But granting that, are you in any one particular, however trifling, more difficult to please with your own conduct, or do you go in all things with a looser rein?"

"In any one?" repeated Markheim, with an anguish of considera-

tion. "No," he added with despair, "in none! I have gone down in all."

"Then," said the visitor, "content yourself with what you are, for you will never change; and the words of your part on this stage are irrevocably written down."

Markheim stood for a long while silent, and indeed it was the visitor who first broke the silence. "That being so," he said, "shall I show you the money?"

"And grace?" cried Markheim.

"Have you not tried it?" returned the other. "Two or three years ago, did I not see you on the platform of revival meetings, and was not your voice the loudest in the hymn?"

"It is true," said Markheim; "and I see clearly what remains for me by way of duty. I thank you for these lessons from my soul; my eyes are opened, and I behold myself at last for what I am."

At this moment the sharp note of the door-bell rang through the house; and the visitant, as though this were some concerted signal for which he had been waiting, changed at once in his demeanor.

"The maid!" he cried. "She has returned, as I forewarned you, and there is now before you one more difficult passage. Her master, you must say, is ill; you must let her in, with an assured but rather serious countenance—no smiles, no overacting, and I promise you success! Once the girl within, and the door closed, the same dexterity that has already rid you of the dealer will relieve you of this last danger in your path. Thenceforward you have the whole evening—the whole night, if needful—to ransack the treasures of the house and to make good your safety. This is help that comes to you with the mask of danger. Up!" he cried: "up, friend; your life hangs trembling in the scales; up, and act!"

Markheim steadily regarded his counselor. "If I be condemned to evil acts," he said, "there is still one door of freedom open—I can cease from action. If my life be an ill thing, I can lay it down. Though I be, as you say truly, at the beck of every small temptation, I can yet, by one decisive gesture, place myself beyond the reach of all. My love of good is damned to barrenness; it may, and let it be! But I have still my hatred of evil; and from that, to your galling disappointment, you shall see that I can draw both energy and courage."

The features of the visitor began to undergo a wonderful and lovely change: they brightened and softened with a tender triumph; and, even as they brightened, faded and dislimned. But Markheim did not pause to watch or understand the transformation. He opened the door and went downstairs very slowly, thinking to himself. His past went soberly before him; he beheld it as it was, ugly and strenuous like a dream, random as chance-medley—a scene of defeat. Life, as he thus reviewed it, tempted him no longer; but on the farther side he perceived a quiet haven for his bark. He paused in the passage, and looked into the shop, where the candle still burned by the dead body. It was strangely silent. Thoughts of the dealer swarmed into his mind, as he stood gazing. And then the bell once more broke out into impatient clamor.

He confronted the maid upon the threshold with something like a smile.

"You had better go for the police," said he: "I have killed your master."

THE EYRIE

LETTERS are still pouring in to The Eyrie on the question of whether WEIRD TALES should continue to use one "Weird Story Reprint" in each issue, and so far those who want us to continue our reprint policy are greatly in the majority. So, in obedience to your wishes, we shall continue our policy of selecting, each month, one of the short-story masterpieces of weird fiction from the literature of the past; but all the other stories in each issue will be entirely new, the best current weird fiction and weird-scientific fiction that can be obtained. In the future, as in the past, WEIRD TALES will print a type of fiction such as can be obtained nowhere else—highly imaginative tales of science and pseudo-science (such as *Explorers Into Infinity* in this issue); tales of supernatural horror (such as *Out of the Earth* in this issue); tales of spirit return (such as *The Return* in this issue); bizarre and fantastic tales, occult and mystic stories; tales of terror and mystery; tales of werewolves, witchcraft and devil-worship, and tales of strange monsters. It is on such stories that the brilliant success of WEIRD TALES has been built, and we shall continue to give you, the readers, a wide variety of the best weird fiction in the world.

