Weird Tales

The Unique Magazine

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Bassett Morgan – Hugh Irish – Victor Rousseau

Strange Stories

WEIRD TALES has built its remarkable success on stories that are utterly strange; stories such as are printed in no other magazine; amazing tales that take the reader out of the humdrum environment of everyday life into a deathless world of the imagination; eery stories that send shuddery chills up the spine; ghost-tales, and tales of the weird monstrosities of ancient legend; bizarre and fantastic tales; weird-scientific tales of the spaces between the worlds, and fantastic dooms that menace the earth. Among the many thrilling stories in the next few issues will be:

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They Thought I Was A Weak Sister
-But I Took Their Breath Away!

ALL of a sudden the office was very quiet, as sometimes happens for an instant or two, and a few words reached me. "Oh, he won't dare kick," the manager was saying, "he's a pretty weak sister."

Mechanically I went on with my work, wondering vaguely who the weak sister could be. A new man had just been hired for our department and desks were being moved to make room for him. A minute later I looked up and saw the chief clerk standing at my side. "Bob," he crisply ordered, "move your desk back in that corner, I want this space for the new assistant I've hired." Then he turned and strode away.

I gulped and wilted down into my chair. *I* was the weak sister! And I was actually being demoted! The new man was being hired for *my* place! This was my reward for all my hard work—this was how I won out by waiting patiently for my turn to be promoted. I had even congratulated myself on my close-lipped, reserved manner—I thought I was showing strength of character by sticking to my work and not trying to push myself—to show off.

And that was the whole trouble. I had plenty of steel in my makeup, but I had no ability to express myself. I was timid, self-conscious, and actually afraid of my own voice. I would study out the office problems and find solutions for our difficulties, but I didn't know how to present these ideas to the man up ahead. Several of the boys who had started at the time I did were now department managers—because they had the knack of forceful speech, self-confidence and personality—the very qualities I lacked.

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A MAGAZINE of the BIZARRE and UNUSUAL

VOLUME X NUMBER 1

Published monthly by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company, 2457 E. Washington Street, Indianapolis, Ind. Entered as second-class matter March 20, 1923, at the post office at Indianapolis, Ind., under the act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 25 cents. Subscription, $2.50 a year in the United States; $3.00 a year in Canada. English office: G. M. Jeffries Agency, Hopefield House, Hanwell, London, W. 7. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts, although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession. The contents of this magazine are fully protected by copyright and must not be reproduced either wholly or in part without permission from the publishers.

NOTE—All manuscripts and communications should be addressed to the publishers' Chicago office at 450 East Ohio Street, Chicago, Ill. FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

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Contents for July, 1927

Cover Design ---------- **C. C. Senf**
Illustrating a scene in "The Return of the Master"

The Return of the Master ---------- **H. Warner Munn** **6**
The Werewolf of Ponkert returns from the pit of Hell to thwart the sinister Master who has wrought his downfall

Gray Ghouls ---------- **Bassett Morgan** **21**
A creepy weird tale of the South Seas, giant apes and eery murders—a startling story of surgery

The Impossible ---------- **Don Robert Catlin** **35**
Travis sought out the source of the tricks of Black Magic, and was trailed across the world by a malignant Chinaman

The Unchained Devil ---------- **Roscoe Gilmore Stott** **42**
The violinist made an evil pledge to a statue, and was redeemed from utter ruin by the love of a girl

(Continued on Next Page)

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(Continued from Preceding Page)

The Curse of Everard Maundy ---------- **Seabury Quinn** **49**
An eldritch tale of voodoo, reanimated corpses, and the intrepid little French ghost-breaker, Jules de Grandin

Tangled Skeins ---------- **Mary McEnnery Erhard** **69**
An utterly strange adventure was that of the Rev. Wilfred Cumberland—a story of transposed personality

A Fable ---------- **Clark Ashton Smith** **76**
Verse

The Ultimate Problem ---------- **Victor Rousseau** **77**
The last of a series of stories, each complete in itself, dealing with Dr. Ivan Brodsky, "The Surgeon of Souls"

The El Dorado of Death ---------- **Percy B. Prior** **84**
A ghost-story of the gold-diggings of Australia—the tragic adventure of two brothers

As Always ---------- **A. Leslie** **86**
Verse

The Mystery of Sylmare ---------- **Hugh Irish** **87**
Strange suicides shocked the artist-colony at Sylmare—the story of a conspiracy of plant-life against humanity

The Edge of the Shadow ---------- **R. Ernest Dupuy** **102**
A tale of the terror that hides in the night—a story of an evil entity, and the howling of dogs in the darkness

The Old Crow of Cairo ---------- **T. Lovell Beddoes** **105**
Verse

The Algerian Cave ---------- **Dick Heine** **106**
Reincarnation played strange pranks in the lives of Paul Mitrande and Louis Fanon

The Dark Chrysalis (Part 2) ---------- **Eli Colter** **113**
The epic of the microbe-hunters—a three-part serial novel dealing with the terrible scourge of cancer

Weird Story Reprint
The Dragon Fang ---------- **Fitz-James O'Brien** **125**
A bizarre and fantastic tale of China under the emperors—a story of strange magic, and love, and a phantom duck

The Eyrie ---------- **138**
A chat with the readers

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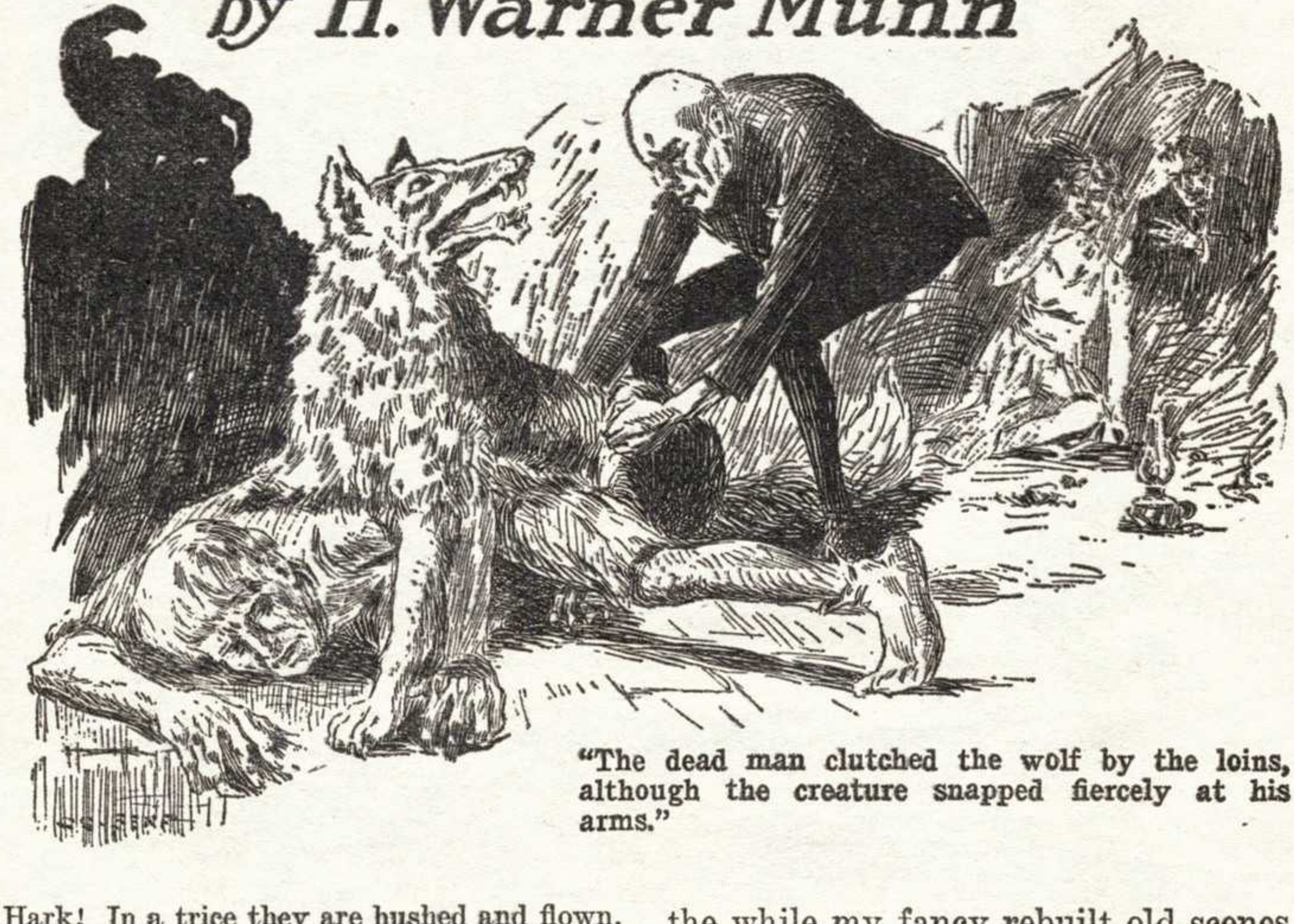
The RETURN of the MASTER

by H. Warner Munn



"The dead man clutched the wolf by the loins, although the creature snapped fiercely at his arms."

Hark! In a trice they are hushed and flown,
For morn is at hand, and the cock has crown!
'Twas a gala night for the souls set free:
Then hail Death and Equality!
—*Danse Macabre.*

1. *A Voice from the Dead*

MANY years had passed since last I had seen my old innkeeper friend, Pierre Garnier, in far-away France.

Disinclination, perhaps born of fear, perhaps mere laziness and sloth, had kept me long near home. Travel ceased to beckon, for as one grows older he is ready to sit quietly by the fire and think, dwelling more in the past than either the present or the future.

Once I was cursed with itching feet which had carried me into strange places, but now they seemed content to rest easily in soft warm slippers, the while my fancy rebuilt old scenes and faces in the glowing embers.

Since the news of Pierre's death in far-away France, which had arrived simultaneously with the curious Latin work, written on human skin, which I have described in the translation that was made public some months ago, I had lapsed into apathy.

Pierre had been the last of my friends. Some correspondence had passed between us lately, but never a word in regard to his amazing ancestor, Wladislaw Brenryk of Ponkert, the werewolf whose diluted blood coursed in Garnier's veins.

That was one reason why I had never returned to the inn. Where lives the man who can converse calmly with son of warlock or vampire? Surely I am not the man who finds it possible, and so I closed the chapter, as I thought, and went away. But still I handled with a fearful de-

light the thought that once a thing of other spaces had been so close to me that I had hobnobbed in ignorance with the descendant of a fiend, and I surrounded myself with weird and occult literature of many kinds. I steeped myself in lycanthropical lore, I drowned my common sense in fantastic legend, myth, and fable, I became a recluse, living alone with my books and a single servant.

One evening late in March, I was speculating idly upon the peculiar recurrence in a work on philology that I had just finished, of the name Garnier, Grenier, or Gangere, which the writer had connected often with the *loup-garou,* or werewolf.

"What a peculiar coincidence," I thought, "that Pierre's surname should be one of these! I could tell that writer something that would interest him much," for I had not formerly revealed Pierre's name in full.

While I still smiled, on the heels of the furtive thought came a tapping on the door, and I heard Parker shuffling down the hall. Soon he returned, in his hand an envelope of yellow.

"A telegram, sir," he said, respectfully. "Willie Thoms brought it from the town, as the station agent believed it was urgent."

"Very well," I said, extending my hand for the message. "Give the boy a quarter, and let me alone," for I disliked being disturbed and Parker knew this well.

As he closed the study door, I tore open the envelope and found that which led to the most horrid adventure I had ever yet encountered in fact or fiction. It began:

Monsieur M———:

You will know without names who this is from. If you would aid an old friend in the direst of peril come at once to the inn that you know of. I feel that only you can save. In God's name, old friend, come at once; a week's delay may be too late.

P. G.

My first emotion was one of gladness. Pierre lived, and I should see him again. For the first time in months I felt cheery. But on rereading the cablegram, which had been relayed by wire from the terminal, I was struck by the agonized tone of the message, so foreign to Pierre's usually placid demeanor. Pierre was in danger, I was needed at once! Again I read, "a week's delay may be too late."

I rang for Parker, and when he came in sight at the end of the hall, called, "Pack my trunks at once. I leave on the morning train." Without waiting for a reply or question I shut the door, and prepared myself for bed.

2. *The Man on the Train*

IT IS not necessary to burden this narrative with minute details of the journey, for it will be lengthy enough at best. Suffice it then to mention only that the ride to Boston was without event, as also was the trip to Paris. I chafed and fretted, spending most of the time as far in the bow as I could place myself, as though I would be nearer to the journey's end than any other. I was first down the gang-plank, and in an hour's time was on the train, and on the last stage toward my goal.

It is necessary to change trains about ten miles out of Paris, and although I had a whole compartment to myself on the first train, the second time I was not so fortunate. I ran down the platform, but all the compartments were closed, signifying that no space remained, and as the wheels commenced to turn I discovered a hand that beckoned from a door. As it reached me I flung in my grip, scrambled in myself and shut the door.

There were two occupants already in the carriage, a slender woman gowned in black, who wore a veil that

concealed her features, and a small dapper little man about whom there was something repellent. I sensed animosity the moment I entered, and felt a surge of dislike in return. But he smiled and nodded politely enough in a smooth oily manner, saying slowly as though he were choosing his words, "You—are—agile—*Monsieur.*"

If his person was repugnant to me, more so was his voice. I made some conventional reply, and pretended an acute interest in my paper. Seeing that I was not to be drawn into conversation, he chose other methods of amusement.

Now it has always been my code to keep strictly out of others' affairs. One can not be positive what are another's motives in performing a certain act. Hidden influences are at work upon that person that are impossible for us even to dream of, and interference may be not only impertinent and unjust, but also dangerous to ourselves. Such it was in this case, but not wholly, for although I might have been spared some moments of mental anguish and terror, the end would have been much the same. I did not realize the true nature of my foe or I should never have left America. There I should have been safe, for there is a great expanse of moving water between that land and France.

As I sat reading my paper I could see that the woman was restless. She was continually glancing at me, as I could tell by the movement of her head, although the heavy veil hid her face. Apparently she and the little man were companions, though I received the impression that it was not friendship, but another bond that held them together.

The man addressed himself to her in words so intentionally offensive that I refuse to include them in my narrative. I half laid down my paper to interfere, but an imperceptible gesture of her hand warned me that it was none of my affair, and I resumed my reading. But I kept close watch of his actions.

Now he attempted to seize her hand, which she allowed him to do, but as he moved nearer to her, placing his knee familiarly, so that it pressed hers, she shrank away as far as she could to the end of the seat, and I felt that circumstances called for action.

I laid down my paper, rose, bowed as courteously as might be in the swaying carriage and inquired politely, "Is this man offending you, *Madame?*"

"No, *Monsieur,*" she said in a low tone. "He is my brother."

The little man leaped to his feet, yellow with passion.

"You lie, you slut!" he cried, and struck her in the face with his open hand. Turning to me he began, "Sir, I will thank you to mind your own affairs," but with the cowardly blow I leapt, and we rolled together on the floor.

The woman screamed as we fought.

With amazing strength he clutched my throat; my mouth opened, and my tongue protruded. Strange lights flared before my eyes, and I knew that I had met a power greater than my own.

Summoning my waning strength I struck again and again, but my hardest blows were nothing against my conqueror. Finally I gained my feet, face black, and with a roaring as of many waters in my ears. I staggered across the carriage blindly, and fighting for air crashed against the side.

Faintly through the darkening haze I saw the woman move toward us, felt cold air rush by my face, as the door swung open, felt tugging at the hands that throttled, and suddenly my enemy released his hold. With the last of my power I smote at the

little man, felt his teeth pierce my hand, and backward he plunged through the open door, rebounded once and lay quiet, soon far behind.

The woman lifted the veil, hesitated with her face averted, then seemingly with a great effort turned toward me and boldly looked into my face.

I searched her features with great disappointment. When one has plumed himself upon being gallant and chivalrous, it is indeed sad to find that the one for whom he has fought is neither young nor beautiful. Although I have long passed the prime of life, still I have a keen eye for beauty.

Not long could she withstand my gaze.

She expectantly eyed me for a moment as though, most strangely I thought, I was to show some sign of recognition, but the face, seamed by wrinkles, yellow and blotched, was entirely unfamiliar to me. Then she turned and watched the flitting landscape that passed so swiftly by.

3. *Regina's Story*

I WAS haunted by a vague sense of the familiar after a bit, something so indefinite that it seemed only a fancy, something that eluded me in a most aggravating fashion.

While I still watched the small oval of withered cheek that I could yet see, down a wrinkle, as from a dried-up creek courses the spring floods, flowed a drop of something bright and wet, followed by another and another that glittered in the fading sunlight. And I became aware that very quietly she wept.

I touched her shoulder.

"*Madame*," I said, "do not cry, I beg. I meant only to preserve you from annoyance. Surely this regrettable occurrence was not of my making. Never would I have interfered had I thought that it was not your wish. Shall I stop the train, so that we may return and search for him?" And I reached for the cord.

With a strength that was ferocious, she pulled me down into my seat again, and held me there.

"Stop the train? Rather pray that it may never stop, and pray to all the gods you know that he may be dead or dying. It is not for that I weep. Could I but know that he was mashed to pulp these would be tears of joy!" she cried. "No, my sorrow is from another cause. I can see in your face that you know me not, but I know you well, and once I was not a stranger to you. Look into my face if you will and tell me with your lips that which your eyes already have told me!"

Desperately she strained back the loose skin on her temples and forehead with her palms. The wrinkles smoothed out a bit, but that was all. I was, though pitying her evident distress, compelled to say, "I do not remember that we have ever met."

She beat upon the window-sill with her gloved hand, then buried her head in her arms, and burst into a storm of tears. Between her sobs came broken words.

"Old! Old! And I was so young! How horrible I am! How changed! Only eighteen, and I look a hundred. Once you knew me well, and I—I worshiped you. I was very young, and you were kind to the little girl that served you. Have you forgotten Regina Noël that waited upon the tables at the Blue Falcon?"

"Regina!" I gasped, scrutinizing that haggard face. Indeed I had known the little waitress, but she had been a child of thirteen when I had last seen her, and now this hag claimed to be a young girl.

"Impossible," I said. "There is no resemblance."

There was silence, and the train clacked on, rail joint after joint speeding by beneath us.

Up she flung her head, defiant.

"Yes, I was Regina, now I know not what I am, save that a devil has me for its slave!"

"The Devil!" My lips shaped the words.

"That *It* is! The Black One! The Enemy! He with whom you fought. Why, oh why did you stop him? Can't you see that it was a plot to kill you? It is a miracle that you escaped; he has planned this thing for months to bring you into his power, and now you have defeated his plans in the first struggle. But it will not be long. He has got me, and he will have you. I feel him following fast!"

"Hush, my child." I soothed and patted the heaving shoulder in the traditional clumsy manner of man soothing his women folk. "That man is dead. He will not trouble you again."

"Oh!" she cried: "it is not the insult that troubles me; I have known far worse than that. It is your dreadful fate that causes me to fear. He has dragged you to him over half a world to gain his ends, and you prate over my troubles."

"I do not understand," I said. "I came in answer to a letter from my friend Pierre, asking for help."

She looked up wofully. "I wrote that message," she replied. "Can you guess who forced me?" Another paroxysm of sobs racked her frail body.

She did not resist when I put my arm around her.

"Tell me about it, Regina," I begged. "I will help you."

"Nothing can help us now," she answered in a desolate tone. "We are lost, but I will tell you. It was five years ago, you went away and did not come again. Pierre watched and waited, but you never came, and I wished that you would return, for you were always so good to me. You remember how you would not let the cook beat me when I spilled the wine?"

I nodded.

"So for three years we waited, and then Pierre died. The manner of his passing was dreadful. It came so slowly that before we realized that he was weaker the sickness had him. Every day he moved more feebly until one night he sat in his armchair by the fire and could not get up again. We had to carry him to bed, and he never left it.

"He was brave, a noble one. Although he knew what ailed him he never told. I think he tried to shield us, and partly he succeeded. I was the one he confided in.

"'Regina,' he called, and I came. 'I am going tonight. I feel it. But before I leave you, listen. In yonder drawer is a book; bring it to me.'

"I did so, and he said, 'Regina, you must not read this. There is meat in here too strong for you. When I am dead, send it to my friend across the sea who fears a poor old man, dying all alone. Write that I loved him, and wish him well, but tell him not that I died like this.'

"Then he raised his poor feeble hand to his throat, and pulled a bandage away.

"'Look close, girl,' he whispered. 'What do you see?'

"'Two small wounds,' I said. 'Have you cut yourself?'

"'No, dear,' he answered. 'Be brave and not afraid, for much depends on you, and I can trust no one else. I am ridden by a demon every night, and this is the mark of the vampire.'

"Somehow I was not afraid. Perhaps I did not understand his whole meaning, and he went on:

"'Tonight I am to die. I feel it plainly. Do not weep for me, dear. I am old, I have lived, I shall die, but after I am dead'—his voice became stern—'do you follow my instructions without fail!

"'I am the descendant of a man who, four hundred years ago, became a werewolf. While planning revolt against his cruel master he was betrayed, and was forced to kill his own wife as a warning to the other members of the pack. His baby daughter was rescued from him, and later on all of the beasts were trapped and killed except the leader. Down the ages has his seed persisted, always menaced by the still living vampire, and out of each generation has one been taken in payment for the man's treachery to his master.

"'So it has been revealed to me, and I am the last of the line. I speak from the grave, and in warning. Tell my old friend that I am dead, but tell him nothing else, lest he should come hither and fall into the monster's power.

"'I am going to ask a dreadful thing for a girl to do, but I know you are brave enough to obey unquestioning, much braver than these fools that work here seeing nothing but their weekly pay.'

"'I am, sire,' I said proudly.

"'I knew it,' he smiled wanly. 'Hark! You will go now, write as I have told you, and mail the book and letter at once. When you return I shall be dead. Go to the priest, tell him all that I have told you under the seal of secrecy, and unless he does certain things I shall become a vampire after death, and shall live again, a monstrous thing. You and the priest must open the grave after I have been buried. Sever my head from my body; fill my mouth, nostrils and ears with garlic. Upon each eye lay a silver cross, and drive a silver nail through my heart. Then return the earth to the grave again and upon it pour boiling water and vinegar.

"'If you do this, the good God will bless you as I do, but if you fail, my curse shall be upon you! Now go, and do as I have said.'

"I left the room, wrote the letter and mailed it to you with the book unread. The Latin is strange to me," she admitted, with a touch of unconscious humor.

"When I returned to report my mission completed, I entered the room and saw that Pierre was dead as he had predicted, and there was another present, sitting on the bed. It was the man you fought with, and now you know why I am here. I failed in my promise, I am a slave, and you and Pierre are lost.

"The monster promised me great things, saying, 'Regina! Queen thou art in name, queen thou shalt be over my loyal subjects that I shall soon secure.'

"Merciful God in Heaven," she cried, leaping to her feet. "Is this the face of a queen? Am I in queenly garb?"

I pulled her down beside me. "Go on," I said huskily.

"The inn was closed after the funeral and never opened again. The Master lives there with one other, and people shun the place as haunted. He searched for the book, but never questioned me till you published the story.* Why did you do it? Why did you? How he obtained a copy I have no idea, but he has one, and in vengeance he swore your death. He has sworn to start a devil pack with you, and to add to it until all France is humbled by him.

"Sire, Hell is loose today, and there is no hope. I cabled you under his orders, and you know the rest. Now if you can escape, do so, but think no more of poor Regina!"

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* "The Werewolf of Ponkert," in WEIRD TALES, July, 1925.

4. *Pursuit*

She was pale and bloodless. I was about to speak when suddenly she whispered. "Hush, do you hear it?"