Arthur W. Davenport, of Buffalo, New York, asks for more orientales. "According to my opinion, you have published very few Oriental weird stories," he writes. "To the minds of most people, the East is filled with mystery and weird happenings. In saying that the plot of a story is laid in New York or London there is no special effect produced upon the mind of the auditor; yet how different is the connotation of the words Bagdad, Stamboul and Damascus! Mystery, intrigue and weirdness are disclosed in the 'Open Sesame' of those words. The unusual fairly leaps into being. The unknown and the unusual should produce the most weird effect in story-telling."

WEIRD TALES will publish a number of weird Oriental tales such as Mr. Davenport asks for, during this year. Some of the best orientales of recent magazine literature have appeared in the pages of this magazine, for instance, the Asiatic tales of E. Hoffmann Price, and the Chinese fantasies of Frank Owen; and letters are still coming in from readers praising Murray Leinster's powerful Asiatic torture-tale, *The Oldest Story in the World*, which appeared in WEIRD TALES.

"I have been a silent admirer of WEIRD TALES long enough," writes Jack T. Chord, of New York City, "so I want to take this opportunity of telling you how I enjoy the first of every month, when W. T. appears on the

stands. I seldom have time to read, but when I do I want the stories to take me far away from earthly environments. That's just what WEIRD TALES does for me and many others."

Writes Marion Clementz, of St. Petersburg, Florida: "Dear Eyrie:—Dern good issue this February one; hope the rest are like it 'cause here's one guy who's gonna read WEIRD TALES. My choice of this here February issue is *The Man Who Cast No Shadow, The Atomic Conquerors* and *The Unearthly. Drome* shore held me tense till I came to the end of part two, and *The Star Shell* also was good while it lasted. Excuse my slang."

Harold D. Scherer, of Winona, Minnesota, writes to The Eyrie: "A year ago last August I happened to notice a copy of WEIRD TALES in a magazine shop, and since that time I have not missed a single copy, neither have I missed reading a single story in your wonderful magazine. Interplanetary stories excite my imagination more than any other kind, and I also am very fond of stories of reincarnation."

"*Drome* grows more wonderful with each succeeding chapter," writes Margaret Harper, of Claymont, Delaware. "It seems plausible enough that a strange land could exist under a great range of mountains. *The Sign of the Seven Skulls* was certainly weird enough to suit any lover of weird tales, and *The Brimstone Cat* was certainly out of the ordinary and very entertaining."

"Seabury Quinn's stories," writes Karl Houghton, of Lakewood, Ohio, "are without a doubt above all others, and I wish to say that he has the immortal Poe shoved off the map. *The Atomic Conquerors* is fine; I only wish we could have more of those tales of dire things that move the whole world to terror, like *The Metal Giants* and *The Abysmal Horror.* But *The Church Stove at Raebrudafisk* is the one I enjoyed most in the February issue. It is stories where minor happenings lead up to fearful results that get my vote for the best stories."

A. W. Oswald, of Syracuse, New York, writes to The Eyrie: "I think that *Drome,* now in its second installment, is one of the best serial stories yet published, being different from the usual type which have had to do entirely with scientific subjects and materialistic creatures. I hope it doesn't end by having the creatures found under the mountain, remnants of a lost race, but still humans, although I suppose in the end the so-called Angel will fall in love with the scientist, as is usually the case. *The Sign of the Seven Skulls* was really the best weird story in your last issue; let's have more stories of the Hartz Mountains and the Black Forest."

Mrs. E. M. Burton, of Birmingham, Alabama, chooses three stories as her favorites in the February issue, for the following reasons: "*The Man Who Cast No Shadow* because it is well written, is clear enough for anyone to understand, and I like that type of story anyway. *The Atomic Conquerors* because I have never read another story of that exact type, and because, although it is utterly impossible, it is so well written that you almost believe that it *is* possible. *The Sign of the Seven Skulls* because it makes the gooseflesh go up and down one's spine and still you read on. Believe me that does not happen always, for a good many so-called 'horror stories' leave a 'bad taste in the mouth.'"