I listened, but heard only the train noises, and so replied, but she impatiently gestured for silence.

She opened the door, and together we looked back. Nothing was in sight, but she said, "I feel him coming. *Monsieur,* are you armed?" And then, "Too late, too late," as she pointed.

Far down the track behind us fluttered a thing monstrously formed, growing yet more huge as it reeled down the sky after the train. In shape it resembled a bat, but one of such tremendous size as has surely not been seen before, since man first dragged himself out of the mud and began to breathe air with lungs.

Rapidly it overhauled the rushing train, soaring high over trees, buildings and wires, slanting down again, dipping with effortless speed along the level lands, and gaining, always gaining, as it rocketed across the fields that we were passing.

Soon it paralleled our course, passed our coach and flapped onward toward the head of the train.

Passing around a curve, the train bent into a crescent, and from our window we could see the creature dip toward the windows of each coach, hold the position, and drop back to the next, searching for something or someone, and I did not need Regina's horror-stricken moan, "It is He!" to inform me for whom the monster searched.

The train straightened out, and we could no longer see ahead, but down the wind came shrill chirpings, almost too high in the scale of sound to be heard. Liquidly sweet, arrowy sharp and piercing, with a note of inquiry in the pitch, the stridulation came louder and nearer, and we were seen.

I felt the girl cringe against me. Beneath my protecting arm her body stiffened, and muscles set rigid. I was no less afraid than she, but it is the man's part in times of stress to hide fear from his women folk, so I patted her shoulder reassuringly and smiled. There was no mirth in the grimace!

It was four times the size of the fox-bat, largest known of the species, that I have seen in Java, but in many ways the two were similar. It possessed the same pointed muzzle, instead of the fluted nose-leaf that makes most bats hideously alien to one's conception of a face's appearance. Whiskers were present, on either side of the nostrils, whose flaring red contrasted strangely with the jet-black appendages.

Its six-foot body was bare in spots, otherwise covered with a mangy, dirty brown hair, shading to ash-gray along its under side. Mud caked in the matted fur, and not yet dry, made it seem more appalling.

Ten-foot membranes buffeted the air as train and terror drove on together. The whistle screamed for a crossing, and as if startled by the sound, the thing turned its head and stared at us again.

Imagine a bat's head the size of a small tub, and you have its dimensions. Picture if you can a mouth that mowed and gibbered at us, disclosing sharp white teeth, and above it eyes of evil in which lurked things unutterable.

Oddly there came into my mind that perhaps this was the very bat that had been lost in Hell, now newly released with something of that unearthly horror lingering in its eyes. I imagined the things it must have seen fluttering down those murky aisles, lost in the choking smoke, soiled and scorched by the lurid flames until it beat with throbbing wings into the free and purer air once more, with memories that nothing could ever wipe away!

What curious things come into our heads at the oddest times and most peculiar places!

Again the whistle shrieked, and with it mingled a most bitter wailing from outside. Suddenly the winged beast zoomed upward, overshadowing us with its mighty membranes, and blackness rushed to meet us. As we entered the tunnel I saw the creature rise almost perpendicularly to surmount the hill that we were passing through.

Regina shuddered as though released from a spell, and I recalled the power that had held the Hungarian numb in the sleigh when the werewolves pursued him along the river. With the thought came action. Although I had felt nothing of this paralysis I knew that I might be next, and it would be then too late to do what I had in mind. I opened my bag, garments flew over the compartment, as I searched for my automatic which I usually carry while traveling abroad. As I closed my hand on its chill metal we burst into the twilight. The dull red sun was cut in half by the hill we had pierced, and against its ominous glare a black dot flickered for a second.

We waited. Soon we saw our pursuer near the carriage. One gigantic wing finger scratched the windowpane, and while its wing was raised for another stroke and its filthy body was clearly exposed I poured six bullets into the junction of wing and trunk.

To the music of tinkling glass and eldritch squeaks of pain he danced in air, rose high, somersaulted over and over, and thudded to earth in a lashing huddle of leathery membrane.

The train rushed on. I hugged the girl beside me in ecstasy. "He is gone! The Master is dead!" I cried.

"No one will ever say that," Regina replied. "You can not kill him. Look!" And she drew her head back from the broken pane with dull wo written on her haggard face.

I stared back, and far behind bobbed a black shape like a large dog, running with a limp, but following with great speed.

Over plowed fields he ran, dipping out of sight and reappearing again farther in our wake, still coming on with the speed of the swallow.

And the sun went down.

5. *Surprizes*

THE night was creeping in upon us when we left the train, for although I knew that Pierre was truly dead I dreamed that perhaps I might avenge him. How this was to be accomplished I had no idea, but I felt certain that if the Master had gone to such labors to drag me across half a world he would not allow me to slip from him thus easily.

Still less did I know what to guard against, for the cunning of this being was beyond my power to comprehend. So, resolving to be constantly upon the alert, I strolled down the road toward the village, apparently at ease, but instead a quivering bundle of nerves, with every sense exploring the literal and mental blackness before me.

Regina walked at my side, her hand within the crook of my arm. Although she pleaded with me to hurry I knew it was useless. If I was to tilt with the Powers of Evil that night, as well in one place as another, and I fancied myself well armed.

So we slowly neared the village. Suddenly Regina stopped and gripped my arm.

"Listen," she whispered. "Do you hear it? He is coming!"

At first I heard nothing, but soon came a soft pattering of feet on the other side of the hedge that grew at the left of the road.

I could not see clearly in the dim light, but I had the impression that something was eyeing us through the hedge. Watching carefully I saw a dim shape bulk out from the shrubbery, and I knew from the old manuscript what it was.

My reading had given me knowledge to cope with this emergency. I reached down and picked up two sticks, while Regina cowered behind me. Holding them crossed I advanced resolutely upon the thing.

"Oh, vampire! Werewolf!" I cried. "Gaze upon this and fear. Behold this cross and tremble! Here is the Lord our God who died for us upon the tree! I conjure you in the name of the White Christ to vanish and trouble this land no more."

I confess I can not understand what followed. This incantation, so claim the books, was a sure charm, and never failed to work in many cases in which it was used. But in this case it did fail.

The beast launched himself at me, but rebounded from the hedge with a baffled raging cry.

In that moment I knew fear. Still I was thankful for my books, for one truth was holding good. I knew he could not pass the hedge.

But in my long absence what had befallen the hedge? My recollection told me that it extended around the field, almost to the village, but how had he entered? Somewhere there was a gap, but if we could reach the village before he could retrace his steps we were safe for the night, and the next day I would enlist the powers of holy men against this child of hell, and blast him back to whence he came.

I did not doubt that the exorcism was efficient, but perhaps I had made some mistake. Perhaps he was armored against minor spells, and if so I was defenseless. So thinking I hurried on. Life for more than myself was at stake if I failed.

Could I reach safety in time?

As we began to near the village I searched busily through my memory for further exorcisms, and one that the books had claimed to be of great efficacy I determined to try.

Again I paused, faced the hedge, this time tracing the sign of the cross in the air, and repeated in a loud voice:

"I exorcise thee, unclean spirit, in the name of Jesus Christ. Tremble, O Satan, enemy of the faith, thou foe of mankind who has brought death into the world, who has deprived men of life, and has rebelled against justice! Thou seducer of mankind, thou root of evil, thou source of avarice, discord and envy, disappear forever!"

A scream from Regina, and a dark shape plunging at the hedge was the only result of this curse, and with a frightful horror I realized the truth.

The power that fought against me was so anciently evil, so horribly unnatural, that only other magic as ancient as itself could prevail against it. Either that or the God or Gods that rule us are indifferent to human fates.

We hurried on. Along the muddy road we passed, slipping in the muck of a much-traveled country highway. I heard, as an undertone to our noisy splashes, three steps and a gap, a recurrent rhythm that kept pace with us on the other side of the hedge.

A stifled whine of eagerness that held a note of furious thwarted desire now brought the girl near to collapse. She became a dead weight upon me, and I could go no farther.

Vainly I urged the danger of our position. She could not or would not stir. The need for desperate haste was terrible, but she seemed very remote and unconscious of me or her surroundings. Finally I seized her by the shoulders and shook her mightily, crying I know not what, and then she spoke. It was a very wee, very

faint little voice, and although her sad, piteously marred face was only a few inches from mine, I had to bend nearer to hear at all.

She spoke, and the words were worlds away, "Don't—stay! Something—I don't know what, is happening——"

Then as she leaned against me I felt her body stiffen, she leapt away from me, her fingers widely spread as though pushing something from her, and screamed, "No! No! Ah, Master—not that!" And then to me, "Run!" And with the word she began tearing frantically at her clothing.

A glimpse I caught of snow-white shoulders that belied that aged face, and then I turned and ran, fled stumbling through the dark, slipping and falling in the mud, clawing my way through the mire, praying for a light ahead. For in my mind was coursing a wild, maddening sentence of the long-dead Brenryk's story: "When my body changed into a wolf I had all the terror of a wild beast for encumbering clothing!"

Behind me—thank God it was far behind!—there shrilled a long, high keening, a wailing shriek that held within it triumph and—despair!

I had not followed that road for years. I am old, the mud was clinging and heavy, and many times I fell. I heard no sounds across the hedge, but the silence was more menacing than a snarl.

Where was the Master, and upon what business was he absent?

The lights of the village began to gleam through the trees and across the fields, but as I picked myself out of the muck again I knew that I should never reach them, for leaping down the lane came something as large as a collie, running with a rabbitlike lope.

I swung up my gun; it spat dryly once, and was silent. The beast stopped short, then came on more slowly. I dared not turn my back, so while I menaced with the empty weapon I backed cautiously down the road. It came nearer. I shouted loudly for help, which seemed to frighten it, but only for a moment.

Then I recognized my surroundings. I threw the heavy automatic, heard it thud on flesh, turned and ran for the building at the roadside.

Behind me, racing feet that fell faster than the throbs of my wildly pounding heart. Before me, the closed door of the deserted inn, and as I reached the step a lurching creature charged from the side, and all three of us struck the door together!

It crashed in. I was thrown on the floor, the beasts having struck each other at an angle blocked the doorway, each struggling to be first!

I kicked the swinging door from where I lay. It slammed between me and those slavering jaws. I think that never before in all my life had I heard such a welcome sound as the clicking of that latch.

6. *A Night at an Inn*

SILENCE—inside the inn, silence and a haunting dread. For there were those that prowled without. I held my breath and listened. There was that odd rhythm of the injured creature, three steps grouped close together, a gap, felt rather than heard, and again three.

A rain of light pattering footfalls that passed like a wind about the grounds, and like the wind there were dolorous wailings also.

Interwoven into the fabric of terror these two were weaving came another thread of sound. A heavy pound of unshod feet that were falling dull and lifeless upon the earth.

My breath hissed loudly through my teeth, and I lost the newer sounds, but within me I knew, although I could not say how or why, that the being that tramped leadenly outside was beyond mortal passions,

and the weapons that men use against one another would not prevail against it.

And I suspected, nay, was almost certain that I knew *what* it was that strode automatonlike around the inn, and *who* it once had been!

The two that prowled were now three, and as though this had given them confidence they bunched together and struck the old door, a mass of fury. It creaked, gave, but held! And round again they flew.

Now, curiously enough, my mind perhaps slipping away from this peril (as I have read it is like to do in times of stress, one becoming calm and poised, who before was frantic), of a sudden my thought spanned time and space to old Hadley, far across the seas in Puritan New England.

I remembered how in the early days of that struggling colony, so beset by foes and forces, a little maid in her sleep heard tramping in the snow outside the palisade, and when awake the march did still persist. How the fear flew like pestilence through the fort, till all were awake and heard a steady tramp that passed and repassed around the building, till women sobbed in unison with the steady thud of marching feet. How a certain holy man, the Reverend Abner Kelton, did order lights to be brought, and Hadley became a blazing radiance through every window and loophole. Hymns were sung and prayers were voiced and with the dawn came silence. The people of Hadley saw that about the fort the snow stretched like a frozen sea to the forest, unsullied by print of foot.

Now, I had my own opinions as to the value of prayers against these creatures that besieged me, remembering well the unexpected result of my exorcism. I had never a voice for singing, and the hymn that seemed appropriate to the occasion was *Brighten the Corner Where You Are*. I had forgotten the words to this, but I lived up to the spirit of the title at least.

There was no such thing in this village as electricity, near though it was to Paris, and Pierre had always depended upon oil lamps and candles. With the light of a match I searched the gutted rooms, from which everything of value had been stolen, and found four stubs of candle, the longest of which was well under two inches, and a small lamp half full of oil. With these I hoped to bridge the night till dawn.

I felt easier at once, such is the effect of light in dispelling the unseen terrors that haunt us all. To you that read this it will seem strange that I thought so belatedly of lights. You may contend that the normal reaction of a man beleaguered in such a manner would be toward unhampered vision. Granted, but I was not normal. I was no longer a reasoning being like yourself, but a quivering bundle of nerves, most horridly atremble at the sound of paws padding about in the night. I could hardly think two consecutive thoughts on the same subject, until welling from the subconscious came the half-forgotten story read so long ago, with its curious analogy to the present.

After the lights were lit I felt more secure, and examined the fastenings of the doors and windows. The glass was gone, but there were heavy wooden shutters barred across the spaces. Two swung open and the floor was covered with dry leaves that had blown in through the openings. These I secured, noticing as I did so that in one pile there was a hollow where something had laired.

The place reeked with a sickening, musky odor, and I felt nauseated. The rear door was rotten, and the lock that held it was rusted.

My situation was desperate, for there were no weapons, nor anything

that could be used as such. The house had been systematically looted, it was plain, and I found myself in much the same plight as had been Brenryk, the Hungarian—defenseless.

But I consoled myself with the thought that I was much better prepared to cope with my enemies than he had been. Was I not armed by the knowledge of the ages? What though my exorcisms had failed in my most desperate need? The older and more potent lore had prevailed, and I knew with certainty that I was safe while the light lasted. It is written in the ancient Persian hymn to Ormuzd (pure spirit of light) that

"Those that follow Ahriman
Shall fear him!
Those who walk with me
Shall by my power conquer him!"

So I waited for the dawn while the candles flickered, though the air was very still.

There were night noises yet, some of evil portent, and others that seemed innocent. The building was full of creaking joints, and small sounds that a too eager ear might translate as creeping things almost ready to pounce resolved themselves into natural noises after all.

Still the pattering persisted, and that dreadful sodden pounding of heavy feet came now from the rear of the inn, and again lumbered by the door. Then came an ominous hush, and I sensed that the storm was about to break.

A light stir overhead brought dust sifting down from the decaying plaster. Simultaneously with the sound of someone walking in the room above there was a mighty ripping crash as the rotten door rent from its hinges and thundered down!

Over it, as it crumbled into punk, limped a slavering beast; and behind it a hulking brute, human in form but expressionless and clumsy, moved woodenly through the doorway.

The dark beast came with a lurching leap, but when it entered the circle of light, flinched and cried out throatily. Still it pressed forward, but I could see that every movement gave it pain.

While it came, the man behind it moved also, eyes fixed in a kind of dumb adoration upon the Master, but as he gradually slowed and stopped, not daring to enter more fully, the newcomer halted also, and together they retreated into the sheltering night.

I was physically and mentally sick at the sight, for in that bloated evil face, brutalized by the filthiest vices and seared with the seal of corruption, I recognized the dearest friend I had ever known, Pierre Garnier, a living dead man!

I stepped back beside the lights and collided with a soft warm body behind me that moved.

My heart almost stopped. I whirled, ready to fight for my life, and Regina stood there bravely facing me. She was swathed in a heavy portiere from one of the upper rooms, and her pitiful eyes begged dumbly for protection. I took her hand in mine and together we faced the foe.

7. *Shadows All!*

Now the wind through the doorway flickered the candles even more, and Life and Death played a game upon the walls with shadows as their pawns, and the stake two human souls!

It was a scene that pen can do no more than outline. A brush wielded by one who habitually deals with masses of color in his art might have captured that eery moment, but words are too inflexible. Black and White Magic were battling, Light and Shadow were at war, and the prize for which they strove awaited the outcome with no power either to fight or flee!

Shapeless forms crawled upon the

walls, darting at us but retreating to their corners with reluctant squirm. Night was welling in through the open door. Darkness and all the evil that is held within it crouched just inside the threshold.

The Master resumed his human form again, his left arm hanging limply at his side. The shoulder was a mass of blood, stiffening in the cool breeze.

As the candles flickered, horrid phantoms hurtled across the ceiling, and close in pursuit rippling banners rushed. Banners of Light, fiercely intolerant of evil, scattering that tattered host of Night. The little points of yellow waved wildly, but the lamp, protected by a glass chimney, burned steady and true.

As the shadows raced upon the wall those in the dark wavered, now edging toward us under the protection of the sable wings that were spread over them, now wincing back from the demon-frightening light, when the wicks flared up once more.

I watched one candle-stub that was almost gone. "When that dies," I thought, "will they rush us? Will the remaining lights be strong enough to defend?"

It burned lower and more fitfully. There was only a rim of wax like a ring unburned. Then the wick fell into the melted wax, and the flame expired. The shadows surged in, and the watchers took one step nearer, that was all.

They dared not come closer while the light lasted, but it was failing fast, and the writhing coils of night seemed to know, and ravened silently for our lives.

We waited—what else was there to do? We could not flee elsewhere, we could not defend ourselves, there was nowhere to hide that they could not reach us. So while the frisking phantoms danced stealthily about us, and the dreadful prowlers leered, as bravely as might be we waited.

I looked at the girl and she smiled back at me, touching a bruise on her cheek that was beginning to blacken. The realization was forcibly brought home to me that this was the mark where the gun had struck.

I pitied her, but she misunderstood my look.

"Do not fear me," she said. "He can not change me now. I am resisting his power, and he is trying hardest to beat down your guard. Submit and he will call you to him, where he can reach you! Resist, and we may yet escape him!"

I fought back the growing lassitude that was overcoming me. How I longed for rest!

"Sleep!" I was commanded. "Fool, to pit yourself against me! Rest and forget the world! Come to me and I will give you rest," the wheedling voice insisted.

Leadenly I stepped forward. Another candle died, and my enemy came to meet me.

Then it seemed that invisible hands raised a barrier between us. Although I pressed forward, and the third flame went out, I was firmly urged back against the wall and held there.

Nothing could be seen, but the air seemed palpitant with life. Life that exulted joyously in the pleasure of existing, life that pulsed with a definite purpose that would not be denied. Regina felt it, and her old-young face looked piteously into mine, and with a motion of protection I placed my arm about her shoulders and drew her close to me. Side by side we faced the end.

The thing that had been Pierre ran its red tongue over pointed teeth and watched us. Seemingly he did not fear. His brutish face held no gleam of intelligence. Only unspeakable vice and ravenous desire were written there. And this was the friend I had loved!

But he that had brought death and destruction to so many, that dread

personification of loathsome evil, at last realized what fear meant.

The oppressive feeling lessened; I felt free to move again, and once more I thought coherently. A deadening weight had been lifted from my brain.

Corpuscles of lambent cool flame began to gather. Thickly clustering in the room, they slipped through the shutters that barred the broken windows, and through the doorway. One passed through the Master's body. He cringed, and it lingered as though inspecting him carefully before entering farther. Even through the walls they came, and watching them we marveled at their numbers.

"What can they be?" I whispered to the girl.

"Wait," she said. "I think I know."

Now about each nucleus of light a mist formed like fog around a street lamp. It thickened, coalesced, and bodies began to appear. Their garments represented all periods and countries.

Side by side, near an imperious cavalier of Spain stood a gipsy wanderer gay in spotted neckerchief, polished leather, and gold coin buttons. Farther away, I recognized a Roman gladiator with his hand on the shoulder of a Persian spearman, whose harness was that of Alexandrian conquests. An ugly crone with hooked nose and protruding teeth tottered, and was supported by a Chinese bonze. Near them I saw the brown of Eastern faces and the green robes held as a holy color by the Moslems. And in the breast of each glowed dimly the central fires.

"It is the rising of the slaves," said Regina. "Here are those that have suffered from the Master's rule. The spirits of the dead have come to save us. Oh God, I thank Thee! Pray, sire, and give thanks, for we are saved!"

"Perhaps," I replied. "Look! The last candle fails."

The shadows rushed in again, but the Master and the Undead beside him did not advance. They were held in their tracks, and though they longed to flee they stood glaring at the accusing crowd, Pierre stupidly shaking his head at us.

One of this whispering company was more opaque than the others. In the throes of some gigantic struggle, he sobbed and panted, his nebulous light growing dim as he became more visible. As his shape became more pronounced the myriad radiant corpuscles waned in brilliance as though he was draining them of force.

The red of a British soldier's uniform faded to pink, the knight's armor, translucent at best, became gauzy, then transparent and disappeared before my eyes. Together the green robes of the Arabs and the yellow of the Chinese bonze vanished, and in their place was empty air.

One by one the strange throng became invisible, but I knew that each was still present, giving his all to his comrade, who was becoming more tangible every second.

Now more than half had gone.

The Master stood in the doorway still, but there was a difference. The hunter had become the hunted! As he had frozen others in their tracks while he worked his will upon them, so he was held in a grip from which there was no escaping.

But he was not submitting weakly to his former victims. He was fighting valiantly for his life. Great beads of moisture burst out upon his forehead as he hurled his mighty will at the shape that grew still more plainly human. His tremendous mental powers struggling against the combined strength of the now wholly invisible throng, buffeted the half-man hither and thither about the room.

Caught first in one eddy of force and then another he hurtled like a wind-blown leaf, and when he struck walls or floor there was no sound. He was not yet solid.

It was a mighty scene, one whose like has never been seen before. The unbelievable and impossible was occurring before our eyes. It was no less than revolution! Evil that had triumphed since unknown times was being overthrown, and by agencies that once were human.

I felt proud that I was man, one of the dominant race, and in a surge of power I gave my feeble mite to the struggle. Since obviously it was the Master's desire that the stranger should not become strong, I willed with all my force that he should. I like to feel that it was the added energy I gave that tipped the scales so evenly balanced, and I hope that it was.

Suddenly, without warning, a man as humanly solid as you or I stood in the center of the room. Dressed he was in harsh blue cloth, about his throat was fur, and upon his head a high hat of the same material.

With the transformation came vibrant joy that pulsed and throbbed through the room, and I knew that the invisible ones were rejoicing.

Visibly the Master aged. His power was ebbing from him, and the strength that had held back Time down through the ages was passing. The years were rushing in upon him.

Now the silence was broken for the first time since the door had been broken in. During the period of waiting, and through the battle of wills, nothing but the hoarse breathing of the living corpse was to be heard, but now the room echoed to long wild peals of eery laughter.

The stranger was giving vent to merriment, and at the sound we shivered. There were revenge, and joy, and death in the cry!

Then he spoke, and one of the strangest happenings of that remarkable night occurred. Although he spoke in unfamiliar language his meaning was clear to me.

"I have returned," he said in a slow, icy voice. "Do you know me?"

The Master did not answer, but I could see that he was shaken. His body visibly shrank, his hair grew white, and a tottering senile old man stood in the doorway, beside the dull uncomprehending monster that he had made of Pierre.

"Before I died I prayed that I might be given you for mine. I have waited for many years. I bided my time where I was sent to expiate my sins. Others I met, more sinned against than sinning. Together we have come. Are we known to you?"

A croak replied, "Vermin of the earth! Yes!"

"Then," cried the stranger, "prepare, for now you die!"

The Master stood more erect, with something of his old pride and might, and waited.

8. *Vengeance at Last!*

THEN the old formula of transmutation was gone through again. The actions that I was so familiar with from the old manuscript were repeated, and I saw for the first time a werewolf at the moment of change.