"By all means continue to publish reprints," urges George I. Foster, rector of the Church of the Good Shepherd in Cleveland, Ohio, "for such writers as Wilkie Collins, Edgar Allan Poe and Washington Irving are al-

ways a treat to intelligent readers. Among your own writers that I most admire are Lovecraft and Quinn (tied for first place), with Burks, Hamilton and Morgan a close second. I bought my first copy of WEIRD TALES about four years ago, while waiting for a suburban car as I was going to deliver a lecture in a neighboring town, and I have never missed a number since, for many of your contributions surpass Poe at his best."

Paul Kerlsson Johnstone, of St. Louis, writes to The Eyrie: "Why not have more stories like *The Lost Race* (in your January issue), dealing with the people of Britain before the Norman Conquest? Certainly many things must have happened while Pict, Scot, Roman, Briton, Saxon, Jute, Angle and Dane struggled for mastery, that would make fiction look tame. I have an idea that many of the tales of that time (about 500 B. C. to 1000 A. D.) which are dismissed as mere myths are cold truth. Certainly archeology has found these old legends to be startlingly accurate in many ways."

Writes Sherlock R. Hope, of Jacksonville, Florida: "Edmond Hamilton, in his own realm of writing, is head and shoulders above all others. I consider his *The Metal Giants* a masterpiece of his type of fiction. I look forward to future issues of WEIRD TALES, which, I sincerely hope, will bring more such stories from this author's pen."

We offered to give the original typescript of Seabury Quinn's cover-design story in the February issue, autographed by the author, for the most helpful and constructive letter sent to The Eyrie discussing the stories in that issue. The typescript was won by Fred W. Fischer, Jr., of Knoxville, Tennessee.

Readers, your favorite story in the February issue, as shown by your votes, was *The Atomic Conquerors*, by Edmond Hamilton, and your second choice was *The Man Who Cast No Shadow*, by Seabury Quinn. What is your favorite story in the present issue?

MY FAVORITE STORIES IN THE APRIL WEIRD TALES ARE:

Story	Remarks
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Reader's name and address:

Explorers Into Infinity

(Continued from page 450)

—it isn't too big yet—but it will be in a minute. Let go of me!"

"No! No, Brett! The shock as you went in—you couldn't take it so suddenly. It might hurt you—kill you. And the switch is too big for your strength."

It was out of control—this monster, growing, inexorably growing—it was pushing at the house—a great white giant pushing gently but with an irresistible power at the little toy house beside it. I could see the house shifting on its foundations; a corner of it tilted downward.

"Brett! Father! Try it now. One last try." Martt and Frannie had the pole again in position. With a last despairing effort we raised it; slid it up over the giant table-edge; caught the wide flaring side of the giant switch. Pushing—despairingly; five of us, pigmies struggling there at that giant threshhold. The switch moved. Our pole held its place; the switch moved farther, clicked with a tremendous snap that reverberated about us. The growth of the monster was checked. It stood there serene, triumphant, with the little house, tilted, but still standing bravely beside it.

White, shaken, we ceased our efforts. Frannie gasped, "We—we only wanted to make it a normal size—so you could load it up with the furniture and things. But it—it got away from us."

Dr. Gryce said, "It is a lesson—perhaps a lesson which we needed forced upon us." He gestured to the great quiescent white building which had spread itself over most of the devastated garden. "A lesson," he repeated. "We must guard this

power carefully. In unskilled or unscrupulous hands it is a power for evil almost unthinkable. This monster here—if it had gotten beyond us—if we had lost its control—this could destroy the Universe!''

CHAPTER 3

EXPLORERS INTO INFINITY

''You think we've got everything in it?'' Frannie asked anxiously.

We had gotten the vehicle back to a size normal to our own stature; and all day had been working to equip it. The instrument room—its Space and Time and size mechanisms were complete. I had learned now that it was to be transported through Space by very similar principles to those commonly in use—a controlled attraction or repulsion of the faces of its cube for the heavenly body nearest to it; in effect, an intensification—a neutralization—or reversal at will of the electronic force which flows between and mutually attracts all material bodies; the force which once—in centuries past—was called gravitation. It needed no word of explanation. Its velocity and distance dials, its direction indicators, were familiar, though rather more intricate than those I had seen in the Interplanetary Service. Beyond that, there was a bank of dials upon which a changing size was recorded—with the vehicle's present starting dimensions to be the standard unit. And other dials for its Time-change. Of these there were two distinct sets. One, a record of the normal Time-change, inevitable to a change of size; another, a comparison of that Time-distance with the normal Time-progress of the earth, so that the Time-position of the vehicle into the earth's Past or Future could be seen.

In a subsidiary instrument-room was a variety of modern astronomical

apparatus; the myrdoscope, and a receiver for an aural ray which, as a guide to Brett, Dr. Gryce was to send from earth. Of this, in more detail, they later explained.

In a smaller room were the apparatus for air renewal, the making of various necessary gases, water and synthetic foods; a store-room of provisions; rooms furnished comfortably so that the vehicle was complete in its living quarters. A thousand details, until at the last I felt as Frannie did —wondering how we could have failed to overlook a score of things we had intended to do.

It was nightfall when we finished; and all that evening we spent checking up the equipment. Dr. Gryce's home had not been seriously damaged by the morning's mishap; and as midnight approached we gathered in the little observation and instrument room he had built in its upper story. Brett and Martt, it had been decided, were to make the journey; we others were to watch and wait. It seemed the more difficult role. All that evening Dr. Gryce had been increasingly silent, careworn of manner and aspect. And though Brett was excited in his mature, repressed fashion—and Martt frankly exuberant—I saw that little Frannie was solemn, perturbed as her father.

It was a soft, brilliant, cloudless night, with no moon to pale the gleaming stars. And at last every detail was settled, and the midnight hour we had set for departure was at hand. We went forth with them to the waiting vehicle. There was nothing more to say. They stood—Brett and Martt—in the opened doorway as we gathered about them.

"Well — good-bye, Father — good-bye, Frannie dear." Brett held her close; then released her, pushed her away. "Good-bye, Frank." His hand-clasp was warm and steady.

Martt was jocular, but now at the last I could hear a tremble to his voice. "When we get to that girl out there—well, I'm going to tell her how interested you all are in her." His laugh was high-pitched. "That is, if we can handle that giant."

"Good-bye, Brett. Good-bye, Martt."

Our words were so futile, so inadequate to the surge of feeling within us! The door slid closed upon them. The vehicle, not to change size until it was far into the realms of outer interstellar Space, beyond our crowding little planets—lifted gently, soared upward, slid away from us, a glistening white shape up there in the quiet starlight.

Gravely, silently, with what sinking of heart I could only imagine, Dr. Gryce stood regarding it. Beside me Frannie was crying softly.

Explorers into infinity! And they were gone, to encounter—what?

The marvels of the voyage through Space and Time, and the search for the girl in that vaster world, to rescue her from her danger, will be described next month.

Coming!

The Time-Raider

By Edmond Hamilton

A startling four-part serial by the author of "The Metal Giants" and "The Atomic Conquerors"—a tale of an entity from thousands of years in the future that reaches back through Time to seize its victims. No more fascinating word-picture has ever been drawn than the thrilling narrative of the pursuit of the Raider through the future of this world, as the Sun grows cold and the Earth withers.