He tore off his suit of blue, and stood a very giant before us. Then he fell upon all fours, his limbs withered and became long, lean shanks. His hands grew claws and became pads. Hair sprang out upon his body. His head narrowed, mouth widening and ears becoming pointed. His eyes were bloodshot with fury, as he howled in a long dismal tone.

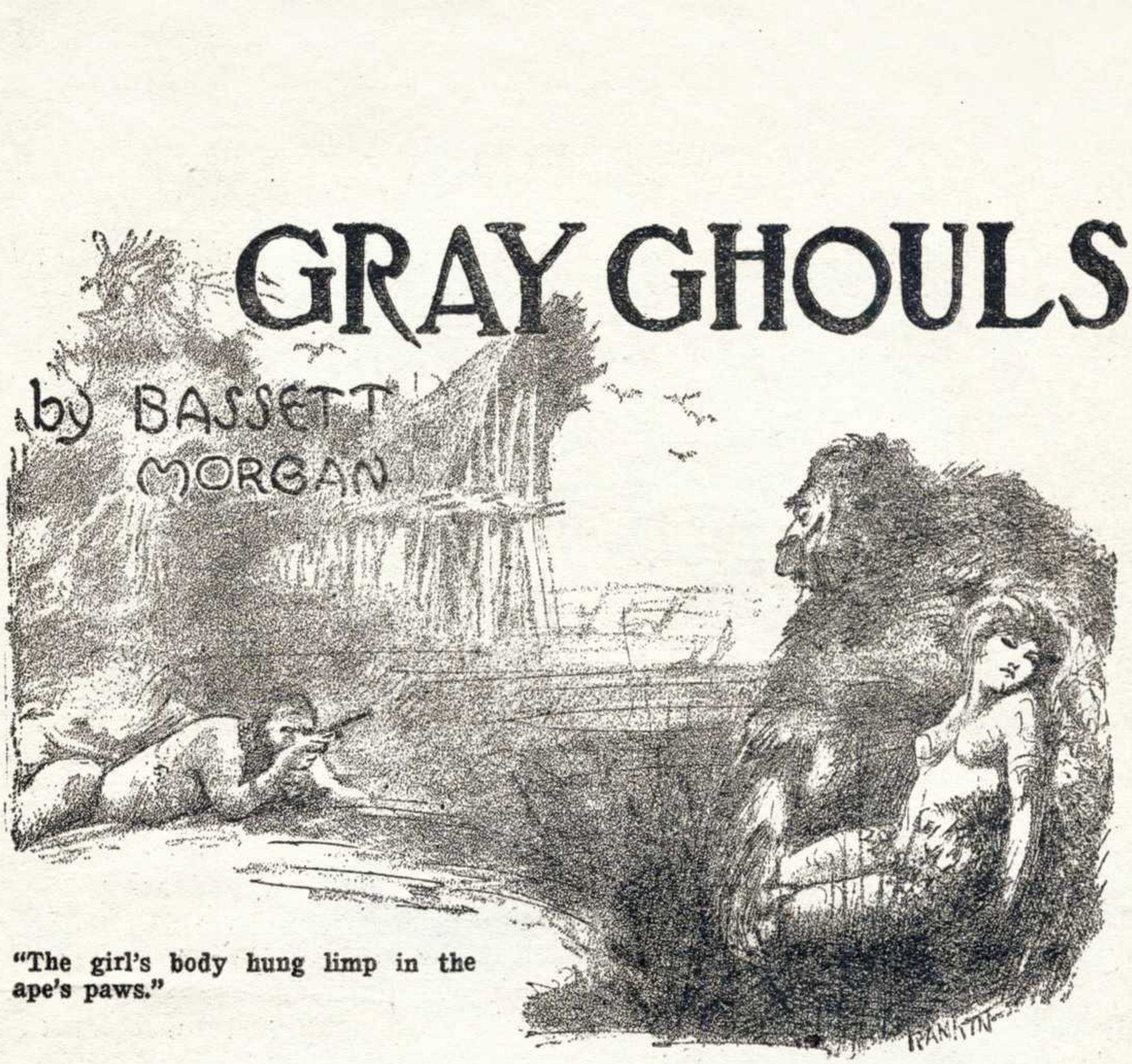
He was now a beast, and as I formed the words in my mind, I recognized my savior.

"Wladislaw Brenryk!" I gasped,

(Continued on page 141)

GRAY GHOULS

by BASSETT MORGAN



"The girl's body hung limp in the ape's paws."

WHEN there was a job to be done, especially adventurous, entailing skilful diplomacy and undoubted peril, Tom Mansey was summoned partly because he knew Papua as well as a white man may, partly that he seemed indifferent to probable torture and death meted out by head-hunting savages to intruders in hidden empires of the hinterland.

The stout officials sat about a table viewing evidence which had promulgated fresh indignation. It had been seized from the trophies of a globe-trotting curio-hunter who parted reluctantly, indignantly from it, and spouted wrath and threats of reprisal. It was a mummied human head no larger than a man's doubled fist, beautifully cured, furnished with balls of cat's-eye chalcedony in the sockets, lips sewn in a kissing pout. The shocking feature was its abundant and flaming red hair. Nowhere in Papuasia is red hair natural to a native. The idea of a mummied head with ruddy locks threatened the fragile foothold of white civilization on those dark flanks of a land as treacherous as the panther it most resembles.

Mansey added the final note of nausea to the assemblage.

"A woman's head, I should say. Whether a white woman or not I don't know. The curing might brown the skin. This hair is silky, rather fine and waved, certainly not bleached. By the manner of lip-sewing I should say it comes from the north-shore people. I never saw nicer work."

It was uncanny, horrid, weird, to hear him enthuse over the craft of cannibalistic savages, but his remarks were crisp when they asked him to investigate the source of supply, take feasible measures to halt barter in heads, intimate to the most indom-

itable, hellishly cunning race of blacks that earth endures, that selling human heads to tourists was indelicate, inadvisable and immoral.

"I'd suggest right here that you'd better stop tourists buying heads. So long as they pay big money for them, the heads will be forthcoming, and since heads with Nordic-colored hair bring fatter prices, the natives will swoop down on the ports and clean out our little intrusion of white exploiters in one whirlwind of savagery run amuck. However, I'm interested. Using cat's-eye quartz for eyes is a new wrinkle that shows intelligent progress in art."

Mansey crossed the room in a weighted silence and traced a forefinger on a wall-map, traversing from the Curlews south of Sarong, then to the great island of Papua marked on the north New Guinea.

"What white men or women have gone into here in the last decade and who's missing?" he asked of the company's clerk who had said least and done most to assist in the investigation. The clerk flipped pages of a book and wrote rapidly on slips of paper which he gave to Mansey.

With these data, Mansey set out with a power launch and a flock of Tonga boys in small outrigger proas hollowed from hardwood in a manner that has not changed since the sea spewed forth the South Sea Islands. Mansey was lightly armed. Weapons are small insurance against the peril of penetrating tribal villages of treacherous Papuasian black men, and he knew that where that ruddy-haired head was cured and fitted with quartz eyes, were intelligence and barbed cunning.

He had little information on which to base conjecture. Official files mentioned a Scotchman, Andrew Keith, who had gone native thirty years before, taken to the hinterland and never reappeared. Besides Andrew Keith, one other white man was in that locality to which Mansey was bound. His name was Homer Mullet, he had been a surgeon in London, got into disrepute and after a brief attempt to establish himself in Port Moresby, went north, evidently had luck with the natives and sent down frequently for drugs of surgical nature and new cases of instruments. His latest order was not more than six months old. With this meager information on possible sources of red hair Tom Mansey navigated the treacherous tide rips and cross currents and after weeks of tentative questioning located the lagoon where Homer Mullet was reported to have established himself as a sorcerer of greater magic than any native chieftain.

LEAVING his Tonga boys and their proas outside, Mansey and a native launch man entered the reef jaws of white coral just when dawn turned the world pearl and the sea was shimmering opal. Across the lagoon were the triangular huts fringed with tinkling shells, a fire burning on the beach, cooking pots steaming over it and the flower-decorated savages who shouted yowls of welcome. His launch churned bubbles in water clear as air, shining like green flame. Beneath were sea-gardens indescribably beautiful and menacing, tinted coral, waving fern weeds, wide-open flanges of tridacnas that can take off a man's foot if he steps into one, pretty little fish clustering and scattering like particles of an exploding glass ball. The air was hot and moist, perfumed by flowers, thick with the stench of rotting river swamp, pungent with seatang, the mingled scents of Papua's breasts teeming with desire, unforgettable as the hells it transcended.

With a feeling of high adventure, Mansey sent the launch close to a crude causeway jutting between the nipa-thatched huts, knowing the

yelps of painted, spear-pronged savages might change at a breath to cries of blood-lust and battle. His heart pounded with the spice of the thing and another discovery. Sitting in state near the fire, remaining seated while the savages danced and leaped in childlike frenzy, was the white man he sought.

A dozen black hands reached to help him to the landing stage. The center of a swarm of rowdy young warriors hideously glorious in necklaces of human knuckle-bones, shark's teeth, crests of Paradise plumes, he was led to the fire and an avenue cleared down which he walked to the white man who was distinctively unornamented except by flower garlands, a collar of many strands of pearls, and pearl strings looped to his midriff.

"I'm Tom Mansey," he said, "and I suppose your name is Homer Mullet. I've been a month or two finding you to have a little talk."

"Mansey," commented Mullet without rising or offering his hand, "seems to me I've seen your name on the company's notations. Sit in for breakfast and make yourself comfortable. I'm pretty chief here, and as long as we agree you can sleep easy. There's turtle stewing and they've learned to cook it white-man fashion. It's good to hear English again. You haven't by any possibility some recent gramophone records, have you?"

Mansey had. He breakfasted on scraped coconut cream and turtle stew, a little fruit and remarkably good coffee and was patient while Mullet pumped and probed him for world news and port gossip.

He and Mullet ate alone. The crowd had dispersed to a farther fire and cooking pot. The women were invisible in the huts. Mansey had opportunity to observe many things, a garden of sorts for that wilderness, an almost new *lagi-lagi* house for the men, and that Mullet's abundant hair curled to his shoulders but was so dark brown as to be almost black. Otherwise the renegade surgeon was a giant in stature, growing too fat and slightly insane, which Mansey expected. No white man can fight Papua. The land gets under his skull and behind his eyes. It drugs and stultifies his morale and finally kills his soul. That had evidently happened to Mullet. But his talk was rational. Mansey saw the slender, tapering fingers always playing nervously with the pearl strands, and the shifting prominent eyes. He had been a man of character and personality, a brainy intelligence, sensual-mouthed, and his good looks spoiled by a flattened nose and indulgence which over-hampered his body.

"You'll stay a few days?" he asked.

"I'd like to," Mansey told him.

"You can have a house. Anything else?" Mullet's smile was suggestive and Mansey shook his head.

"The fact is I came for your help in halting the sale of heads to white tourists, if possible." Mansey told in detail the new menace which had leaped to formidable proportions and of the one ruddy-haired head which had started the rumpus.

"So you, knowing something of heads," said Mullet, "recognized the lip-sewing and came north. They know that I'm here, and that Sandy Keith left his red-headed offspring in these hills, eh?"

"I suspected something of the sort. I suspected you."

This man was clever, also friendly. Mansey wanted that amiable feeling to continue and he had no hope of fooling Homer Mullet about his mission. Frankness might serve where guile would antagonize.

"You flatter me," said Mullet, laughing. "I start no line of devils down here, my friend. Besides, my hair isn't red."

"But the heads——" began Mansey. Mullet silenced him.

"I've no doubt my fellows do trade heads. They cure them. I can't stop that, but I have managed to put the fear o' God into them enough to confine their head-gathering to enemies and killing them outright before they begin. One thing I'll admit: there isn't a fresh one in the village. Look at the houses."

They strolled abroad and Mansey saw that the heads on display were old, rather green and misted with mold. Wooden figures carved grotesquely were plentiful. The village was clean, the houses new, there was evidence of sanitation and order unusual to natives. Yet instinct told Tom Mansey he was hot on the trail of trouble.

He was sure of it when at one hut there was a commotion and he saw a young girl struggling with older women and caught a glimpse of a head of glinting gold curled in cloudy beauty. Then amid shrieks of the women she was dragged inside and hidden. Mullet laughed.

"Bleaching a new queen," he observed. "At present I am a widower after a fashion. That shock you?"

"No." Mansey shook his head. "It isn't good for man to live alone, especially in savage lands. That new queen is a beauty."

"Six weeks in a darkened hut bleaches them like mellow ivory, and she's been kept from betel-chewing, or having her teeth filed. Making wives to order is feasible here, Mansey. Old Sandy Keith knew that."

"He is dead?" asked Mansey quickly.

"He is dead, and I inherited a lot of his troubles along with his trained apes. Sandy was quite a scientist. He was bent on learning the language of orang-outangs and had a flock of them. I have them now, nicely trained. You'll see."

Mansey was relieved at the conversational change, and puzzled. The orang-outang is a formidable simian, and he knew little about them except that they would clear the jungle in their vicinity of smaller monkeys and birds on sight. Mullet's laugh was unpleasant, yet Mansey fancied it sounded strange because laughter was not often loosed in that place. He sensed a sinister secret behind this bland talk of Mullet, and he knew instinctively that he was being entertained nicely to hide that secret, as well as Mullet's almost pathetic joy in companionship of his own race and kind.

THAT night he watched a dance at the *lagi-lagi* house and the ritual of initiation of young men ripe for manhood—the ritual that would enable them to take wives and heads. It was not new to Mansey, but he hated the evident relish of Homer Mullet over the stoicism of young men enduring greatly. He watched through a haze of the final orgy, until satiated with strong drink and blood-lust they finally dropped inert and lay like a strange harvest of death as dawn flowed over the hills and blazed on the sea.

He went to the hut they had given him, but did not sleep. The settlement was lifeless at that hour except for a few older women at their housekeeping and cooking. He thought of the girl in the bleaching hut who would be Mullet's queen, and was sorry for her, needlessly. He remembered that Mullet had said he was a widower at present, and during the dance in the *lagi-lagi* house he had confided drunken details of his rule and the reign of Sandy Keith.

"He lorded it, Mansey. Had several wives, and I married one of his daughters, a red-headed she-devil. She had all the beauty you'd ever find in a woman, but she was worse than native. She tried to kill me a

dozen times, knives, poison, sorcery, until——''

Mullet had laughed horridly. Tom Mansey had no doubt in the world that the red-headed wife of Homer Mullet was killed, probably murdered. It was not his concern, but it sickened him. He knew that he was on the track of that forbidden traffic in heads, yet no nearer a solution of the puzzle would be presented if he tried to halt it.

That day he slept fitfully and awoke after the noon heat to find Homer Mullet astir. Hearing his voice, Mansey looked from the hut door and saw Mullet coming down the trail of white crushed coral followed closely by a huge gray shape that loped along in the way of the great apes, paws trailing at its knees, and Mullet was talking to the creature, which seemingly answered by uncouth guttural sounds.

He hailed Mansey. ''Going to take a look-see at my queen. Come along?''

It seemed diplomatic to go along and Mansey came down the notched log a little on guard because of the great ape.

''Sheba won't bother you,'' said Homer Mullet. ''She's jealous of women but not men. I've got to get her acquainted with this girl, whom, by the way, I've named Cleo, short for Cleopatra.'' Mullet enjoyed the joke loudly, and the great ape showed her big teeth in a wide-mouthed grin and an uncanny cackle.

''Shut up!'' yelped Mullet. The effect was magical. The ape's eyes showed shame, even grief, and she hung her head, but when Mansey looked back he thought she was snarling.

When they reached the hut where the potential queen was being bleached and beautified, Sheba the ape suddenly darted and swung to its roof-peak, and no commands of Mullet would make her descend.

''All right, you jealous old she-monk, take a look-see from up there and you'll see a real beauty. Bring out the girl!'' he called to the scrawny old woman who peeped from the door.

On the roof, Sheba chattered angrily as Mullet repeated the command in native. To Mansey the experiment seemed considerable of a risk. As the child appeared in the hut doorway, Sheba showed jealousy. The girl was the prettiest Mansey had ever seen, her rounded body outlined in scarlet stain, her only covering a waist fringe of red and white blossoms.

Homer Mullet glanced at her, then beckoned to the ape on the hut roof and commanded in lurid curses, which Sheba not only ignored but chattered back her raging resentment.

''Look here,'' howled Mullet, ''you'll come down and behave or I'll get the whip. This girl is your master-lady, hear what I say? You'll treat her nicely and none of your tricks like last time. You had your chance, you she-devil! And you made hell for everybody. You know what happened to you then, and it'll be worse next time. I'll make a crocodile of you—understand? You know how you hate water and the muggers. Well, you behave or your next incarnation will be a mugger. Now come down and kowtow.''

Mansey listened in astonishment and something of fear. The she-ape was powerful enough to tear a man limb from limb, and she was roused to fury. Her eyes shot green fire, her teeth flashed and ground on themselves. The pretty little bride was gray-skinned with terror and dropped to the ground, her golden eyes a wild appeal. Mullet had been drinking heavily all night and was still drunk. His face grew purple-red, his eyes were bloodshot, the veins on his neck stood out and throbbed. But the ape

defied him and in the end he snarled a command to take the girl inside, and strode off beckoning Mansey to follow to a couch by a shaded nook at the jungle edge.

There he imbibed more fermented coconut juice and gradually calmed to coherency which was no less frightful in its revelations than his exhibition of rage.

"That ape is near human. I'd say she *is* human. Old Keith made a study of them. I went him one better. I gave them brains. You saw that she was jealous, didn't you? Well, I'm afraid of her. Six months ago she killed my bride, another red-headed beauty like this one. I've got to prevent that, Mansey. Somehow I've got to keep her from this girl."

"Why not do away with the ape?" asked Mansey, more because some reply was expected than as a suggestion.

"I dare not. I've got seven of them trained, equipped with brains, thinking brains. They're my bodyguard. Without them I wouldn't last here. Oh, I know these blacks don't love me! I'm not that great a fool that I'd feel safe long. The she-apes are always near. You don't see them, but they don't let me out of their sight. I made a mistake with Sheba, though. Sheba was the name of that red-haired she-devil of a wife that tried to do me in. I remember telling you about her last night. Well, Sheba loved her red hair and beauty. She loved me too damn well. And God, how she hates being a monkey! But that was no idle threat about the muggers. I've never tried that, but I will. I'll make a crocodile of Sheba, so help me God, if she touches this new girl."

"Mullet, you're about as drunk as I've seen a man. Better quit that stuff or you'll be seeing monkeys," said Mansey.

Homer Mullet laughed long and loud.

"You don't believe that, eh? Well, I don't blame you. But didn't you hear why they did for me in London? No? Well, I'll tell you. I took the brain of a boy dying with consumption and transplanted it to the head of a half-wit homicide. And by God, I made a success of it! And did they hail me as the discoverer of a new trail in surgery, and see as I saw, a way to empty our asylums and make use of incurables? They did not. They said I was crazy, they disgraced me. I barely escaped an asylum myself. That's why I came out here and kept my hand in. And I've done it time and time again. There was plenty of opportunity. The battles gave me subjects for experiment, and many a head is mummied and sold whose brain is still doing excellent service in a strange body. That's what I've done."

Mansey was staring at Mullet the surgeon, who gloated over his own skill. It was unbelievable, yet except the wrath which shone in his eyes, Mullet's appearance was convincing.

"But trying the ape business was new. And possibly it was immoral. Sheba tried so many times to kill me, and one night when I was sleeping she almost got me. I struck in self-defense, stunned her and saw myself as a murderer. You may think murder a small thing to a man like me. It isn't. I've never killed. I didn't kill then. The she-ape that Keith had trained and which liked me was tearing the hut to pieces when she heard the row inside, and before I could get a gun she had snatched the body of my insensible Sheba. You won't care for details of what happened. I hadn't a weapon and I grabbed a bottle of chloroform which was handy and tried to brain the ape. The bottle broke and she was deluged. It

acts quickly on them, Mansey. And something seemed to crack in my brain as I saw the unconscious ape and the dying woman. Well, the ape is Sheba. Now you know. I'm a fool not to kill her, but it's gone farther than that with me. I liked Sheba. And she cared enough for me to prevent my ever taking a second wife. More than that, she has somehow communicated to the other orang-outangs her jealous guardianship.

"I can't slaughter all the apes in the jungle, and they haunt me. Sheba has managed to people the land with gray ghouls who watch me night and day. Dante never conceived the hell of torture that I'm living through, Mansey."

IN THE tropic heat, Homer Mullet shivered and sweat broke cold on the forehead of Tom Mansey. Through terrific repulsion overwhelming him, he found himself sorry for the man who had made his own hell with more ingenious cunning than cannibal head-hunters could have devised for him.

"Mansey, if you could tell me a way out, I'd hang these pearls on your arm. An emperor's ransom, Mansey, for a plan to rid myself of this hell and live in peace."

Mansey was silent. The avalanche of horror had come so suddenly he could not yet grasp the thing. He assured himself it was the talk of a maniac, wildly horrible, yet in spite of reason he was convinced. And sifting through the horror was the fact of those red-haired heads drifting down to be bartered. If what Mullet said should be true, he was no nearer accomplishing what he had come to do. The authorities would not believe this tale nor could he halt the barter and trade.

"What became of the—the head—of Sheba?" he asked, licking dry lips with the tip of his tongue.

"They stole it from me. And I had made a job of that head, was rolling drunk when I did most of it. I put eyes——"

"Cat's-eye quartz?" asked Mansey. Mullet nodded.

"I've got it in the boat," said Mansey. "That was the one that caused the trouble. It was nicely finished."

Mullet stared at him.

"For God's sake, hide it, Mansey. Perhaps Sheba——"

He did not finish, for swinging down from tree branches overhead, the great she-ape stood before them.

Mullet ripped out an oath and added, "You heard what I was saying, you——"

Mansey fancied he heard the sound of a guttural word of speech and he leaped to his feet, ready to run for cover. The ape regarded him a moment with her alert gaze, then reached a paw, caught his shoulder and flung him, as if he were a child, at Mullet's feet.

"Better behave, Mansey," commented Mullet. "She's heard what I said. She was old Keith's daughter, remember, and he taught all of them his own tongue. If you speak French now, we might manage——"

He looked at Mansey enquiringly. Mansey shook his head.

"Very little. I do comprehend '*sauve qui peut,*' however, and it seems appropriate to this situation."

"A fine chance," snarled Mullet, as he looked about him. Mansey's gaze followed that survey and again he felt the chill of fear. In the thick tangle of lianas and jungle growth he caught glimpses of gray shapes watching them, swinging in grotesquely airy flight from tree to tree, a company of gray apes, the formidable "men of the woods" known to the world as orang-outangs.

"My harem," was hissed from Mullet's lips. "Each one equipped

with the brains of a woman I selected as a wife, sealing her doom at the hands of this she——'' The epithets he applied to Sheba were unspeakably vile. Mansey looked in apprehension at Sheba, but her eyes had not changed expression. Evidently there were a good many curses of port dives and docks not included in her knowledge of English. In place of anger, the eyes held something of the love-loyalty seen in the eyes of a faithful dog for its master. She squatted beside Mullet, took his hand and stroked it with her black paw, then held it to her cheek. Mullet jerked it away with an expression of disgust, and the great ape whimpered sorrowfully.

''You see?'' snarled Mullet. ''Yet we must talk. How about those gramophone records? Start a row going——''

''They're in the launch,'' said Mansey. ''I'll get them.'' But when he rose, the ape caught his ankle, reaching with no apparent effort, and Mansey was jerked to the ground. Then, throwing back her head, Sheba displayed her fangs in a wide-mouthed and unmistakable grin. Mansey realized that he had walked into a trap, that only by cunning could he escape from the dread company of gray ghouls which Mullet the surgeon loosed in that jungle. Now for the first time he faced greater peril than head-hunting savages seeking trophies or glutting their unquenchable blood-lust against white intruders.

''Wait,'' said Mullet, then addressed the ape. ''You savvy music records?'' He made a circular motion with his hand and hummed a scrap of tune. ''You fetchem white man proa 'longside. Savvy?''

Sheba uttered a sound from her throat and swung in swift flight through the trees. Mansey immediately scrambled to his feet and Mullet rose, but before they could take a step there was a circle of great apes hemming them in effectively. They made no attempt to touch either man, but formed a ring and marched about the two prisoners in what might have seemed a ludicrously humorous array if it had not been menacing and sinister.

''Mansey, I'm going out with you. I've got to go. God knows there isn't any other place for me—in white settlements, I mean—but I'll get to another island. They can't cross water. Oh, you can speak now! These are natives, not even very good at *beche de mer* talk. It's that devil of a Sheba who understands and communicates with the others. You heard her just now, calling them. Usually they don't come so close, but your arrival has made her suspicious, no doubt, and she doesn't want to lose me.''

His laughter was mirthless and uncanny, the sound of insanity cracking in his voice. Mansey did not wonder. He felt that his own reason would not long stand the strain of this sinister surveillance. Yet what reasoning power was still uncluttered by the impasse in which he found himself, cautioned him against attempting to assist Mullet to escape. The great ape would frustrate such an attempt, he felt sure. And there was danger in releasing a madman like Mullet on any other island, he thought. Aware that his face showed reluctance, he was again frank in speech.

''Mullet, I'm of the opinion that you can't get away, and I must. I could bring help, perhaps. I'll give you my word to do what I can, but for two of us to attempt escape, especially when you have such devoted followers, is utterly futile.''

''Look here, don't you fancy for a moment you and that launch will leave this lagoon without me, Mansey. You can't, you know, unless I am willing. Even if you got to the launch, the blacks in their canoes would

halt you at the reef entrance. I've had enough of this. Before you came I was making the best of it. I was content enough, only that I wanted a woman. Oh, it's my own doings! Don't think I'm shifting the blame, but at that it was something stronger than my will driving my hand to that delicate operation. If they'd let me alone in London, if they'd seen the marvel of what I'd accomplished, the greatest feat of surgery in this or any other age, I wouldn't be here and this wouldn't have happened. But they drove me out, my own race and kind. And you belong to them, Mansey. I've got a grudge, not against you, but all white men. Mansey"—his voice became quieter, more confidential in tone—"what if we'd take Sheba, you and I, and tour a few countries exhibiting the greatest marvel of the age? We'd need money, and we'd make it. I've lorded it here. I couldn't go back and grub and sweat again. But we could do that——"

"Mullet, either you talk rational or——"

"What will you do? What *can* you do except put a bullet through me, and you'd loose a hell-fury that would tear you bit by bit in rags. I've seen Sheba do that. Finger by finger, Mansey, toe by toe, handfuls of hair, eyelids——"

"Shut up, you beast!" cried Mansey.

"That gets you, eh? Well, it's true. And I'm your only protection. You've got to save me to escape alive."

"What about the natives?"

"Sheba is half native, remember, and she likes her own kind. They're safe. They're not only safe but invulnerable. When they go forth to take wives and heads, the gray apes go along and fight for them. It's a shambles when they leave, Mansey. It has one kick-back, though." Mullet laughed again and Mansey liked his curses better than his laughter. "The natives don't need to fight and they will in time lose their own initiative, their courage. Some day this tribe won't exist, but that won't come in time to save us."

"Listen, Mullet, suppose I go out and bring help, a revenue cruiser that will blast this village into nothingness as has been done before now. A few shells——"

"Shells won't reach the apes. You'd merely murder the blacks who aren't to blame. Besides, I've no assurance that you'd come back or send them. Who'd believe your story of human apes? And where would I be when they shelled the village? If I went to the hills, the apes would go along. If I stayed here to have them killed I'd get it. What, don't you see I couldn't even kill myself if I felt like heroics to save you, because you'd have Sheba on your neck the minute I croaked? Pretty little mess, eh, Mansey? And there is no escape in the jungles or huts, none at all except to cross the water where the apes can't follow, and you're handicaped there because the natives know just what would happen to them if I'm not here to keep Sheba pacified. I did try getting away with one of my brides in a canoe and Sheba was on watch that night. She tore a *lagi-lagi* to bits, jerked the men to the shore and sent them after me in canoes. Then they gave me to understand I must not try again to escape. Oh, it's a beautiful entanglement! Here's Sheba."

THE great ape dropped from overhanging tree branches and in one arm she carried Mansey's gramophone case, without which he never traveled. It was further proof of the

uncanny intelligence of Sheba that she had understood Mullet's command and brought the case. She squatted and deftly unfastened the buckles of leather straps binding the oil-cloth cover, fitted the handle, opened a package of records and wound the machine. In another moment the wail of *She's My Baby Doll* rose in the hot silence. An instant later Mansey shrieked laughter of hysteric abandon, for the great she-ape was swaying from one foot to another and gazing at Homer Mullet with the amorous leer of a love-sick crone. She put out a paw to take his hand, but Mullet jerked it aside, and kicked his bare foot at her chest. Lacking his hand to fondle, she seized his foot, precipitated him on his back and cuddled the foot to her breast, laying her cheek against it and fondling each toe as mothers the world over play with toes of their babies.

"Laugh, damn you," growled Mullet. "I'll show you." He spoke in native to Sheba, who reluctantly released his foot, caught Mansey in her arms and, despite his struggles, swung to the tree branches. For all her strength the weight of a fighting man cumbered her movements and she halted her flight to hold him by both arms and shake him until his teeth rattled. Then swinging farther aloft she flung him over the crotch of a branch and dropped to earth.

From below, Mansey heard Mullet's shrieks of mirth. At that elevation he could see the village huts, the lagoon and his launch, the long reef-jaws, and ascending far down the outer beach, the smokes of fires where his Tonga boys cooked their meal. About him were the palms glittering like sabers in the sun, but the jungle was silent, bereft of the gorgeous birds of Paradise, the lorries and parrakeets, the little chattering harmless monkeys. Where the great apes held court, no other jungle life lingered.

Mansey straddled the limb and considered in frantic dismay the situation in which he was placed. Reluctantly, he accepted Mullet's logic. There seemed no escape. Watching glimpses he obtained of the lagoon through swaying palms and branch plumes, he saw a dark object floating and realized with his heart racing that it was the body of his native left in charge of the boat. Evidently he had angered Sheba and she had killed him without so much as an outcry. Mansey almost envied the dead man. For the first time in his years of Papua he admitted that there were worse things than murder: far worse than the taking and curing of human heads as trade to tourists was the fitting of beast craniums with the brains of thinking humans.

Mansey looked below. The gramophone still wailed its jazz music and foolish songs. The seven great she-apes were dancing clumsily, in contrast to their lithe grace in the trees. Mullet lay prone on the mats, his naked trunk crisscrossed by strings of pearls, his arms over his eyes. Above, Mansey racked his brain to think of a plan of escape. Far off, the black crouching hills quivered in the heat, which was affecting Mansey in spite of a breeze at that elevation which did not penetrate below. He felt thirsty and faint and he knew if he should lose his grip of the tree bole, he would fall to death. His heart and blood began to pound, a throbbing which presently drummed in his ears. Then, suddenly, Tom Mansey knew he heard drums, far off, faint, inaudible to Mullet because of the grinding gramophone diligently kept going by Sheba.

Mansey knew the meaning of the drum-song of Papua, rising, falling, sinister, maddening, the voice coaxed by bare hands from bladderskins

stretched over human skulls, and a new fear swooped and rode his shoulders. That drum-song meant savages on the march, and it was coming nearer. He looked below and saw that the she-apes had ceased dancing and stood as if listening through the blatant jazz music to the voice of approaching peril.

In another moment, Sheba had clutched Mullet and shot him to his feet and was chattering a warning. The gramophone record died with a moan, and the drum-song rose insistent as the drone of bees, palpitant as the quivering hills. It roused sleeping natives and the huts belched savages. They poured from the *lagi-lagi* where they had been sleeping off the night potations, arranging their plume crests as they leaped to earth, young men greedy for battle, eager for slaughter, grimly meticulous over their gaudy ornaments, proud of the fine blue lace of tattooing and blistered cicatrices obtained in agony.

Mullet looked up to where Mansey was hidden in the tree.

"Need help to get down?" he called. "Sheba will fetch you."

Mansey yelled a refusal and began to scramble down, but the great ape swung aloft before he had compassed more than a few feet of the descent. She caught the branch on which he was perched and bent it double, plucked him from his vantage and let the branch go. The crash as it flew back proved the tremendous strength of the beast-woman, and Mansey's heart missed a beat as he was swung in flying leaps and dropped on the mats, unhurt.

"Hear those drums?" began Mullet. "That means reprisal. Now Sheba and her sisters can help my fellows defend the village." He looked at Mansey, and in the bloodshot eyes of Mullet there was a meaning Mansey tried to read because neither dared utter his thoughts in the uncanny hearing of Sheba. Mullet turned to the ape.

"Good Sheba, pretty Sheba. Go after the drums, Sheba. Show the Kauloo warriors they can't fight our fellows. Take the other girls and have a good fight, old girl." He patted her shoulder, and at that careless caress the great ape fawned on him like a grateful cur that has known only kicks and abus

THE warriors were dressing for battle in frenzied haste. They scorned to go forth to fight or die in aught but gorgeous array. And a drum-song of their own arose, one drum after another, purling the blood-rousing tempo that stirs the heart and soul of a man, tingles in his flesh, prickles on his scalp, the primal quickening call to war. Looking at Mullet, Tom Mansey saw hope born in his eyes and thought he understood. They would be rid of the apes for a time. His own thoughts darted to the launch in the lagoon, the Tonga flotilla on the beach outside. Then as he looked seaward Mansey cursed. The Tonga boys had heard that drum-song and understood its meaning. They had no courage. They had launched their canoes, which ranged like slim dark beetles on the sun-glitter of the sea, ready to dart like arrows to safety far beyond. They hovered about the lagoon entrance evidently waiting a hail or sign from Mansey, and he was powerless to reach them.

About the cooking fire, replenished by old men, began the war dance, and old women fetched gourds of fermented coconut wine, which was swigged by the warriors, who smacked their lips loudly and leaped into new frenzy, wild contortions, a hideous Carmagnole in which the she-apes joined, sometimes jumping to catch a tree branch and swing madly, spinning in midair like gibbet-fruit. Then at a sign from the leader, the dancers

filed into the jungle, and the great apes leaped to the trees. Where had been a ferocious swarm of painted savages was only the scattered fire embers and the women gathering the empty gourds.

"Now," said Mullet, "now is our chance. We've got the luck of fools. Get to the launch and start it, Mansey, and I'll get the girl. By God, I'd have given Sheba credit for more brains than she showed this time, but the gods are with us."

"Look here, you leave that girl behind, Mullet." Mansey's voice was stern.

"To be killed by the she-ape? What d'you take me for? Not much! I know what'll happen to every living human left in this village when Sheba comes home and finds me gone. There won't be a village. There won't be anything, Mansey, but rubbish, blood-soaked earth and bits of flesh. That girl comes. And there's no time to argue. . ."

It was the one outstanding fact; they must hasten and get away. Mansey turned and ran to the landing stage where he had been swung from the launch yesterday. He shortened her painter, dropped in and whirled the wheel. Then his heart sank. The engine was dead and a glance showed him the cunning of Sheba, for she had unscrewed every nut and bolt she could find and emptied his spare gasoline. The cans glittered at the bottom of the lagoon when Mansey looked overside. The ape had taken time to sink them, sink every spare tool and all loose gear she could find. She had even thrust the oars, carried for emergency, into the open jaws of tridacnas, which closed on them. He leaned over, and reaching into the water, wrenched on one, but not all his strength released it. His efforts broke the blade tip and the maimed oar came up in his hands. The second one was beyond his reach.

Some minutes had elapsed in his cursory examination of the launch, but his brain was never so alert before. He thought he might use the maimed oar to scull the unwieldy craft, and stood up to summon the Tonga proas from beyond the reef, for the old men and women of the village were watching him covertly and muttering among themselves. Mansey remembered they did not want Mullet to escape for fear of the great apes' wrath. But they would probably not interfere with him. He faced a decision of saving his own life and leaving Mullet to a hell he had made for himself, or risking death in the attempt to release Mullet from horror. The choice was wrenched from him when he saw Mullet leap from the bleaching hut to the ground with the girl on his shoulder, and Mullet's free hand clutched a big navy revolver.

Mansey saw the reason for the gun at once, and his own small automatics were in his hands. For when they saw their erstwhile white master running like a deer for the shore, there was a piercing scream from the natives left behind the war party, and they rushed at Mullet and the girl, determined to hold him on his perilous throne.

Mansey heard the man's warning cry, then the crack of his gun as he cleared a path, shooting as he ran, crashing through the outthrust arms that would have detained him, leaving dead and dying in his wake. He had almost gained the white strip of coral beach from which the landing stage jutted over the lagoon water, when one courageous old man threw himself headlong and Mullet tripped and crashed to earth, the girl flung from his arms and curled in a heap on the coral. In another moment, Mullet was the center of a heaving, lunging mass of blacks who tried to weight him to earth.

Mansey, in the launch, heard his fists thud on flesh, heard the thud of the gun-butt used as a club, saw black and white arms threshing like flails, then with a mighty heave Mullet was free. A triumphant yell burst from his throat and he had leaped toward the shining head of the girl who lay on the sand as she had fallen, evidently knocked unconscious. That yell died in Mullet's throat and Mansey's heart missed a beat, then raced painfully. For from the quivering plumes of trees dropped a gray ghoul shape, screaming horribly in rage, and she flung herself at the white man and sent him spinning with a sweep of her long arm. It was Sheba!

With his brain in a whirl, Mansey realized that if he was ever to get away, it was the crucial moment. Yet, loosing the launch painter, he hesitated. Mullet lay prone on the glistening coral sand, and after a glance at him, Sheba had turned to the girl whose shining brush of curls turned slightly as if consciousness was just returning. One awful scream burst from her throat as the hand of Sheba encircled her throat, then Mansey saw her bright hair through a red mist, for he realized what was going to happen, and saw from his eye corners that Mullet had rolled to his belly on the coral and was taking aim with his gun. Mansey's thoughts darted in wild speculation. Mullet would shoot Sheba, and he need not aim for the girl unless Mullet missed the ape. Otherwise—he shuddered with horror of what would happen in another moment as the hammer of Mullet's gun clicked uselessly, and Sheba, snarling horribly, picked up the girl as if she were a rag doll.

Mansey's gun cracked twice. He felt sick, revolting with nausea, for the girl's body hung limp in the ape's paws, and on her golden skin two bright soft ribbons spurted and flowed. She was beyond pain. But Mullet was creeping soundlessly, cautiously on his belly over the coral, making for the landing stage.

MANSEY loosed the painter, held the launch by his clutch of the nearest post, kept his gun aimed at the head of Sheba, trying in spite of the red mist over his sight to point for the base of her brain, afraid to risk a shot lest he should miss and she would be upon them with lightning speed.

He had time to think how marvelously the rapid-fire passing of events had shaped for this get-away. Without the sudden arrival of Sheba, the natives would have prevented their escape; and if Mansey had not insisted on bringing the girl, Sheba's attention would never have been distracted by this opportunity to glut jealous rage on her rival in the affections of Mullet. The great ape was extremely, dreadfully engrossed. Mansey tried not to see what she did, tried to believe it was a rag doll in the hands of a mischievous pet. He was bracing himself with all his will to override the violent upheaval that swept to his eyes and brain, while Mullet crept toward the launch.

Far off the drum-song was muffled, like the croon of surf on coral. Beyond the reef his Tonga boys waited. Another two minutes and Mullet would tumble into the craft. Already Mansey had braced the broken oar-tip against the planks to shove out. They must widen the water between themselves and Sheba. Mansey wondered, in a vague, darting thought, if orang-outangs could not swim, and remembered that before this transelementation the human body of Sheba was probably adept and strong in the water.

Mullet was on the landing stage. Mansey heard the planks creak, but Sheba seemed to hear nothing but her

own animal snarling at the dreadful task presented her. She was almost finished. Her arm swept out and held aloft something pitiful with long bright hair which she played with and stroked. Then from far out beyond the reef one of Mansey's boys hailed his master. Mansey's whole body jerked as if his nerves were strings of a puppet snatched by a crude hand.

"Marster, Marster!"

Mullet lunged as Sheba was on her feet. The launch careened crazily as he plunged in and Mansey heaved on the oar, then tried to propel the craft from the stern. One wild screech of baffled rage rang and echoed between the jungle-clad reef-prongs, and swinging the head by its long hair, Sheba sailed through the air, flung herself from the landing stage into the water and swam after the boat.

Mullet was yelling and chattering like a madman. His gun was gone and he had seized Mansey's automatics and sent a sharp fusillade at the swimming ape. If Sheba was hit, the lead pellets did not halt her. Mansey, sculling frantically at the stern, saw her fangs bared, heard her snarls, stared in horror as his muscles cracked with the strain of propelling the tubby launch, at the long, gray, hairy ghoul which gained on them so rapidly that the boat might have been anchored for all headway they seemed to make.

A mighty lunge, and Sheba's paw caught the stern, seized the oar with which he tried to batter her off, and wrenched it from his grasp. Then Mansey threw himself on the combing as the ape's weight almost swamped them. Mullet was screaming, fighting, kicking as the paws seized him, dragged him from his clutch of the planks and hauled him, still struggling, into the sea.

For a moment there was a wild upheaval, and the clear lagoon water churned in foam that was blood-streaked. Mullet's shots had hit the she-ape, but that great body had the strength and endurance of an elephant. Yet in another moment, Mansey saw that Sheba was badly wounded, for her lips dripped redly and her eyes showed glassy.

Mullet was clasped in one arm and she tried to swim with the other. Beside the body of Mullet trailed a head with bright hair, and Mansey, helpless to avert further tragedy, sick with the shock of dread, clung to the launch combing, watching Sheba suddenly cease swimming, and sink beneath the lagoon water, with Mullet in her grasp.

The ripples spread in rings, the bubbles broke. Through water clear as air, Mansey saw the gray ghoul go down, feet first, with the white man still struggling futilely. Then as the hairy gray shape parted sea-fern fronds until her foot touched a vantage by which she might have shot her body to the surface, there was a further commotion in the sea-gardens, a violent upheaval writhing below, a line of bubbles ascending, breaking soundlessly as the souls of man and she-ape escaped.

Mansey stared. He knew. Sheba's foot had touched the tinted flesh flanges of a giant tridacna and it had closed like a steel trap. Not even in the death agony had she released her embrace of the man whom in human shape she had loved so fiercely that she took him with her to a transelementation far removed from reach of those bunglers who trifle with the doors of life and death.

THE hot sun blazed down on a man inert, limp as a rag, lying on the launch bottom, and presently the Tonga boys who saw the launch put out, came to investigate.

They were some weeks towing the

(Continued on page 144)

The IMPOSSIBLE

by DON ROBERT CATLIN

"Then came a blinding flash of light, an odor of burning parchment."

"GENTLEMEN, you of the Wanderlust Club are my friends. Among you are numbered financial wizards, men of scientific renown. Not only because of your worldly standing, but also because of our mutual regard, I have come to you to obtain assistance in freeing the world from the grasp of that monster-octopus, fear!"

To say that we of the club were startled is putting it all too mildly. Travis, the man who had just spoken, had been absent from the country for more than four years, and now, evidently laboring under a terrific strain, he had returned to startle us.

Some there were of us, I am afraid, who thought our friend was unbalanced. But Travis waved us to seat ourselves and calmly called out to the attendant to lock the doors securely.

"My friends," he began, sweeping the semicircle of faces about him with eyes glittering strangely, "several years ago I left you to go on a rambling tour of the world. In Haiti, that breeding place of wizardry and Black Magic, I chanced to see a little more than an outsider usually witnesses of the clutching grasp those necromancers have upon the fear-bound natives. Perhaps many of you will remember that I have ever been agnostic concerning spiritualism; at any rate, upon seeing the damnable hold those magi have obtained upon the throats of the ignorant natives, my heart was filled with a great pity for them; and, after many days and nights of mulling the horror of it over in my mind, I came to the determination to throw off the yoke from the necks of the ignorant—if possible.

"Some there are who believe that love—or hate—is the strongest of human emotions; yet I think you will agree with me that fear is, beyond cavil, the most soul-stirring emotion of them all. My life was worth nothing to anyone save myself; and I reasoned that if it were possible for me to learn the secrets of Black Magic and spiritualism, by broadcasting throughout the world an explanation of how the seemingly impossible tricks of wizardry were done I might remove that fear of the unknown from the hearts of all.

"I remember thinking, as I started upon my strange quest for knowledge of the mysterious, that, if I were to accomplish my ends, I must needs learn to perform the impossible. But, gentlemen, *the impossible has never been done!* It is quite true that we poor mortals witness some certain thing which is beyond our comprehension, and we dub it magic. I might," he added dryly, "call your attention to Noah Webster's definition of the word 'impossible'."

Whether or not the man were mad, at least he seemed sure of himself, and we of the Wanderlust Club were giving him strict attention. Striding through our midst, Travis went to the window and took up a potted plant. He placed it on the floor at his feet.

"Not with an intention of being theatrical, gentlemen, but merely to show you that I am not taking up your time with a drooling bit of idiocy, I shall show you a few things sometimes performed by magi. For instance: look carefully upon this plant. It is thoroughly healthy, and its flowers very sweet . . ."

Our eyes fell to the thing; and, as God is my witness, the plant shriveled and died beneath our gaze!

Travis was smiling. "You have witnessed the impossible? No, no, gentlemen; you have seen this thing, and therefore it can not have been impossible! Are there things impossible? Indeed yes; but rest assured that you shall never see them!

"A man goes to a mystic; a witch; a medium. He sees and hears things which appear to be supernatural. His wits are befuddled, there is an indefinable fear in his breast, and he imagines more than he sees or hears. He credits to spirits the mystery of the revelations which have been made to him. As for myself, I have seen things in my search for the solution of the riddle of the universe which I would not have thought to be possible; yet I have solved the mystery, and tonight I shall show you some of these things.

"As children, you witnessed the magician upon the stage as he produced rabbits and geese and eggs and miles upon miles of ribbon from an ordinary hat. And you were, indeed, witnessing child's play. The adult mind, broadened in scope of knowledge, demands deeper mysteries. Tonight you shall see them, gathered from Haiti, Egypt, India, and China. My reason in thus displaying these mysteries: before proceeding farther with my astounding revelations, I want each of you to see for himself, for seeing is believing!"

TRAVIS paused for breath, then proceeded with his novel and weird demonstration. Trick after trick, things which I would have staked my life upon as being impossible, startling, shaking us all to the very foundations of our souls!

In the tense moments of the denouement of a rather bewildering bit of magic, Amos Green sipped at a glass of water the attendant had just handed him.

"I am tremendously sorry," called Travis, "for the water you are drinking, Amos, is a virulent poison!"

We were all startled; but Amos, grinning sheepishly, in a gesture of foolish bravado drained the glass.

"Great God!" came from the lips of the onlookers as the limp body of Amos Green sagged and slipped forward on the floor with a soft thud. "Broome—Broome!"

But Dr. Broome was already kneeling beside the still, prostrate form.

"Dead!" he whispered in an awed voice. "Travis, you must indeed have eaten of the Fruit of the Tree of Life and Death!" Then, his voice ringing with fury: "I thought at first you were joking—that you might have connived with Green—but the man is a corpse!"