Watch for this story in WEIRD TALES

The Ruler of Destiny

(Continued from page 480)

toward him from the pink wall. Tentacles of death reached out toward him. He knew full well now what his end must be. One moment he looked out from the top of his laboratory upon the ruin he had wrought, saw that his world had come to chaos, and all the unutterable terror of a world ages old rose up within his soul, beating upon his reason like a blight of infinity. Ponderously he rushed down the stairs, out the door and into the desolate street before his workhouse. The stench of the dead was in his nostrils. Purple fingers of horror reached out toward him; purple that changed to black. The wrath of God was descending upon him in that black cloud hovering above, inky, ever increasing in magnitude, crushing down upon his tortured soul, surrounding him in impalpable gloom like a cloak of blackness.

A tongue of purple licked through the air, hovered above him. His huge face was gray with terror, his eyes filled with panic. He tried to run; fell; rose to his feet; staggered toward the pink veil which held out the purple, trying to hold it back. Breath coming in hoarse sobs, eyes aflame, then blinded with tears, cheeks jouncing, he tore at the pink as though it were a tangible thing—*passed through!*

The fingers of the purple night swept in upon him, gladly, one might think (though there was none left to see); tentacles of purple swathed him, clasped him, crushed him.

A moment of unutterable terror, an instant of fiery pain, a burst of vivid memory as the gates to hell yawned. Then the Master of Destiny was no more.

The Endocrine Monster

(Continued from page 474)

Janis finally. He had tried to ease her last moments, but there was little he could do. "But merciful God! What havoc! Bonita dead! Three of our bunch—no!"—he looked over where Lassignac lay limp against the bole—"no, four! And she'd have gotten us, too, perhaps, if it hadn't been for the fer de lance! Well, it's over!"

"Yes," said Arnheimer, his voice soft and uncertain. "It's over. Our whole expedition is over. Don Ramon and Connaughton held the key to the plans. And they are dead!"

"Well, then it's ended," said Janis. "Except to bury our friends and this—this—afflicted woman!"

3

"WELL?" I questioned as Dr. Wilkie finished. "What's the answer? What does it——?"

"Wait a moment," he interrupted. "Before you ask questions let me show you a passage from a recent book."

He went over to one of the shelves, withdrew a book, and marked one of the pages. "This book deals with the endocrines or internal secretions, of which you doubtless know. Before showing you this passage let me explain just one point. The adrenal or suprarenal gland lies just above the kidney, and anatomically has two parts, an outer cortex or shell, and an inner medulla or pulp. The medulla gives off adrenalin, which regulates blood pressure in all parts of the body through action on the blood vessels. The cortex gives off an unknown secretion which seems to have a remarkable influence. When it is diseased, certain curious things

happen. Now read what I have indicated."

He placed the volume before me. And this is what I read:

"The main course of cortical disease proceeds as follows:

"a. In early cases there is precocious sexuality, adiposity in the pelvic region, remarkable muscular strength, recalling the *enfants hercules* of the French writers. In girls, there is a marked tendency toward maleness. Later on the fatty tissue is lost, the children grow thin and die of exhaustion.

"b. In young women the disease develops with phenomenal muscular strength and endurance, assertiveness and even pugnacity of behavior, and excessive sexuality; this stage is followed by the appearance of male characters, such as beardedness, general hairiness, and hair on chest and abdomen. Here we are reminded of the 'strong women' and 'bearded ladies' of the circuses and side-shows. Later the muscular strength is replaced by excessive weakness, and finally death from exhaustion ensues."

Thus far I read. "Jove!" I exclaimed. "Then this woman—this Bonita—was——?"

"Precisely," said Dr. Wilkie. "She was suffering from cortical disease. The symptoms are clear. She was really helpless, driven inexorably by a malady over which she had no control. Like the Nuremberg maiden, she crushed those that she embraced."

"Humph!" I mused. "And so your guinea-pig——?"

"Yes, I have experimented with it, causing an excessive or altered secretion by the use of certain injections. The symptoms are the same—heavy buttocks, phenomenal strength, pugnacity, even the appearance of male characters. The last I figure to be the turning point. This animal should before very long grow weak and die from exhaustion. Looking back at the experience with Bonita I feel that she had reached her turning point also, and would have died in typical exhaustion. This experiment has helped me understand her case, the case of Bonita."