A shiver, creeping flesh, sudden chills seized upon me. I wanted to rush from the room, felt an impulse to scream, yet something seemed to hold me fast in my chair and stilled the shriek unborn upon my cold lips.

"Pardon me, Doctor," said Travis. "Please make no mistake; you have tested the body for signs of life?"

Broome drew himself up. "I think that there can be no reflection upon my professional conduct, sir! Would that I were mistaken! I have applied every known means of ascertaining life and it is an unquestionable fact that the man is dead, a corpse. There is no respiration; no action of the heart, lungs, or other organs. The man is dead!"

"Please do not think that I wish to discredit you, Doctor. But will you stake your professional reputation upon your statement that Amos Green is without life?"

Unhesitatingly came Broome's answer: "Absolutely!"

Our attention had been centered upon Travis and the doctor. The former pointed out, "Then may I call your attention to the presumed corpse?"

We turned—to see Amos Green in the act of rising to his feet; the muscles of his throat were contracting as though he were but taking up the thread of life at the very point at which he had left it. He was swallowing that last sip of water!

Broome, poor soul, felt his way to a chair and sank into it, consternation written upon his features; while Amos, dazed and uncomprehending, stared queerly at Travis.

"Once again," commented the wanderer, "I have proved that the impossible can not be done. Oh, I realize that it appeared to be such! But consider well: Dr. Broome—to whom I now extend my apologies for my seeming discourtesy—declared Amos to be dead. The question in your minds is: Was he really dead? I shall permit you to answer that question for yourselves; but, accepting the doctor's statement, we shall assume that Green was, in fact, without life. I killed him; and then I brought him back to life. He now lives, none the worse for his brief sojourn in that outer world about which we mortals know nothing. But the point I wish to stress is this: assuming that I did kill him, and assuming that I did bring him to life again, then, as you have seen this with your own eyes it can not have been an impossibility! There is no such thing as doing the impossible!"

"You lie!" came a strange, small voice from behind the semicircle of chairs about Travis.

WE WHIRLED—and saw a small, slender, withered, ancient-looking old Chinaman. How he had gotten entrance to the room God alone knows, for the doors had been locked and members of the club had been seated in each of the large windows which looked out upon the teeming streets below. No man had seen the Chinaman enter!

"And I repeat," the ancient spoke again, "that you lie! The impossible has been done—and shall be done again!"

Senses whirling, uncomprehending, I turned back to face Travis; and

surely if ever one man saw another undergo a living hell, then I witnessed all the torture of devilish ingenuity being concentrated upon the soul of the man I knew as Travis.

There is a legend that, his soul having been so great, Lincoln's body shrank in dimension upon that soul's departure; and now, before my very eyes, I saw the body of my friend shrink, and I knew that his soul had left him, that it had gone out into the ether to combat that of the Chinaman. Here in this room a tremendous battle of will-power was raging.

I saw great beads of sweet break out on Travis' forehead. His eyes were wide, staring; then, with a little jerking of his flesh, he was himself again.

"You are too much for me, I admit," he smiled.

The Chinaman seemed to pity him. "Think you that the pupil may teach the master?" he asked quietly.

Instantly I knew that it had been from this wrinkled old Chinaman that Travis had learned a great part of what he knew of magic. But why had the Chinaman followed him so mysteriously into these rooms? Had my friend——? My thoughts were running wild.

"I might choose no better time than this to explain the situation," Travis was saying calmly. "Perhaps some of you gentlemen have been wondering just what my object was in displaying the magic I have learned. If you will be patient a moment, I shall satisfy your curiosity.

"You, my friends, and myriad hosts of human beings in every country and clime, have been, and, but for me, always would be subject to the age-old superstition that spirits communicate with the living and that with the aid and assistance of these spirits, certain persons are able to accomplish supernatural acts. As for myself, I believe in God, and there my belief ceases. I do not believe that spirits help or restrain us, for we are free agents.

"Four years ago, I commenced a world-wide search for knowledge of Black Magic—supernaturalism—spiritualism—call it what you will. I started with the assumption that, while there is such a thing as the impossible, it had never been done. And, gentlemen, I have proved my case.

"Call back your Bible-study days; recall the days of Moses; picture him among the priests of Egypt, before Pharaoh. Moses sent plagues upon the Egyptians—and the magicians duplicated his miracles! Now if, as the Bible states—and I believe it to be true—God lent power to Moses to perform these miracles, then who lent power to the necromancers of Egypt? There, gentlemen, is a question! My answer—and the only logical rejoinder, so it seems to me—is that the priests of Egypt used trickery.

"I have shown you who are gathered here some few things which you could not understand, things which bewildered you, frightened you, and yet I have devoted but four years to the study of magic. You, men of scientific renown, men of hard-headed business acumen, have known fear this night. Consider what groveling fear you might have felt had you been of the masses, or of lesser intelligence! Suppose I had been born among magi, suckled and nourished in an atmosphere of intrigue and mysticism; do you doubt that I might now perform even more wondrous deeds?

"And yet they would all have been deeds of trickery! Of these things which you have seen, and of their explanations, I shall speak further at a later time, for I see that my esteemed visitor is becoming uneasy.

"Some small satisfaction I shall permit him by publicly admitting that I am a thief." Calmly, as a ripple of disbelief swept over us, Travis thrust his hand into an inner

pocket of his coat and withdrew a small, stained, tattered, ancient-appearing book. "I have here a chronicle of—but wait. I must begin at the beginning.

"It is well known that the magicians and priests of the various Eastern cults have kept knowledge of magic alive by handing that wisdom down from father to son. You might torture or kill, but the priests died with their secrets of necromancy locked in their breasts. Only to their sons or successors would they impart their learning. And down through the ages, the peoples of the earth have been as dust beneath the feet of the sorcerers, bound to them by a chain of fear hitherto unbreakable. It is my purpose to *break that chain!*

"And now, a moment of my history for the four years just past. A few months here, several there, applying myself diligently and with the aid of unlimited funds judiciously spent, I passed from one sorcerer to another, learning what each had to impart. No need for me to go into intricate details—time forbids. Let it suffice that at last, a year ago, I had seemingly reached my goal. I could duplicate all the bags of tricks displayed by magicians of Egypt, India, China. And yet I knew that somewhere there must be a source of knowledge. I think that it cost me a part of my soul, but I found that source!

"This man"—pointing to the stolid old Chinaman—"lived in a hovel near a temple far from the haunts of man. How I found him, God alone knows. But I did find him, and, by throwing myself whole-heartedly into a living lie, I caused him to believe me a sincere and devout member of his cult. And this little, wrinkled old man held in the hollow of his hand all the secrets of eternity!

"Remember, please, that the knowledge possessed by the ordinary magician or priest is but a very small part of a great whole. Knowing comparatively little, he has but little to impart to his son or successor. So great are the secrets combined that no man could ever hope to master one tenth part of them; and so, perforce, they must be written. This book"—holding aloft the stained and tattered parchment—"holds within its covers the answer to every mystery of the universe! I stole it from this Chinaman—for all humanity I became a thief.

"And now you know why I have come to you with these astounding revelations; now you comprehend why I have performed these acts of magic tonight. I know that I have convinced you that I am telling the truth; and, together, we shall bend every effort, lend every aid to broadcast to the world these logical and simple explanations of hitherto inexplicable mysteries of the supernatural. And when we shall have informed the world of the insidious evil of the magi, then we shall have removed for all time the clutching, clawing grasp of fear from the hearts of those who know no better than to give credence to the supernatural!"

EXHAUSTED by the force of his fierce passion, Travis smiled triumphantly at the Chinaman. "This sorcerer's presence, sirs, can mean but one thing. He has trailed me, over thousands of miles, intent upon regaining possession of this book; for exposure of its contents will wreak incalculable ruin to the carefully nurtured, age-old belief. Well"—smiling into the Chinaman's eyes—"he shall not have it!"

The Chinaman made no remonstrance; he remained still and silent as a carven statue.

Travis thrust out the book, so that the Chinaman's eyes might fall upon it. "Permit me to point out to you," he said, "that while I did not succeed in overpowering your will, a

few minutes past, yet at the same time you found to your sorrow that you could not conquer my own. Checkmate! Physically you are unable to overcome me; and you know quite well that, sorcerer though you are, I can thwart your magic with other magic equally as powerful. Therefore, I shall keep the book.''

Now, for the first time, the Chinaman moved. There was something sinister about his sinuous, gliding motion, and I felt a premonition of impending evil, terror, horror!

The Chinaman halted, spoke swiftly. ''One thing you forget; you have not yet mastered *all* the secrets—you are a fool! I know a thousandfold more than you. Can you hope to resist the accumulated knowledge of eons of time?''

I perceived a sardonic twitching at Travis' mouth.

''I read your thoughts—you should have guarded them more carefully.'' This was Travis' answer to the Chinaman. ''You are thinking that this book is written in the very oldest form of written language, and that you alone possess the key whereby the writings become legible and intelligible. But you are wrong in your assumption.'' Travis' voice rang shrilly in my ears as he turned from the Chinaman to us who were his friends. ''You may not believe me when I tell you this thing; but that man does not understand one word of English, and he has been speaking in the purest of the Mongolian dialects. Yet you and I have understood him perfectly, and he has understood every word I have uttered. The explanation is merely—telepathy. When I speak, the thought-wave is impelled from my brain in perfect synchronization with the spoken word, and it is the thought which he has understood; likewise our comprehension of his speech. Now, it is true that, as an ordinary man, I might never hope to read the contents of this record, for any attempt to decipher it would result in failure. But what this master necromancer has forgotten is that when these writings were put on parchment by the guiding genius of Black Magic, it was merely thought transferred to paper and that thought is ever the same, changeless. I have but to concentrate, and this ancient thought instantly becomes intelligible——''

A wailing shriek broke from the lips of the Chinaman; shrill, terrifying in its intensity. His face blazed with the demoniacal fury of a man gone mad with rage and hatred. Too late, he realized that Travis could, indeed, solve all that which he would have given his life to conceal.

WHY we of the Wanderlust Club did not interfere none of us was ever able to ascertain, afterward; it was as if we were chained to our chairs by an irresistible force.

Travis and the Chinaman were almost face to face; their eyes burned queerly as will-power met will-power in mortal, terrific struggle. How long they stood thus I do not know; it seemed years, yet it could have been at most only a few minutes.

They say that a Chinaman's features do not betray his inner emotions; still, I fancied that I saw a trace of chagrin, of disappointment, on the face of this little, wrinkled, dried-up old Chinaman. For a moment he was baffled—even I knew that. And then I saw him concentrating upon the book in Travis' hand.

The atmosphere of the room became super-charged with a crackling, rending power one could almost hear! Then came a blinding flash of light; an odor of burning parchment.

In the very hands of Travis, the books of secrets had burst into a devastating flame!

"You devil from hell!" screamed Travis. "That secret—lost to the world since the day of the priests of Baal and the Prophet! God sent devouring fire upon the water-soaked altar and the priests of Baal could not duplicate the feat because the only one of their number who knew the secret of devouring fire had vanished. Lost throughout the ages; and it now appears at the command of this necromancer!"

The Chinaman flicked a skinny, clawlike hand in the direction of the ashes upon the floor. "I told you there were secrets which you did not know," he commented softly. "And there are yet other mysteries——"

Travis whipped out an ugly, squat-looking automatic. "You have prevented me from publishing that record of deviltry," he said, "yet I can not permit you to return to your temple and continue the breeding of evil to visit upon the ignorant and ill-advised. As you have destroyed that which would have liberated the world from fear, so I shall destroy you."

There was a cold finality in his voice; and scarce had the words left his lips than he fired. The shot reverberated through the room. Came the fumes of burned powder, acrid. But the Chinaman was still standing, unmoved.

An expression of incredulity touched Travis' face. I could see the puzzled, dazed, uncomprehending look in his eyes, for at that distance he could not have missed. He squeezed the stock of the automatic yet again—and again.

Almost together those two last shots; almost as one, so rapidly were they fired.

And the Chinaman had not moved—until now. With one swift step he reached the person of the man who was my friend, and I saw a glittering flash of gleaming metal.

Travis crumpled. His body bent in the middle, sagging; then he crashed to the floor.

"A little knowledge is a dangerous thing," murmured the Chinaman, quite distinctly. A queer glint of a peculiarly greenish tint showed in his eyes. Then slowly, slowly, his lids drooped lower and lower. As his eyes were masked by those lowering lids, he toppled as might a tower undermined at its base, and fell to the floor beside the body of Travis.

The spell was broken; for the first time in an hour I moved. Travis was in my arms, his life-blood staining my garments, while all about me I heard horrified cries.

Stark terror depicted upon their faces, they backed away from those still bodies; all but Dr. Broome, who was now crouched beside me.

I, too, arose and backed away. We waited an eternity.

As Broome turned, there was an awed hush.

"Travis — and that other — both dead! Travis had learned too much, and he has paid the penalty. For, alone, he could not overthrow that which had existed since first the world began.

"Gentlemen, tonight we have seen the Chinaman kill our friend after three bullets had struck him. Travis did not miss, for, in a space which might be covered by a half-dollar coin, three bullets smashed their way into the Chinaman's heart.

"Therefore, when he took that last step forward and killed Travis, *the Chinaman was already a dead man.*"

His voice trailed away into a whisper: "We have witnessed the accomplishment of the impossible!"

The UNCHAINED DEVIL

by ROSCOE GILMORE STOTT

"One by one the features took on a gruesome, hideous likeness."

MARCH 3rd, 19——: Perhaps somebody will believe my story. I am a plain man not given to imagination; surely not to lying. You have seen me, no doubt. When you came front at the Durand Theater you saw me. I was the last orchestra member to come out of the "hole"—the one at the far left. You thought me a hunchback, perhaps. But I am not. My fingers are knotted a bit and I have become a little bowed by constant playing of the bass viol. My eyes are not what they once were. My arms have lost their muscular freedom. I am nervous. I know; because of this I shrink from the sight of the front rows at the Durand. Sometimes I twitch more than others. It is not a disease. Nor is the tightness of my muscles age. I am but forty-two, though I look sixty.

I must tell this story before—well, I will be frank in these written words—*before I pass away.* For I can not live long. My nights of tossing tell me this. My weird hours of pain and nausea tell me. I am fading—fading—fading. I will tell it all, and maybe you, who later read, will believe my story. God, somebody *must* believe me!

It is the story of the Unchained Devil.

Twenty-two years ago I was a pupil of the violin in Munich. Had we possessed great wealth I would have been there as a lad of ten, for our neighbors said that my fingers

were those of a genius. At twelve I played better than our first-violin now at the Durand. We did not know then that Grandfather Printz owned the dye-works at Berlin. Nor did we know that he had standing with the German royalty. Nor did we know that—but I am going too fast.

When I finished at Munich I was a concert violinist. But my time had come for the Prussian army. I rebelled. My mother rebelled and wept because my art would be crushed by three years of army service. One day we learned our fate more certainly. Father came in with a face aflame. A ruling of the throne was about to snatch from him his toy-inventions. He had been years perfecting them. He cursed the ruling powers and said we were to flee to America.

It would take thousands of words to tell all of our flight. I was about to be free in America. I had had distant relatives to return with their stories of America and her spirit of freedom and her great concert-halls and orchestras and her chances for being somebody and getting somewhere. Father sat half-hidden among packs of emigrant belongings and whispered his dreams of toy production when he should reach Boston. Mother stroked my fingers and told of her dreams of me as I stood before great masses of the rich who sat in decorated boxes. And together we laughed and cried—sometimes hours at a time.

Never with us—always alone—sat Grandfather Printz. He sat silent for the ten days we were on shipboard. And to add to the mystery of his silence he leaned against what appeared to be a wooden coffin-box. It was the only possession he had brought, and when it had been loaded by four burly deck-hands he had refused all information as to its contents. Now and then he would take a small book from his pocket and write down a few German words. He was the only one, however, among us four who knew English, and he spoke it as a scholar. I learned later from Mother that he had been—years before—in diplomatic service and in his early manhood an instructor in the university at Göttingen.

Perhaps it was his great joy, perhaps it was the strain of early army life. Before Father could get a hearing with American manufacturers he died. Grandfather took Mother and me to a little town north of Boston. It was then we knew of his wealth. Much to our surprize, he purchased a beautiful, though small, estate near the Atlantic. On the newly-bought grounds was a grove of hardy trees. In the heart of the grove he had his coffin-box opened for the first time—though the custom-house officers had taken off a slat or two to estimate the duty. It revealed a carefully-crated statue of Baron von Bismarck.

Grandfather was radiant as his workmen placed it.

"This, Franz," he said to me, "this is to be our inspiration—yours and mine. This is the likeness of the world's greatest spirit, the embodiment of all that is power and energy and courage and craftsmanship and ambition. Here is our idol, the Iron Chancellor. Sit here with him in the grove until you catch the mystery of his being. Ponder on the grass by the side of this marble being until you catch his ambition. We have our work to do—you and I. Remember, Franz!"

Grandfather doled out his money solemnly, almost stubbornly. Mother wished to seek work until I should come into my own, but he would not hear to it. I found him once ten days after we had become established. I had been sent by Mother to Boston and had chosen to see the harbor rather than spend my vacant time in some place of amusement. I

came upon Grandfather. He was silently and with rare art charting the harbor. His surprize at seeing me was not as great as his apparent uneasiness. He ordered me away. But secretly I found his notations later. In German words he had written upon each sheet in small characters, "For the Fatherland."

I wonder today, if Grandfather Printz had lived, if the fate of France and Belgium would not have been America's! But he aged rapidly after leaving Munich and he left us suddenly. According to his papers we shipped his remains back to Munich—the ashes of cremation as he had directed. The papers and charts he wished returned to Berlin we did not send. Mother seemed to divine that he had, in his loyalty to the old, been unfaithful to the new. His funds (I do not think we ever found all of them), Mother directed into a finishing course for me at Boston Conservatory and my initial career.

I WILL rush by two years of study at Boston. My chance finally came. I was to be soloist with a great orchestra. Mother told me that afterward managers would flock to me and the critics would herald me. In anticipation of the triumph I went to rest for a month or more back at the little estate which Grandfather had bought.

Perhaps I had been there four days—at least four—when a strange sensation came over me. I am about to be absolutely honest. I do not understand the spirit world. I have never studied the unseen forces of Nature and Mind. I am by trade a musician—a violinist. I merely am writing those sensations which I felt. I do not know that I heard actual voices. I do not know whether or not actual sound-waves were produced. I can only tell *what I actually heard.*

It was late on a Friday afternoon. I had been telling Mother of my efforts at mastering English at the Conservatory. Later I had gone to my own room and was looking about on the photographic prints—some of Munich, many more of America. Suddenly I saw Grandfather Printz. No form at the Judgment Throne will ever be more real. He appeared to be touched with some great zeal, some big enthusiasm. His words were as clear as his living voice—only not as loud. "Have you forgotten, Franz, our inspiration—yours and mine? Ponder on the grass by the side of this marble being until you catch his ambition. We have our work to do—you and I. Remember, Franz!"

By nature I am obedient. Even then—in my early twenties—I still asked permission of my Mother for almost anything I wished to do. She had often smiled and told me I was a man. But the habit was strong upon me. Now when Grandfather looked straight at me with unusual animation, I never questioned the idea that I had an hallucination. I saw Grandfather—actual, real. His words went into the depths of me. I quickly obeyed. Any other course was out of the question. Without thinking of Mother, I almost ran from the room. I do not recall seeing the buildings in the outer barnlot. I do not remember whether I leapt the fence or opened the gateway. But ten minutes later I was in the heart of the grove, prostrate upon the grass—and I was looking stedfastly upon the marble statue.

Nor will I try to imagine how long I was there. The sun must have crept below the hill. For I saw the image in the moonlight. It was as distinct as a fine portrait.

My story is honest. I do not know how long I was there; I do not even know why I did not hunger. Crouched there, I looked upon the face of my Grandfather's idol—the embodiment of a giant ambition. I

do not recall being numb, though I do not believe I changed my position for at least three hours.

All of a sudden that finely chiseled face changed. I believe the sky had become overcast, for it was necessary to look more intently to see the different features of the face. The face of von Bismarck faded out into an intense blackness. I would judge that it remained so perhaps for three or four minutes of time. The mystery held me closely and I stood to my feet and came a bit closer. One by one the features took on a most gruesome, hideous likeness. The nose became more pointed and slender than Grandfather's idol's; the whole contour was longer and thinner and sterner, if anything. Before my gaze there came into being a face of some terrible and mighty force or personality or being—call it anything you will. To me it was nothing short of *the face of Satan.* Not differing from the pictured likenesses, it shone almost as a dull-red sun against a stormy sky. There was no recognition. No smile—indeed, there appeared to be nothing personal.

Yet I heard a voice. Before God's throne, I would still declare I heard a voice!

The words came slowly and yet with a terrible power that seemed to make them burn their way into my consciousness. The words sank so deep that I could scarcely breathe. I know I was absolutely motionless. I felt the sensation of an all-engulfing power of deity—call it what you wish. The voice was harsh and as if strained in the production. Like brands each word burned its way into memory.

"Today," said the voice, "is the night of toll. All things have their price. You have bound me for years. You have shackled me and trodden me down. Loose me!—loose me or you shall die! Loose me and your dream shall come true! Loose me and your art shall become wonderful and terrible—and your name shall be glorious. Loose me! Loose me! I am bound, who should be free. Loose me and into your fingers shall flow my power—into your soul shall then come the rivers of ambition that none shall stem. I am the lord of power! I am the king of all yet to be!"

As quickly as the words were spoken the direful visage faded out and I found my eyes looking once more upon von Bismarck. I fell to the ground as in a great swoon. When I awoke, Mother was weeping over me. She said they had not found me until dawn.

MARCH 6th: The pain of the writing stayed my stiff fingers from their task. You who read will never know the labor of my record. But I will go on today after my rest. You must know. You must judge.

When I was strong again I went back to the statue. This time with a strange fear that hung upon me like a cloak. But I saw nothing. Neither did I hear a word.

Today I met an American girl. She lives near by and seems to be an artist. Yes, she told me—a sculptress. She interested me. But I am not for women. I have my art.

She told me to call her Minna. She is frail and unlike my old-country women friends.

She asked all about my story. I did not tell her—she is young and beautiful and she might—well, a woman can change one's ambition.

I may see her again after my debut.

Her eyes were large and wistful and she—am I an egotist to think she is drawn to me?

Bah, with the entire sex!

The night before I should go to New York for the debut I saw Grandfather. This was the last time I ever saw his image. He repeated only a phrase and went from view

into the darkness of my sleeping room. But the phrase branded me with a swift purpose. He said:

"This is to be our inspiration . . ."

I walked slowly this time out into the grove. My mood was unlike anything I had known. A strange receptivity possessed me completely. I felt as one being led into an unknown land by an untried pathway.

I had not long to wait. The spell did not hold by mystery as on the first occasion. I looked about me, I even walked about the statue and watched the sun go down behind the hill. I felt oddly unafraid.

With the darkness the terrible face crept slowly into view and I no longer viewed my grandparent's idol but the being of satanic likeness and power.

"You will loose me, my musician! You have accepted my terms. You will pay the toll . . . And yours is to be the power and glory and kingdom forever and ever and ever."

The voice faded and with it the terrible face. I turned about with deliberate purpose and walked slowly back to my mother, whom I found with friends on the veranda. I was not shaken. Nor, to be honest, had I known that I had reached any decisions or made any surrender. I do know that a very queer sense of relief possessed me utterly. I amused my mother's friends with some stories of Conservatory life. I found myself laughing with a strange intoxication. Mother even felt my cheeks, fearing a fever had come with the approach of my great night. I brought out Grandfather's ancient tankard and, as we were all of one blood, we drank rather heartily of the beer and ate with enthusiasm of the German cakes which Mother always baked with such fine skill. I am not by nature a wit; in fact I have always taken myself too seriously. Yet on that strange night—that eve of victory—I became a punster of the worst sort. I sang lilting snatches of folk-song, too; and to cap the evening's mirth, I told the party that on the morrow I would play like *this*, and—oh God, I tell the truth!—I actually transfixed them, my mother most of all. At the close of the rhapsody I had chosen, my mother held me for minutes to her breast and every woman in the party kissed me with the silly sentimentality of the French.

Minna was among them.

I think she had asked Mother if she might not hear me sometime.

The wistfulness of her eyes! I am twice her age at least. Why do I even think of her a moment? We are unlike. She asked me for a moment in the far corner away from the others. She showed me rough sketches of her sculpture. She, too, has a gift.

But she has no ambition. She will not go far. She managed to reply to my question about her career by blushing and saying a home must be more remarkable than all the careers in the world.

She is weakly sentimental that way.

MARCH 20th: What surrender I ever made will always be a mystery to me. I can not name an hour when I ever said to imp or god that I would do thus or so. But heart decisions are unlike mind decisions. The mind may speak one thing and the heart be acting along lines quite contrary. The heart in its decision is still; the heart is never loud, never boastful; but it wins over the mind—will or nil.

I went to my debut with no concern. In fact my calm puzzled my friends and made my mother sorrowful. She had never known an artist to feel such an abandon, such buoyancy—such utter lack of concern. (My fingers ache with their task. I will finish another day.)

April 2nd: I could not go on. For days I have been in physical misery.

I can hardly play the bass viol at the Durand. I am aging. I am old and stiff—at forty-two!

But the story. I dare not delay it. Perhaps I can never finish it, if I neglect my chance.

With nimble fingers, I wish to tell you of that great evening. But cramped fingers can not write with rapidity, and besides, you all have read—ah, you have read of Franz Printz!

I was *everything* that night! Listen, for I am not a boasting, lying man. In the name of the Blessed Virgin, I am even thought modest. But it is God's truth—I *was* everything. I was Passion running with wild abandon down flowering garden-paths to find Youth eager and unafraid in the secret of alluring caves. I was Power with my hand on the river, the mill, the dynamo, and the forge. I was Love leading to a million sacrifices. I was fiendish, wooing, haunting, and Sir Galahad on holy quests. I was man in his striving, God with forgiving, Satan with his subtle mockeries.

Yes, they covered me with flowers and they shrieked their voices hoarse because their hands could not show me their homage. I was mobbed, kissed and applauded until——

When it was, I do not know. I was heavy with drinking and only awake enough from to time to time to feel bare-breasted women leaning about me. It had been a mad carnival of the low and beast in me. Mother told me later that I left the stage with critics begging for photographs and interviews. But, so she told, I broke away in a delirium of joy and said that *I owed a man something and that I must first pay him!*

It was Minna who found me. How strange are the ways of good women! She searched for me until she found me. She took her own reputation into her own hands. She fell down by my side with painted women showering me with their hectic attentions. She dragged me away against every protest. Leaning upon her frail shoulder I came to a park.

The girl confessed her love for me. But I can have none of it. I have a work—if they will only let me—and they *will let me*—whatever gods there be!

Days later, when I crept back, the critics found me and the managers crowded upon me. For genius is readily forgiven its dissipations. But when I found my violin it had been smashed. I recall vaguely that I hit a stage-hand who stood in my way after my last great number. And with managers pleading for my booking time, I discovered that I had truly paid a price dearer than my goal. My fingers were worked, not by nimble and trained, but by surely knotted muscles. My whole being was actually warped. I could not stand straight. I seemed muscle-bound and every atom of vital power seemed to have left me—helpless. Mother and the managers spared no expense. I was rubbed and massaged; I was bathed in every known mineral water. But to no avail.

I paid my toll.

And later with difficulty I managed to hold the stubby bow and for years I have been at the Durand with a bass viol—the purchase of the last money given me by a broken-hearted mother. The estate went, the friends, all save Minna, forsook me; God turned away from me.

Even the Unchained Devil never visited me again.

But Minna came. She came night after night to share with me the scant luxury of a walk to my home or the jars of a surface-car.

She bathes my fingers.

Last night she told me that maybe I could come to see her work. It is an exhibit or something. But I will never go. I will not ruin her standing, whatever it has grown to be. I am an outcast, a failure! . . . I could cry from the pain of humiliation

until the stars shriek back at me in mockery.

Love has welled up in my hard heart. I love the girl in return—but I am man enough never to let her know. She is gentle—like the whisper of new spring in Central Park. She must have some wealth. I do not understand it. But I will be fair to her. I will give her no wreck.

April 15th: I must add this. Some unseen power compels me. I have just gotten word from the manager of the Durand to whom in a moment of terrible despair I showed these slowly-penned pages of my life. He says that I must be treated yet again. That new invention and discovery will play upon my tightened, stiffened muscles and I yet will play. He has loaned me a violin and I am trying daily to play.

April 20th: The Symphony Orchestra needs a first-violin. My conductor at the Durand has recommended me.

MAY 1st: It is evening. I have surrendered the bass viol at the Durand and daily they are rubbing my muscles. I have come to the old estate bought by Grandfather. It will be sunset soon. I am here pondering on the grass by the side of a marble statue. Something has lured, something has called me. I do not know what; I do not care. Only I am here to watch and listen—and obey.

It is so near the dusk that I can hardly see to write . . . Oh God, the face is changing into the likeness of Satan! And the lips are moving—moving as they did so long ago. Yes, it is the same voice and I hear the same words.

"Loose me! Loose me and I will——"

Oh, I will, I will, I will! I will loose you and I shall play in the Symphony with the first violins! I shall . . .

May 15th: It was Minna's hand that stopt me at the writing. It was the warm heart of a wonder-woman who took me away.

"I have something to show you, My Own!" she explained.

Then she took me back to the garden. Her own funds had purchased it all back for me.

Then I looked on the miracle that is Love. And, Oh you who read my honest story, don't forget, as I did, that Love is more than all Art or Genius or Power.

This was the miracle. She had with skilled fingers changed the statue of Bismarck—von Bismarck the chancellor—into a being scarce a fourth the size—and it was the likeness of a little child!

"And," she went on, "this is to be our new inspiration until—until the time comes, if it ever comes, that God shall give to us a living child—sent from His glory-throne to lead us aright."

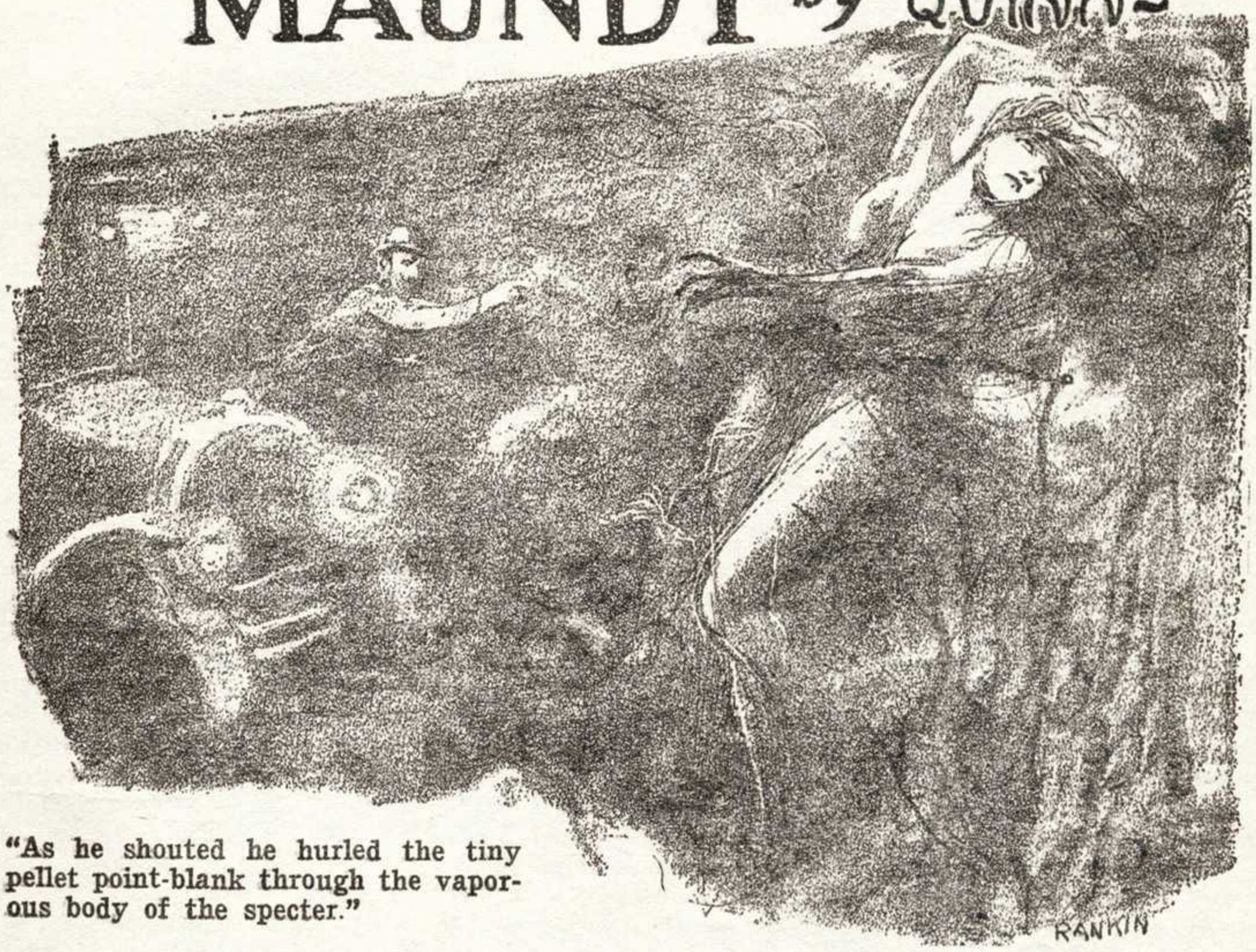
Daily she has massaged my fingers with more than skill.

Today I took a bow into my hands.

I can play!—I can play a violin!

The CURSE of EVERARD MAUNDY

by SEABURY QUINN



"As he shouted he hurled the tiny pellet point-blank through the vaporous body of the specter."

"*MORT d'un chat!* I do not like this!" Jules de Grandin slammed the evening paper down upon the table and glared ferociously at me through the library lamplight.

"What's up now?" I asked, wondering vaguely what the cause of his latest grievance was. "Some reporter say something personal about you?"

"*Parbleu, non,* he would better not!" the little Frenchman replied, his round blue eyes flashing ominously. "Me, I would pull his nose and tweak his ears. But it is not of the reporter's insolence I speak, my friend; I do not like these suicides; there are too many of them."

"Of course there are," I conceded soothingly, "one suicide is that much too many; people have no right to——"

"Ah bah!" he cut in. "You do misapprehend me, *mon vieux.* Excuse me one moment, if you please." He rose hurriedly from his chair and left the room. A moment later I heard him rummaging about in the cellar.

In a few minutes he returned, the week's supply of discarded newspapers salvaged from the dust bin in his arms.

"Now, attend me," he ordered as he spread the sheets out before him and began scanning the columns

hastily. "Here is an item from Monday's *Journal:*

Two Motorists Die While Driving Cars

The impulse to end their lives apparently attacked two automobile drivers on the Albemarle turnpike near Lonesome Swamp, two miles out of Harrisonville, last night. Carl Planz, thirty-one years old, of Martins Falls, took his own life by shooting himself in the head with a shotgun while seated in his automobile, which he had parked at the roadside where the pike passes nearest the swamp. His remains were identified by two letters, one addressed to his wife, the other to his father, Joseph Planz, with whom he was associated in the real estate business at Martins Falls. A check for three hundred dollars and several other papers found in his pockets completed identification. The letters, which merely declared his intention to kill himself, failed to establish any motive for the act.

Almost at the same time, and within a hundred yards of the spot where Planz's body was found by State Trooper Henry Anderson this morning, the body of Henry William Nixon, of New Rochelle, N. Y., was discovered partly sitting, partly lying on the rear seat of his automobile, an empty bottle of windshield cleaner lying on the floor beside him. It is thought this liquid, which contained a small amount of cyanide of potassium, was used to inflict death. Police Surgeon Stevens, who examined both bodies, declared that the men had been dead approximately the same length of time when brought to the station house.

"What think you of that, my friend, *hein?*" de Grandin demanded, looking up from the paper with one of his direct, challenging stares.

"Why—er——" I began, but he interrupted.

"Hear this," he commanded, taking up a second paper, "this is from the *News* of Tuesday:

Mother and Daughters Die in Death Pact

Police and heartbroken relatives are today trying to trace a motive for the triple suicide of Mrs. Ruby Westerfelt and her daughters, Joan and Elizabeth, who perished by leaping from the eighth floor of the Hotel Dolores, Newark, late yesterday afternoon. The women registered at the hotel under assumed names, went immediately to the room assigned them, and ten minutes later Miss Gladys Walsh, who occupied a room on the fourth floor, was startled to see a dark form hurtle past her window. A moment later a second body flashed past on its downward flight, and as Miss Walsh, horrified, rushed toward the window, a loud crash sounded outside. Looking out, Miss Walsh saw the body of a third woman partly impaled on the spikes of a balcony rail.

Miss Walsh sought to aid the woman. As she leaned from her window and reached out with a trembling arm she was greeted by a scream: "Don't try! I won't be saved; I must go with Mother and Sister!" A moment later the woman had managed to free herself from the restraining iron spikes and fell to the cement areaway four floors below.

"And here is still another account, this one from tonight's paper," he continued, unfolding the sheet which had caused his original protest:

High School Co-ed Takes Life in Attic

The family and friends of Edna May McCarty, fifteen-year-old co-ed of Harrisonville High School, are at a loss to assign a cause for her suicide early this morning. The girl had no love affairs, as far as is known, and had not failed in her examinations. On the contrary, she had passed the school's latest test with flying colors. Her mother told investigating police officials that overstudy might have temporarily unbalanced the child's mind. Miss McCarty's body was found suspended from the rafters of her father's attic by her mother this morning when the young woman did not respond to a call for breakfast and could not be found in her room on the second floor of the house. A clothesline, used to hang clothes which were dried inside the house in rainy weather, was used to form the fatal noose.

"Now then, my friend," de Grandin reseated himself and lighted a vile-smelling French cigarette, puffing furiously, till the smoke surrounded his sleek, blond head like a mephitic nimbus, "what have you to say to those reports? Am I not right? Are there not too many—*mordieu,* entirely too many!—suicides in our city?"

"All of them weren't committed here," I objected practically, "and besides, there couldn't very well be any connection between them. Mrs. Westerfelt and her daughters carried

out a suicide pact, it appears, but they certainly could have had no understanding with the two men and the young girl——"

"Perhaps, maybe, possibly," he agreed, nodding his head so vigorously that a little column of ash detached itself from his cigarette and dropped unnoticed on the bosom of his stiffly starched evening shirt. "You may be right, Friend Trowbridge, but then, as is so often the case, you may be entirely wrong. One thing I know: I, Jules de Grandin, shall investigate these cases myself personally. *Cordieu,* they do interest me! I shall ascertain what is the what here."

"Go ahead," I encouraged. "The investigation will keep you out of mischief," and I returned to the second chapter of Haggard's *The Wanderer's Necklace,* a book which I have read at least half a dozen times, yet find as fascinating at each rereading as when I first perused its pages.

THE matter of the six suicides still bothered him next morning. "Trowbridge, my friend," he asked abruptly as he disposed of his second helping of coffee and passed his cup for replenishment, "why is it that people destroy themselves?"

"Oh," I answered evasively, "different reasons, I suppose. Some are crossed in love, some meet financial reverses and some do it while temporarily deranged."

"Yes," he agreed thoughtfully, "yet every self-murderer has a real or fancied reason for quitting the world, and there is apparently no reason why any of these six poor ones who hurled themselves into outer darkness during the past week should have done so. All, apparently, were well provided for, none of them, as far as is known, had any reason to regret the past or fear the future; yet"—he shrugged his narrow shoulders significantly—"*voilà,* they are gone!

"Another thing: At the *Faculté de Médicine Légal* and the *Sûreté* in Paris we keep most careful statistics, not only on the number, but on the manner of suicides. I do not think your Frenchman differs radically from your American when it comes to taking his life, so the figures for one nation may well be a signpost for the other. These self-inflicted deaths, they are not right. They do not follow the rules. Men prefer to hang, slash or shoot themselves; women favor drowning, poison or gas; yet here we have one of the men taking poison, one of the women hanging herself, and three of them jumping to death. *Nom d'un canard,* I am not satisfied with it!"

"H'm, neither are the unfortunate parties who killed themselves, if the theologians are to be believed," I returned.

"You speak right," he returned, then muttered dreamily to himself: "Destruction—destruction of body and imperilment of soul—*mordieu,* it is strange, it is not righteous!" He disposed of his coffee at a gulp and leaped from his chair. "I go!" he declared dramatically, turning toward the door.

"Where?"

"Where? Where should I go, if not to secure the history of these so puzzling cases? I shall not rest nor sleep nor eat until I have the string of the mystery's skein in my hands." He paused at the door, a quick, elfin smile playing across his usually stern features. "And should I return before my work is complete," he suggested, "I pray you, have the excellent Nora prepare another of her so magnificent apple pies for dinner."

Forty seconds later the front door clicked shut, and from the dining room's oriel window I saw his neat little figure, trimly encased in blue chinchilla and gray worsted, pass quickly down the sidewalk, his ebony cane hammering a rapid tattoo on the

stones as it kept time to the thoughts racing through his active brain.

"I AM desolated that my capacity is exhausted," he announced that evening as he finished his third portion of deep-dish apple pie smothered in pungent rum sauce and regarded his empty plate sadly. "*Eh bien,* perhaps it is as well. Did I eat more I might not be able to think clearly, and clear thought is what I shall need this night, my friend. Come; we must be going."

"Going where?" I demanded.

"To hear the reverend and estimable Monsieur Maundy deliver his sermon."

"Who? Everard Maundy?"

"But of course, who else?"

"But—but," I stammered, looking at him incredulously, "why should we go to the tabernacle to hear this man? I can't say I'm particularly impressed with his system, and—aren't you a Catholic, de Grandin?"

"Who can say?" he replied as he lighted a cigarette and stared thoughtfully at his coffee cup. "My father was a Huguenot of the Huguenots; a several times great-grandsire of his cut his way to freedom through the Paris streets on the fateful night of August 24, 1572. My mother was convent-bred, and as pious as anyone with a sense of humor and the gift of thinking for herself could well be. One of my uncles—he for whom I am named—was like a blood brother to Darwin the magnificent, and Huxley the scarcely less magnificent, also. Me, I am"—he elevated his eyebrows and shoulders at once and pursed his lips comically—"what should a man with such a heritage be, my friend? But come, we delay, we tarry, we lose time. Let us hasten. I have a fancy to hear what this Monsieur Maundy has to say, and to observe him. See, I have here tickets for the fourth row of the hall."

Very much puzzled, but never doubting that something more than the idle wish to hear a sensational evangelist urged the little Frenchman toward the tabernacle, I rose and accompanied him.

"*Parbleu,* what a day!" he sighed as I turned my car toward the downtown section. "From coroner's office to undertakers' I have run; and from undertakers' to hospitals. I have interviewed everyone who could shed the smallest light on these strange deaths, yet I seem no further advanced than when I began. What I have found out serves only to whet my curiosity; what I have not discovered——" He spread his hands in a world-embracing gesture and lapsed into silence.

The Jachin Tabernacle, where the Rev. Everard Maundy was holding his series of non-sectarian revival meetings, was crowded to overflowing when we arrived, but our tickets passed us through the jostling crowd of half-skeptical, half-believing people who thronged the lobby, and we were soon ensconced in seats where every word the preacher uttered could be heard with ease.

Before the introductory hymn had been finished, de Grandin mumbled a wholly unintelligible excuse in my ear and disappeared up the aisle, and I settled myself in my seat to enjoy the service as best I might.

The Rev. Mr. Maundy was a tall, hatchet-faced man in early middle life, a little inclined to rant and make use of worked-over platitudes, but obviously sincere in the message he had for his congregation. From the half-cynical attitude of a regularly-enrolled church member who looks on revivals with a certain disdain, I found myself taking keener and keener interest in the story of regeneration the preacher had to tell, my attention compelled not so much by his words as by the earnestness of his manner and the wonderful stage presence the man possessed. When

the ushers had taken up the collection and the final hymn was sung, I was surprized to find we had been two hours in the tabernacle. If anyone had asked me, I should have said half an hour would have been nearer the time consumed by the service.

"Eh, my friend, did you find it interesting?" de Grandin asked as he joined me in the lobby and linked his arm in mine.

"Yes, very," I admitted, then, somewhat sulkily: "I thought you wanted to hear him, too—it was your idea that we came here—what made you run away?"

"I am sorry," he replied with a chuckle which belied his words, "but it was *necessaire* that I fry other fish while you listened to the reverend gentleman's discourse. Will you drive me home?"

The March wind cut shrewdly through my overcoat after the superheated atmosphere of the tabernacle, and I felt myself shivering involuntarily more than once as we drove through the quiet streets. Strangely, too, I felt rather sleepy and ill at ease. By the time we reached the wide, tree-bordered avenue before my house I was conscious of a distinctly unpleasant sensation, a constantly-growing feeling of malaise, a sort of baseless, irritating uneasiness. Thoughts of years long forgotten seemed summoned to my memory without rime or reason. An incident of an unfair advantage I had taken of a younger boy while at public school, recollections of petty, useless lies and bits of naughtiness committed when I could not have been more than three came flooding back on my consciousness, finally an episode of my early youth which I had forgotten some forty years.

My father had brought a little stray kitten into the house, and I, with the tiny lad's unconscious cruelty, had fallen to teasing the wretched bundle of bedraggled fur, finally tossing it nearly to the ceiling to test the tale I had so often heard that a cat always lands on its feet. My experiment was the exception which demonstrated the rule, it seemed, for the poor, half-starved feline hit the hardwood floor squarely on its back, struggled feebly a moment, then yielded up its entire ninefold expectancy of life.

Long after the smart of the whipping I received in consequence had been forgotten, the memory of that unintentional murder had plagued my boyish conscience, and many were the times I had awakened at dead of night, weeping bitter repentance out upon my pillow.

Now, some forty years later, the thought of that kitten's death came back as clearly as the night the unkempt little thing thrashed out its life upon our kitchen floor. Strive as I would, I could not drive the memory from me, and it seemed as though the unwitting crime of my childhood was assuming an enormity out of all proportion to its true importance.

I shook my head and passed my hand across my brow, as a sleeper suddenly wakened does to drive away the lingering memory of an unpleasant dream, but the kitten's ghost, like Banquo's, would not down.

"What is it, Friend Trowbridge?" de Grandin asked as he eyed me shrewdly.

"Oh, nothing," I replied as I parked the car before our door and leaped to the curb, "I was just thinking."

"Ah?" he responded on a rising accent. "And of what do you think, my friend? Something unpleasant?"

"Oh, no; nothing important enough to dignify by that term," I answered shortly, and led the way to the house, keeping well ahead of him, lest he push his inquiries farther.

In this, however, I did him wrong. Tactful women and Jules de Grandin have the talent of feeling without be-

ing told when conversation is unwelcome, and besides wishing me a pleasant good-night, he spoke not a word until we had gone upstairs to bed. As I was opening my door, he called down the hall, "Should you want me, remember, you have but to call."