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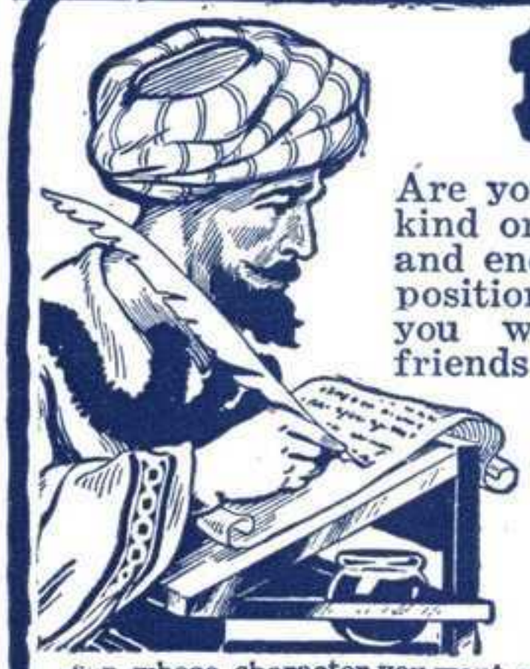

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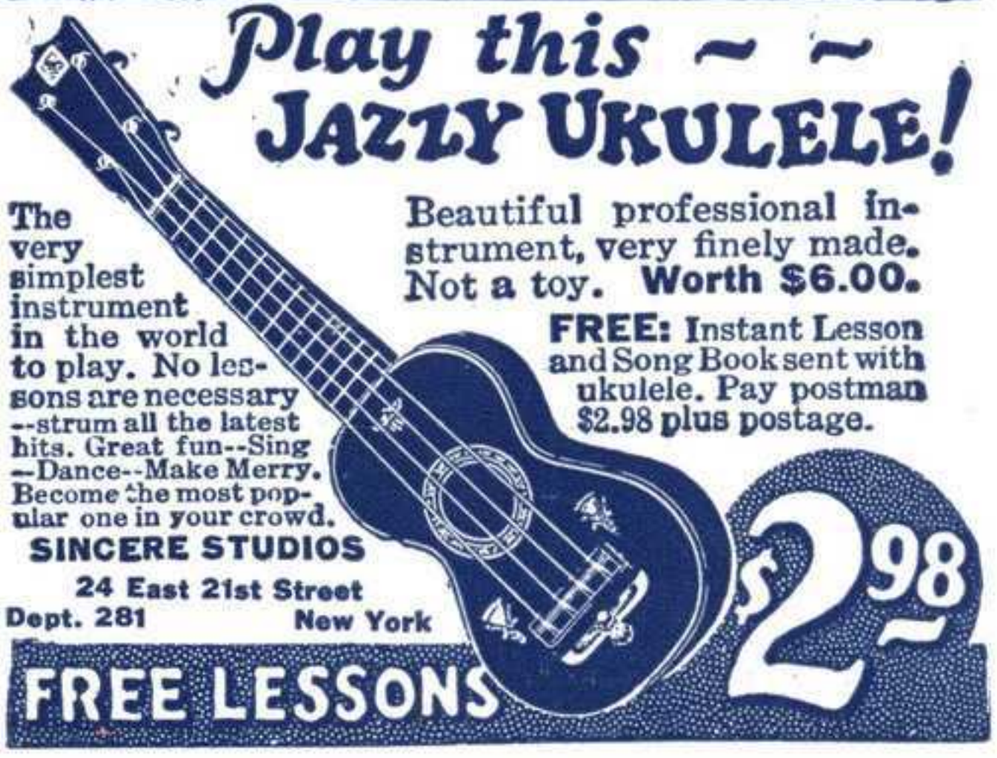

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