"Humph!" I muttered ungraciously as I shut the door. "Want him? What the devil should I want him for?" And so I pulled off my clothes and climbed into bed, the thought of the murdered kitten still with me and annoying me more by its persistence than by the faint sting of remorse it evoked.

How long I had slept I do not know, but I do know I was wide-awake in a single second, sitting up in bed and staring through the darkened chamber with eyes which strove desperately to pierce the gloom.

Somewhere—whether far or near I could not tell—a cat had raised its voice in a long-drawn, wailing cry, kept silence a moment, then given tongue again with increased volume.

There are few sounds more eery to hear in the dead of night than the cry of a prowling feline, and this one was of a particularly sad, almost reproachful tone.

"Confound the beast!" I exclaimed angrily, and lay back on my pillow, striving vainly to recapture my broken sleep.

Again the wail sounded, indefinite as to location, but louder, more prolonged, even, it seemed, fiercer in its timbre than when I first heard it in my sleep.

I glanced toward the window with the vague thought of hurling a book or boot or other handy missile at the disturber, then held my breath in sudden affright. Staring through the aperture between the scrim curtains was the biggest, most ferocious-looking tom-cat I had ever seen. Its eyes, seemingly as large as butter dishes, glared at me with the green phosphorescence of its tribe, and with an added demoniacal glow the like of which I had never seen. Its red mouth, opened to full compass in a venomous, soundless "spit," seemed almost as large as that of a lion, and the wicked, pointed ears above its rounded face were laid back against its head, as though it were crouching for combat.

"Get out! Scat!" I called feebly, but making no move toward the thing.

"S-s-s-sssh!" a hiss of incomparable fury answered me, and the creature put one heavy, padded paw tentatively over the window-sill, still regarding me with its unchanging, hateful stare.

"Get!" I repeated, and stopped abruptly. Before my eyes the great beast was *growing*, increasing in size till its chest and shoulders completely blocked the window. Should it attack me I would be as helpless in its claws as a Hindoo under the paws of a Bengal tiger.

Slowly, stealthily, its cushioned feet making no sound as it set them down daintily, the monstrous creature advanced into the room, crouched on its haunches and regarded me steadily, wickedly, malevolently.

I rose a little higher on my elbow. The great brute twitched the tip of its sable tail warningly, half lifted one of its forepaws from the floor, and set it down again, never shifting its sulfurous eyes from my face.

Inch by inch I moved my farther foot from the bed, felt the floor beneath it, and pivoted slowly in a sitting position until my other foot was free of the bedclothes. Apparently the cat did not notice my strategy, for it made no menacing move till I flexed my muscles for a leap, suddenly flung myself from the bedstead, and leaped toward the door.

With a snarl, white teeth flashing, green eyes glaring, ears laid back, the

beast moved between me and the exit, and began slowly advancing on me, hate and menace in every line of its giant body.

I gave ground before it, retreating step by step and striving desperately to hold its eyes with mine, as I had heard hunters sometimes do when suddenly confronted by wild animals.

Back, back I crept, the ogreish visitant keeping pace with my retreat, never suffering me to increase the distance between us.

I felt the cold draft of the window on my back; the pressure of the sill against me; behind me, from the waist up, was the open night, before me the slowly advancing monster.

It was a thirty-foot drop to a cemented roadway, but death on the pavement was preferable to the slashing claws and grinding teeth of the terrible thing creeping toward me.

I threw one leg over the sill, watching constantly, lest the cat-thing leap on me before I could cheat it by dashing myself to the ground——

"Trowbridge, *mon Dieu,* Trowbridge, my friend! What is it you would do?" The frenzied hail of Jules de Grandin cut through the dark, and a flood of light from the hallway swept into the room as he flung the door violently open and raced across the room, seizing my arm in both hands and dragging me from the window.

"Look out, de Grandin!" I screamed. "The cat! It'll get you!"

"Cat?" he echoed, looking about him uncomprehendingly. "Do you say 'cat', my friend? A cat will get *me? Mort d'un chou,* the cat which can make a mouse of Jules de Grandin is not yet whelped! Where is it, this cat of yours?"

"There! Th——" I began, then stopped, rubbing my eyes. The room was empty. Save for de Grandin and me there was nothing animate in the place.

"But it *was* here," I insisted. "I tell you, I saw it; a great, black cat, as big as a lion. It came in the window and crouched right over there, and was driving me to jump to the ground when you came——"

"*Nom d'un porc!* Do you say so?" he exclaimed, seizing my arm again and shaking me. "Tell me of this cat, my friend. I would learn more of this puss-puss who comes into Friend Trowbridge's house, grows great as a lion and drives him to his death on the stones below. Ha, I think maybe the trail of these mysterious deaths is not altogether lost! Tell me more, *mon ami;* I would know all—all!"

"Of course, it was just a bad dream," I concluded as I finished the recital of my midnight visitation, "but it seemed terribly real to me while it lasted."

"I doubt it not," he agreed with a quick, nervous nod. "And on our way from the tabernacle tonight, my friend, I noticed you were much *distrait.* Were you, perhaps, feeling ill at the time?"

"Not at all," I replied. "The truth is, I was remembering something which occurred when I was a lad four or five years old; something which had to do with a kitten I killed," and I told him the whole wretched business.

"U'm?" he commented when I had done. "You are a good man, Trowbridge, my friend. In all your life, since you attained to years of discretion, I do not believe you have done a wicked or ignoble act."

"Oh, I wouldn't say that," I returned, "we all——"

"*Parbleu,* I have said it. That kitten incident, now, is probably the single tiny skeleton in the entire closet of your existence, yet sustained thought upon it will magnify it even as the cat of your dream grew from cat's to lion's size. *Pardieu,* my friend, I am not so sure you did dream of that abomination in the

shape of a cat which visited you. Suppose——'' he broke off, staring intently before him, twisting first one, then the other end of his trimly waxed mustache.

''Suppose what?'' I prompted.

''*Non,* we will suppose nothing tonight,'' he replied. ''You will please go to sleep once more, my friend, and I shall remain in the room to frighten away any more dream-demons which may come to plague you. Come, let us sleep. Here I do remain.'' He leaped into the wide bed beside me and pulled the down comforter snugly up about his pointed chin.

''. . . . and I'd like very much to have you come right over to see her, if you will,'' Mrs. Weaver finished. ''I can't imagine whatever made her attempt such a thing—she's never shown any signs of it before.''

I hung up the telephone receiver and turned to de Grandin. ''Here's another suicide, or almost-suicide, for you,'' I told him half teasingly. ''The daughter of one of my patients attempted her life by hanging in the bathroom this morning.''

''*Par la tête bleu,* do you tell me so?'' he exclaimed eagerly. ''I go with you, *cher ami.* I see this young woman; I examine her. Perhaps I shall find some key to the riddle there. *Parbleu,* me, I itch, I burn, I am all on fire with this mystery! Certainly, there must be an answer to it; but it remains hidden like a peasant's pig when the tax collector arrives.''

''Well, young lady, what's this I hear about you?'' I demanded severely as we entered Grace Weaver's bedroom a few minutes later. ''What on earth have you to die for?''

''I—I don't know what made me want to do it, Doctor,'' the girl replied with a wan smile. ''I hadn't thought of it before—ever. But I just got to—oh, you know, sort of brooding over things last night, and when I went into the bathroom this morning, something—something inside my head, like those ringing noises you hear when you have a head-cold, you know—seemed to be whispering, 'Go on, kill yourself; you've nothing to live for. Go on, do it!' So I just stood on the scales and took the cord from my bathrobe and tied it over the transom, then knotted the other end about my neck. Then I kicked the scales away and'' —she gave another faint smile— ''I'm glad I hadn't locked the door before I did it,'' she admitted.

De Grandin had been staring unwinkingly at her with his curiously level glance throughout her recital. As she concluded he bent forward and asked: ''This voice which you heard bidding you commit an unpardonable sin, *Mademoiselle,* did you, perhaps, recognize it?''

The girl shuddered. ''No!'' she replied, but a sudden paling of her face about the lips gave the lie to her word.

''*Pardonnez-moi, Mademoiselle,*'' the Frenchman returned. ''I think you do not tell the truth. Now, whose voice was it, if you please?''

A sullen, stubborn look spread over the girl's features, to be replaced a moment later by the muscular spasm which preludes weeping. ''It—it sounded like Fanny's,'' she cried, and turning her face to the pillow, fell to sobbing bitterly.

''And Fanny, who is she?'' de Grandin began, but Mrs. Weaver motioned him to silence with an imploring gesture.

I prescribed a mild bromide and left the patient, wondering what mad impulse could have led a girl in the first flush of young womanhood, happily situated in the home of parents who idolized her, engaged to a fine young man, and without bodily or spiritual ill of any sort, to attempt her life. Outside, de Grandin seized

the mother's arm and whispered fiercely: "Who is this Fanny, Madame Weaver? Believe me, I ask not from idle curiosity, but because I seek vital information!"

"Fanny Briggs was Grace's chum two years ago," Mrs. Weaver answered. "My husband and I never quite approved of her, for she was several years older than Grace, and had such pronounced modern ideas that we didn't think her a suitable companion for our daughter, but you know how girls are with their 'crushes'. The more we objected to her going with Fanny, the more she used to seek her company, and we were both at our wits' ends when the Briggs girl was drowned while swimming at Asbury Park. I hate to say it, but it was almost a positive relief to us when the news came. Grace was almost broken-hearted about it at first, but she met Charley this summer, and I haven't heard her mention Fanny's name since her engagement until just now."

"Ah?" de Grandin tweaked the tip of his mustache meditatively. "And perhaps Mademoiselle Grace was somewhere to be reminded of Mademoiselle Fanny last night?"

"No," Mrs. Weaver replied, "she went with a crowd of young folks to hear Maundy preach. There was a big party of them at the tabernacle—I'm afraid they went more to make fun than in a religious frame of mind, but he made quite an impression on Grace, she told us."

"*Feu de Dieu!*" de Grandin exploded, twisting his mustache furiously. "Do you tell me so, *Madame?* This is of the interest. *Madame,* I salute you," he bowed formally to Mrs. Weaver, then seized me by the arm and fairly dragged me away.

"Trowbridge, my friend," he informed me as we descended the steps of the Weaver portico, "this business, it has *l'odeur du poisson*—how is it you say?—the fishy smell."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"*Parbleu,* what should I mean except that we go to interview this Monsieur Everard Maundy immediately, right away, at once? *Mordieu,* I damn think I have the tail of this mystery in my hand, and may the blight of prohibition fall upon France if I do not twist it!"

THE Rev. Everard Maundy's rooms in the Tremont Hotel were not hard to locate, for a constant stream of visitors went to and from them.

"Have you an appointment with Mr. Maundy?" the secretary asked as we were ushered into the anteroom.

"Not we," de Grandin denied, "but if you will be so kind as to tell him that Dr. Jules de Grandin, of the Paris *Sûreté,* desires to speak with him for five small minutes, I shall be in your debt."

The young man looked doubtful, but de Grandin's steady, catlike stare never wavered, and he finally rose and took our message to his employer.

In a few minutes he returned and admitted us to the big room where the evangelist received his callers behind a wide, flat-topped desk.

"Ah, Mr. de Grandin," the exhorter began with a professionally bland smile as we entered, "you are from France, are you not, sir? What can I do to help you toward the light?"

"*Cordieu, Monsieur,*" de Grandin barked, for once forgetting his courtesy and ignoring the preacher's outstretched hand, "you can do much. You can explain these so unexplainable suicides which have taken place during the past week—the time you have preached here. That is the light we do desire to see."

Maundy's face went masklike and expressionless. "Suicides? Suicides?" he echoed. "What should I know of——"

The Frenchman shrugged his narrow shoulders impatiently. "We do fence with words, *Monsieur,*" he interrupted testily. "Behold the facts: Messieurs Planz and Nixon, young men with no reason for such desperate deeds, did kill themselves by violence; Madame Westerfelt and her two daughters, who were happy in their home, as everyone thought, did hurl themselves from an hotel window; a little schoolgirl hanged herself; last night my good friend Trowbridge, who never understandingly harmed man or beast, and whose life is dedicated to the healing of the sick, did almost take his life; and this very morning a young girl, wealthy, beloved, with every reason to be happy, did almost succeed in dispatching herself.

"Now, *Monsieur le prédicateur,* the only thing this miscellaneous assortment of persons had in common is the fact that *each of them did hear you preach the night before, or the same night, he attempted self-destruction.* That is the light we seek. Explain us the mystery, if you please."

Maundy's lean, rugged face had undergone a strange transformation while the little Frenchman spoke. Gone was his smug, professional smirk, gone the forced and meaningless expression of benignity, and in their place a look of such anguish and horror as might rest on the face of one who hears his sentence of damnation read.

"Don't—don't!" he besought, covering his writhing face with his hands and bowing his head upon his desk while his shoulders shook with deep, soul-racking sobs. "Oh, miserable me! My sin has found me out!"

For a moment he wrestled in spiritual anguish, then raised his stricken countenance and regarded us with tear-dimmed eyes. "I am the greatest sinner in the world," he announced sorrowfully. "There is no hope for me on earth or yet in heaven!"

De Grandin tweaked the ends of his mustache alternately as he gazed curiously at the man before us. "*Monsieur,*" he replied at length, "I think you do exaggerate. There are surely greater sinners than you. But if you would shrive you of the sin which gnaws your heart, I pray you shed what light you can upon these deaths, for there may be more to follow, and who knows that I shall not be able to stop them if you will but tell me all?"

"*Mea culpa!*" Maundy exclaimed, and struck his chest with his clenched fists like a Hebrew prophet of old. "In my younger days, gentlemen, before I dedicated myself to the salvaging of souls, I was a scoffer. What I could not feel or weigh or measure, I disbelieved. I mocked at all religion and sneered at all the things which others held sacred.

"One night I went to a Spiritualistic séance, intent on scoffing, and forced my young wife to accompany me. The medium was an old colored woman, wrinkled, half-blind and unbelievably ignorant, but she had something — some secret power — which was denied the rest of us. Even I, atheist and derider of the truth that I was, could see that.

"As the old woman called on the spirits of the departed, I laughed out loud, and told her it was all a fake. The negress came out of her trance and turned her deep-set, burning old eyes on me. 'White man,' she said, 'yuh is gwine ter feel mighty sorry fo' dem words. Ah tells yuh de speerits can heah whut yuh says, an' dey will take deir revenge on yuh an' yours—yas, an' on dem as follers yuh—till yuh wishes yo' tongue had been cut out befo' yuh said dem words dis yere night.'

"I tried to laugh at her—to curse her for a sniveling old faker—but there was something so terrible in

her wrinkled old face that the words froze on my lips, and I hurried away.

"The next night my wife—my young, lovely bride—drowned herself in the river, and I have been a marked man ever since. Wherever I go it is the same. God has seen fit to open my eyes to the light of Truth and give me words to place His message before His people, and many who come to sneer at me go away believers; but wherever throngs gather to hear me bear my testimony there are always these tragedies. Tell me, gentlemen"—he threw out his hands in a gesture of surrender—"must I forever cease to preach the message of the Lord to His people? I have told myself that these self-murders would have occurred whether I came to town or not, but—is this a judgment which pursues me forever?"

Jules de Grandin regarded him thoughtfully. "*Monsieur,*" he murmured, "I fear you make the mistakes we are all too prone to make. You do saddle *le bon Dieu* with all the sins with which the face of man is blackened. What if this were no judgment of heaven, but a curse of a very different sort, *hein?*"

"You mean the devil might be striving to overthrow the effects of my work?" the other asked, a light of hope breaking over his haggard face.

"U'm, perhaps; let us take that for our working hypothesis," de Grandin replied. "At present we may not say whether it be devil or devilkin which dogs your footsteps; but at the least we are greatly indebted to you for what you have told. Go, my friend; continue to preach the Truth as you conceive the Truth to be, and may the God of all peoples uphold your hands. Me, I have other word to do, but it may be scarcely less important." He bowed formally and, turning on his heel, strode quickly from the room.

"THAT'S the most fantastic story I ever heard!" I declared as we entered the hotel elevator. "The idea! As if an ignorant old negress could put a curse on——"

"*Zut!*" de Grandin shut me off. "You are a most excellent physician in the State of New Jersey, Friend Trowbridge, but have you ever been in Martinique, or Haiti, or in the jungles of the Congo Belgique?"

"Of course not," I admitted, "but——"

"I have. I have seen things so strange among the *Voudois* people that you would wish to have me committed to a madhouse did I but relate them to you. However, as that Monsieur Kipling says, 'that is another story.' At the present we are pledged to the solving of another mystery. Let us go to your house. I would think, I would consider all this business-of-the-monkey. *Pardieu,* it has as many angles as a diamond cut in Amsterdam!"

"TELL me, Friend Trowbridge," he demanded as we concluded our evening meal, "have you perhaps among your patients some young man who has met with a great sorrow recently; someone who has sustained a loss of wife or child or parents?"

I looked at him in amazement, but the serious expression on his little heart-shaped face told me he was in earnest, not making some ill-timed jest at my expense.

"Why, yes," I responded. "There is young Alvin Spence. His wife died in childbirth last June, and the poor chap has been half beside himself ever since. Thank God I was out of town at the time and didn't have the responsibility of the case."

"Thank God, indeed," de Grandin nodded gravely. "It is not easy for us, though we do ply our trade among the dying, to tell those who remain behind of their bereavement. But this Monsieur Spence; will you call

on him this evening? Will you give him a ticket to the lecture of Monsieur Maundy?"

"No!" I blazed, half rising from my chair. "I've known that boy since he was a little toddler—knew his dead wife from childhood, too; and if you're figuring on making him the subject of some experiment——"

"Softly, my friend," he besought. "There is a terrible Thing loose among us. Remember the noble martyrs of science, those so magnificent men who risked their lives that yellow fever and malaria should be no more. Was not their work a holy one? Certainly. I do but wish that this young man may attend the lecture tonight, and on my honor, I shall guard him until all danger of attempted self-murder is passed. You will do what I say?"

He was so earnest in his plea that, though I felt like an accessory before the fact in a murder, I agreed.

Meantime, his little blue eyes snapping and sparkling with the zest of the chase, de Grandin had busied himself with the telephone directory, looking up a number of addresses, culling through them, discarding some, adding others, until he had obtained a list of some five or six. "Now, *mon vieux,*" he begged as I made ready to visit Alvin Spence on my treacherous errand, "I would that you convey me to the rectory of St. Benedict's Church. The priest in charge there is Irish, and the Irish have the gift of seeing things which you colder-blooded Saxons may not. I must have a confab with this good Father O'Brien before I can permit that you interview the young Monsieur Spence. *Mordieu,* me, I am a scientist; no murderer!"

I drove him past the rectory and parked my motor at the curb, waiting impatiently while he thundered at the door with the handle of his ebony walking stick. His knock was answered by a little old man in clerical garb and a face as round and ruddy as a winter apple.

De Grandin spoke hurriedly to him in a low voice, waving his hands, shaking his head, shrugging his shoulders, as was his wont when the earnestness of his argument bore him before it. The priest's round face showed first incredulity, then mild skepticism, finally absorbed interest. In a moment the pair of them had vanished inside the house, leaving me to cool my heels in the bitter March air.

"You were long enough," I grumbled as he emerged from the rectory.

"*Pardieu,* yes, just long enough," he agreed. "I did accomplish my purpose, and no visit is either too long or too short when you can say that. Now to the house of the good Monsieur Spence, if you will. *Mordieu,* but we shall see what we shall see this night!"

Six hours later de Grandin and I crouched shivering at the roadside where the winding, serpentine Albemarle Pike dips into the hollow beside the Lonesome Swamp. The wind which had been trenchant as a shrew's tongue earlier in the evening had died away, and a hard, dull bitterness of cold hung over the hills and hollows of the rolling countryside. From the wide salt marshes where the bay's tide crept up to mingle with the swamp's brackish waters twice a day there came great sheets of brumous, impenetrable vapor which shrouded the landscape and distorted commonplace objects into hideous, gigantic monstrosities.

"*Mort d'un petit bonhomme,* my friend," de Grandin commented between chattering teeth, "I do not like this place; it has an evil air. There are spots where the very earth does breathe of unholy deeds, and by the sacred name of a rooster, this is one

such. Look you at this accursed fog. Is it not as if the specters of those drowned at sea were marching up the shore this night?"

"Umph!" I replied, sinking my neck lower in the collar of my ulster and silently cursing myself for a fool.

A moment's silence, then: "You are sure Monsieur Spence must come this way? There is no other road by which he can reach his home?"

"Of course not," I answered shortly. "He lives out in the new Weiss development with his mother and sister—you were there this evening—and this is the only direct motor route to the subdivision from the city."

"Ah, that is well," he replied, hitching the collar of his greatcoat higher about his ears. "You will recognize his car—surely?"

"I'll try to," I promised, "but you can't be sure of anything on a night like this. I'd not guarantee to pick out my own—there's somebody pulling up beside the road now," I interrupted myself as a roadster came to an abrupt halt and stood panting, its headlights forming vague, luminous spots in the haze.

"*Mais oui,*" he agreed, "and no one stops at this spot for any good until *It* has been conquered. Come, let us investigate." He started forward, body bent, head advanced, like a motion picture conception of an Indian on the warpath.

Half a hundred stealthy steps brought us abreast of the parked car. Its occupant was sitting back on the driving seat, his hands resting listlessly on the steering wheel, his eyes upturned, as though he saw a vision in the trailing wisps of fog before him. I needed no second glance to recognize Alvin Spence, though the rapt look upon his white, set face transfigured it almost beyond recognition. He was like a poet beholding the beatific vision of his mistress or a medieval eremite gazing through the opened portals of Paradise.

"A-a-ah!" de Grandin's whisper cut like a wire-edged knife through the silence of the fog-bound air, "do you behold it, Friend Trowbridge?"

"Wha——" I whispered back, but broke the syllable half uttered. Thin, tenuous, scarcely to be distinguished from the lazily drifting festoons of the fog itself, there was a *something* in midair before the car where Alvin Spence sat with his yearning soul looking from his eyes. I seemed to see clear through the thing, yet its outlines were plainly perceptible, and as I looked and looked again, I recognized the unmistakable features of Dorothy Spence, the young man's dead wife. Her body—if the tenuous, ethereal mass of static vapor could be called such—was bare of clothing, and seemed endued with a voluptuous grace and allure the living woman had never possessed, but her face was that of the young woman who had lain in Rosedale Cemetery for three-quarters of a year. If ever living man beheld the simulacrum of the dead, we three gazed on the wraith of Dorothy Spence that moment.

"Dorothy—my beloved, my dear, my dear!" the man half whispered, half sobbed, stretching forth his hands to the spirit-woman, then falling back on the seat as the vision seemed to elude his grasp when a sudden puff of breeze stirred the fog.

We could not catch the answer he received, close as we stood, but we could see the pale, curving lips frame the single word, "Come!" and saw the transparent arms stretched out to beckon him forward.

The man half rose from his seat, then sank back, set his face in sudden resolution and plunged his hand into the pocket of his overcoat.

Beside me de Grandin had been fumbling with something in his inside pocket. As Alvin Spence drew

forth his hand and the dull gleam of a polished revolver shone in the light from his dashboard lamp, the Frenchman leaped forward like a panther. "Stop him, Friend Trowbridge!" he called shrilly, and to the hovering vision:

"Avaunt, accursed one! Begone, thou exile from heaven! Away, snake-spawn!"

As he shouted he drew a tiny pellet from his inner pocket and hurled it point-blank through the vaporous body of the specter.

Even as I seized Spence's hand and fought with him for possession of the pistol, I saw the transformation from the tail of my eye. As de Grandin's missile tore through its unsubstantial substance, the vision-woman seemed to shrink in upon herself, to become suddenly more compact, thinner, scrawny. Her rounded bosom flattened to mere folds of leatherlike skin stretched drum-tight above staring ribs, her slender graceful hands were horrid, claw-tipped talons, and the yearning, enticing face of Dorothy Spence became a mask of hideous, implacable hate, great-eyed, thin-lipped, beak-nosed—such a face as the demons of hell might show after a million million years of burning in the infernal fires. A screech like the keening of all the owls in the world together split the fog-wrapped stillness of the night, and the monstrous thing before us seemed suddenly to shrivel, shrink to a mere spot of baleful, phosphorescent fire, and disappear like a snuffed-out candle's flame.

Spence saw it, too. The pistol dropped from his nerveless fingers to the car's floor with a soft thud, and his arm went limp in my grasp as he fell forward in a dead faint.

"*Parbleu,*" de Grandin swore softly as he climbed into the unconscious lad's car. "Let us drive forward, Friend Trowbridge. We will take him home and administer a soporific. He must sleep, this poor one, or the memory of what we have shown him will rob him of his reason."

So we carried Alvin Spence to his home, administered a hypnotic and left him in the care of his wondering mother with instructions to repeat the dose if he should wake.

IT WAS a mile or more to the nearest bus station, and we set out at a brisk walk, our heels hitting sharply against the frosty concrete of the road.

"What in the world was it, de Grandin?" I asked as we marched in step down the darkened highway. "It was the most horrible——"

"*Parbleu,*" he interrupted, "someone comes this way in a monstrous hurry!"

His remark was no exaggeration. Driven as though pursued by all the furies from pandemonium, came a light motor car with plain black sides and a curving top. "Look out!" the driver warned as he recognized me and came to a bumping halt. "Look out, Dr. Trowbridge, it's walking! It got out and walked!"

De Grandin regarded him with an expression of comic bewilderment. "Now what is it that walks, *mon brave?*" he demanded. "*Mordieu,* you chatter like a monkey with a handful of hot chestnuts! What is it that walks, and why must we look out for it, *hein?*"

"Sile Gregory," the young man answered. "He died this mornin', an' Mr. Johnson took him to th' parlors to fix 'im up, an' sent me an' Joe Williams out with him this evenin'. I was just drivin' up to th' house, an' Joe hopped out to give me a lift with th' casket, an' old Silas *got up an' walked away!* An' Mr. Johnson embalmed 'im this mornin', I tell you!"

"*Nom d'un chou-fleur!*" de Grandin shot back. "And where did this

so remarkable demonstration take place, *mon vieux?* Also, what of the excellent Williams, your partner?"

"I don't know, an' I don't care," the other replied. "When a dead corpse I saw embalmed this mornin' gets outa its casket an' walks, I ain't gonna wait for nobody. Jump up here, if you want to go with me; I ain't gonna stay here no longer!"

"*Bien,*" de Grandin acquiesced. "Go your way, my excellent one. Should we encounter your truant corpse, we will direct him to his waiting *bière.*"

The young man waited no second invitation, but started his car down the road at a speed which would bring him into certain trouble if observed by a state trooper.

"Now, what the devil do you make of that?" I asked. "I know Johnson, the funeral director, well, and I always thought he had a pretty level-headed crowd of boys about his place, but if that lad hasn't been drinking some powerful liquor, I'll be——"

"Not necessarily, my friend," de Grandin interrupted. "I think it not at all impossible that he tells but the sober truth. It may well be that the dead do walk this road tonight."

I shivered with something other than the night's chill as he made the matter-of-fact assertion, but forbore pressing him for an explanation. There are times when ignorance is a happier portion than knowledge.

We had marched perhaps another quarter-mile in silence when de Grandin suddenly plucked my sleeve. "Have you noticed nothing, my friend?" he asked.

"What d'ye mean?" I demanded sharply, for my nerves were worn tender by the night's events.

"I am not certain, but it seems to me we are followed."

"Followed? Nonsense! *Who* would be following us?" I returned, unconsciously stressing the personal pronoun, for I had almost said, "What would follow us," and the implication raised by the impersonal form sent tiny shivers racing along my back and neck.

De Grandin cast me a quick, appraising glance, and I saw the ends of his spiked mustache lift suddenly as his lips framed a sardonic smile, but instead of answering he swung round on his heel and faced the shadows behind us.

"*Holà, Monsieur le Cadavre!*" he called sharply. "Here we are, and—*sang du diable!*—here we shall stand."

I looked at him in open-mouthed amazement, but his gaze was turned stedfastly on something half seen in the mist which lay along the road.

Next instant my heart seemed pounding through my ribs and my breath came hot and choking in my throat, for a tall, gangling man suddenly emerged from the fog and made for us at a shambling gait.

He was clothed in a long, old-fashioned double-breasted frock coat and stiffly starched shirt topped by a standing collar and white, ministerial tie. His hair was neatly, though somewhat unnaturally, arranged in a central part above a face the color and smoothness of wax, and little flecks of talcum powder still clung here and there to his eyebrows. No mistaking it! Johnson, artist that he was, had arrayed the dead farmer in the manner of all his kind for their last public appearance before relatives and friends. One look told me the horrible, incredible truth. It was the body of old Silas Gregory which stumbled toward us through the fog. Dressed, greased and powdered for its last, long rest, the thing came toward us with faltering, uncertain strides, and I noticed, with the sudden ability for minute inventory fear sometimes lends our senses, that his old, sunburned skin showed more than one brand where the formaldehyde embalming fluid had burned it.

In one long, thin hand the horrible thing grasped the helve of a farmyard ax, the other hand lay stiffly folded across the midriff as the embalmer had placed it when his professional ministrations were finished that morning.

"My God!" I cried, shrinking back toward the roadside. But de Grandin ran forward to meet the charging horror with a cry which was almost like a welcome.

"Stand clear, Friend Trowbridge," he warned, "we will fight this to a finish, I and It!" His little, round eyes were flashing with the zest of combat, his mouth was set in a straight, uncompromising line beneath the sharply waxed ends of his diminutive mustache, and his shoulders hunched forward like those of a practised wrestler before he comes to grips with his opponent.

With a quick, whipping motion, he ripped the razor-sharp blade of his sword-cane from its ebony sheath and swung the flashing steel in a whirring circle about his head, then sank to a defensive posture, one foot advanced, one retracted, the leg bent at the knee, the triple-edged sword dancing before him like the darting tongue of an angry serpent.

The dead thing never faltered in its stride. Three feet or so from Jules de Grandin it swung the heavy, rust-encrusted ax above its shoulder and brought it downward, its dull, lack-luster eyes staring straight before it with an impassivity more terrible than any glare of hate.

"*Sa ha!*" de Grandin's blade flickered forward like a streak of storm lightning, and fleshed itself to the hilt in the corpse's shoulder.

He might as well have struck his steel into a bag of meal.

The ax descended with a crushing, devastating blow.

De Grandin leaped nimbly aside, disengaging his blade and swinging it again before him, but an expression of surprize—almost of consternation—was on his face.

I felt my mouth go dry with excitement, and a queer, weak feeling hit me at the pit of the stomach. The Frenchman had driven his sword home with the skill of a practised fencer and the precision of a skilled anatomist. His blade had pierced the dead man's body at the junction of the short head of the biceps and the great pectoral muscle, at the coracoid process, inflicting a wound which should have paralyzed the arm—yet the terrible ax rose for a second blow as though de Grandin's steel had struck wide of the mark.

"Ah?" de Grandin nodded understandingly as he leaped backward, avoiding the ax-blade by the breadth of a hair. "*Bien. À la fin!*"

His defensive tactics changed instantly. Flickeringly his sword lashed forward, then came down and back with a sharp, whipping motion. The keen edge of the angular blade bit deeply into the corpse's wrist, laying bare the bone. Still the ax rose and fell and rose again.

Slash after slash de Grandin gave, his slicing cuts falling with almost mathematical precision in the same spot, shearing deeper and deeper into his dreadful opponent's wrist. At last, with a short, clucking exclamation, he drew his blade sharply back for the last time, severing the ax-hand from the arm.

The dead thing collapsed like a deflated balloon at his feet as hand and ax fell together to the cement roadway.

Quick as a mink, de Grandin thrust his left hand within his coat, drew forth a pellet similar to that with which he had transformed the counterfeit of Dorothy Spence, and hurled it straight into the upturned, ghastly-calm face of the mutilated body before him.

The dead lips did not part, for the embalmer's sutures had closed them

forever that morning, but the body writhed upward from the road, and a groan which was a muted scream came from its flat chest. It twisted back and forth a moment, like a mortally stricken serpent in its death agony, then lay still.

Seizing the corpse by its grave-clothes, de Grandin dragged it through the line of roadside hazel bushes to the rim of the swamp, and busied himself cutting long, straight withes from the brushwood, then disappeared again behind the tangled branches. At last:

"It is finished," he remarked, stepping back to the road. "Let us go."

"Wha—what did you do?" I faltered.

"I did the needful, my friend. *Morbleu,* we had an evil, a very evil thing imprisoned in that dead man, and I took such precautions as were necessary to fix it in its prison. A stake through the heart, a severed head, and the whole firmly thrust into the ooze of the swamp—*voilà.* It will be long before other innocent ones are induced to destroy themselves by *that.*"

"But——" I began.

"*Non, non,*" he replied, half laughing. "*En avant, mon ami!* I would that we return home as quickly as possible. Much work creates much appetite, and I make small doubt that I shall consume the remainder of that so delicious apple pie which I could not eat at dinner."

JULES DE GRANDIN regarded the empty plate before him with a look of comic tragedy. "May endless benisons rest upon your amiable cook, Friend Trowbridge," he pronounced, "but may the curse of heaven forever pursue the villain who manufactures the wofully inadequate pans in which she bakes her pies."

"Hang the pies, and the plate-makers, too!" I burst out. "You promised to explain all this hocus-pocus, and I've been patient long enough. Stop sitting there like a glutton, wailing for more pie, and tell me about it."

"Oh, the mystery?" he replied, stifling a yawn and lighting a cigarette. "That is simple, my friend, but these so delicious pies—however, I do digress:

"When first I saw the accounts of so many strange suicides within one little week I was interested, but not greatly puzzled. People have slain themselves since the beginning of time, and yet"—he shrugged his shoulders deprecatingly—"what is it that makes the hound scent his quarry, the war-horse sniff the battle afar off? Who can tell?

"I said to me: 'There is undoubtlessly more to these deaths than the newspapers have said. I shall investigate.'

"From the coroner's to the undertakers', and from the undertakers' to the physicians', yes, *parbleu!* and to the family residences, as well, I did go, gleaning here a bit and there a bit of information which seemed to mean nothing, but which might mean much did I but have other information to add to it.

"One thing I ascertained early: In each instance the suicides had been to hear this reverend Maundy the night before or the same night they did away with themselves. This was perhaps insignificant; perhaps it meant much. I determined to hear this Monsieur Maundy with my own two ears; but I would not hear him too close by.

"Forgive me, my friend, for I did make of you the guinea-pig for my laboratory experiment. You I left in a forward seat while the reverend gentleman preached, me, I stayed in the rear of the hall and used my eyes as well as my ears.

"What happened that night? Why, my good, kind Friend Trowbridge, who in all his life had done

no greater wrong than thoughtlessly to kill a little, so harmless kitten, did almost *seemingly* commit suicide. But I was not asleep by the switch, my friend. Not Jules de Grandin! All the way home I saw you were *distrait*, and I did fear something would happen, and I did therefore watch beside your door with my eye and ear alternately glued to the keyhole. *Parbleu*, I entered the chamber not one little second too soon, either!

"'This is truly strange,' I tell me. 'My friend hears this preacher and nearly destroys himself. Six others have heard him, and have quite killed themselves. If Friend Trowbridge were haunted by the ghost of a dead kitten, why should not those others, who also undoubtlessly possessed distressing memories, have been hounded to their graves by them?'

"'There is no reason why they should not,' I tell me.

"Next morning comes the summons to attend the young Mademoiselle Weaver. She, too, have heard the preacher; she, too, have attempted her life. And what does she tell us? That she fancied the voice of her dead friend urged her to kill herself.

"'Ah, ha!' I say to me. 'This whatever-it-is which causes so much suicide may appeal by fear, or perhaps by love, or by whatever will most strongly affect the person who dies by his own hand. We must see this Monsieur Maundy. It is perhaps possible he can tell us much.'

"As yet I can see no light—I am still in darkness—but far ahead I already see the gleam of a promise of information. When we see Monsieur Everard Maundy and he tells us of his experience at that séance so many years ago—*parbleu*, I see it all, or almost all.

"Now, what was it acted as agent for that aged sorceress' curse?"

He elevated one shoulder and looked questioningly at me.

"How should I know?" I answered.

"Correct," he nodded, "how, indeed? Beyond doubt it were a spirit of some sort; what sort we do not know. Perhaps it were the spirit of some unfortunate who had destroyed himself and was earthbound as a consequence. There are such. And, as misery loves company in the proverb, so do these wretched ones seek to lure others to join them in their unhappy state. Or, maybe, it were an Elemental."

"A *what?*" I demanded.

"An Elemental—a Neutrarian."

"What the deuce is that?"

For answer he left the table and entered the library, returning with a small red-leather bound volume in his hand. "You have read the works of Monsieur Rossetti?" he asked.

"Yes."

"You recall his poem, *Eden Bowers*, perhaps?"

"H'm; yes, I've read it, but I never could make anything of it."

"Quite likely," he agreed, "its meaning is most obscure, but I shall enlighten you. *Attendez-moi!*"

Thumbing through the thin pages he began reading at random:

> It was Lilith, the wife of Adam,
> Not a drop of her blood was human,
> But she was made like a soft, sweet woman . . . .
>
> Lilith stood on the skirts of Eden,
> She was the first that thence was driven,
> With her was hell and with Eve was heaven . . . .
>
> What bright babes had Lilith and Adam,
> Shapes that coiled in the woods and waters,
> Glittering sons and radiant daughters . . . .

"You see, my friend?"

"No, I'm hanged if I do."

"Very well, then, according to the rabbinical lore, before Eve was created, Adam, our first father, had a demon wife named Lilith. And by

her he had many children, not human, nor yet wholly demon.

"For her sins Lilith was expelled from Eden's bowers, and Adam was given Eve to wife. With Lilith was driven out all her progeny by Adam, and Lilith and her half-man, half-demon brood declared war on Adam and Eve and their descendants for ever. These descendants of Lilith and Adam have ever since roamed the earth and air, incorporeal, having no bodies like men, yet having always a hatred for flesh and blood. Because they were the first, or elder race, they are sometimes called Elementals in the ancient lore; sometimes they are called Neutrarians, because they are neither wholly men nor wholly devils. Me, I do not take sides in the controversy; I care not what they are called, but I know what I have seen. I think it is highly possible those ancient Hebrews, misinterpreting the manifestations they observed, accounted for them by their so fantastic legends. We are told these Neutrarians or Elementals are immaterial beings. Absurd? Not necessarily. What is matter—material? Electricity, perhaps—a great system of law and order throughout the universe and all the millions of worlds extending throughout infinity.

"Very good, so far; but when we have said matter is electricity, what have we to say if asked, 'What is electricity?' Me, I think it a modification of the ether.

" 'Very good,' you say; 'but what is ether?'

"*Parbleu,* I do not know. The matter—or material—of the universe is little, if anything, more than electrons flowing about in all directions. Now here, now there, the electrons coalesce and form what we call solids —rocks and trees and men and women. But may they not coalesce at a different rate of speed, or vibration, to form beings which are real, with emotions and loves and hates similar to ours, yet for the most part invisible to us, as is the air? Why not? No man can truthfully say, 'I have seen the air,' yet no one is so great a fool as to doubt its existence for that reason."

"Yes, but we can see the effects of air," I objected. "Air in motion, for instance, becomes wind, and——"

"*Mort d'un crapaud!*" he burst out. "And have we not observed the effects of these Elementals—these Neutrarians, or whatsoever their name may be? How of the six suicides; how of that which tempted the young Mademoiselle Weaver and the young Monsieur Spence to self-murder? How of the cat which entered your room? Did we see no effects there, *hein?*"

"But the thing we saw with young Spence, and the cat, were visible," I objected.

"But of course. When you fancied you saw the cat, you were influenced from within, even as Mademoiselle Weaver was when she heard the voice of her dead friend. What we saw with the young Spence was the shadow of his desire—the intensified love and longing for his dead wife, plus the evil entity which urged him to unpardonable sin."

"Oh, all right," I conceded. "Go on with your theory."

He stared thoughtfully at the glowing tip of his cigarette a moment, then: "It has been observed, my friend, that he who goes to a Spiritualistic séance may come away with some evil spirit attached to him —whether it be a spirit which once inhabited human form or an Elemental, it is no matter; the evil ones swarm about the lowered lights of the Spiritualistic meeting as flies congregate at the honey-pot in summer. It appears such an one fastened to Everard Maundy. His wife was its first victim, afterward those who heard him preach were attacked.

"Consider the scene at the taber-

nacle when Monsieur Maundy preaches: Emotion, emotion—all is emotion; reason is lulled to sleep by the power of his words; and the minds of his hearers are not on their guard against the entrance of evil spirits; they are too intent on what he is saying. Their consciousness is absent. *Pouf!* The evil one fastens firmly on some unwary person, explores his innermost mind, finds out his weakest point of defense. With you it was the kitten; with young Mademoiselle Weaver, her dead friend; with Monsieur Spence, his lost wife. Even love can be turned to evil purposes by such an one.

"These things I did consider most carefully, and then I did enlist the services of young Monsieur Spence. You saw what you saw on the lonely road this night. Appearing to him in the form of his dead beloved, this wicked one had all but persuaded him to destroy himself when we intervened.

"*Très bien.* We triumphed then; the night before I had prevented your death. The evil one was angry at me; also it was frightened. If I continued, I would rob it of much prey, so it sought to do me harm. Me, I am ever on guard, for knowledge is power. It could not lead me to my death, and, being spirit, it could not directly attack me. It had recourse to its last resort. While the young undertaker's assistant was about to deliver the body of the old Monsieur Gregory, the spirit seized the corpse and animated it, then pursued me.

"Ha, almost, I thought, it had done for me at one time, for I forgot it was no living thing I fought, and attacked it as if it could be killed. But when I found my sword could not kill that which was already dead, I did cut off its so abominable hand. I am very clever, my friend. The evil spirit reaped small profits from fighting with me."

He made the boastful admission in all seriousness, entirely unaware of its sound, for to him it was but a straightforward statement of undisputed fact. I grinned in spite of myself, then curiosity got the better of amusement. "What were those little pellets you threw at the spirit when it was luring young Spence to commit suicide, and later at the corpse of Silas Gregory?" I asked.

"Ah"—his elfish smile flickered across his lips, then disappeared as quickly as it came—"it is better you do not ask me that, *mon cher*. Let it suffice when I tell you I convinced the good *Père* O'Brien that he should let me have what no layman is supposed to touch, that I might use the ammunition of heaven against the forces of hell."

"But how do we know this Elemental, or whatever it is, won't come back again?" I persisted.

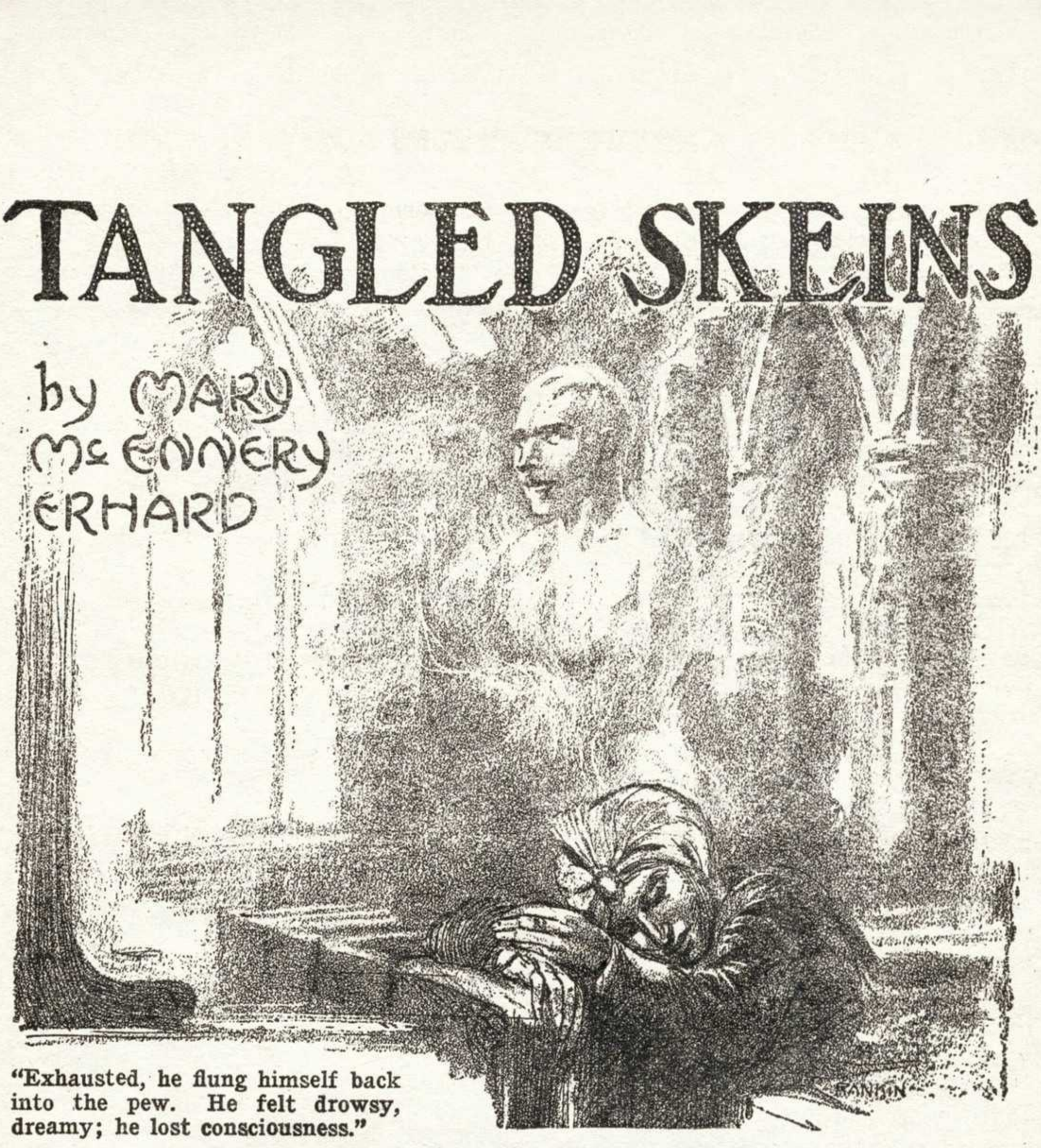
"Little fear," he encouraged. "The resort to the dead man's body was its last desperate chance. Having elected to fight me physically, it must stand or fall by the result of the fight. Once inside the body, it could not quickly extricate itself. Half an hour, at least, must elapse before it could withdraw, and before that time had passed I had fixed it there for all time. The stake through the heart and the severed head makes that body as harmless as any other, and the wicked spirit which animated it must remain with the flesh it sought to pervert to its own evil ends henceforth and forever."

"But——"

"*Ah bah!*" He dropped his cigarette end into his empty coffee cup and yawned frankly. "We do talk too much, my friend. This night's work has made me heavy with sleep. Let us take a tiny sip of cognac, that the pie may not give us unhappy dreams, and then to bed. Tomorrow is another day, and who knows what new task lies before us?"

TANGLED SKEINS

by MARY McENNERY ERHARD



"Exhausted, he flung himself back into the pew. He felt drowsy, dreamy; he lost consciousness."

I NEVER read of odd and bizarre occurrences or of happenings which seem beyond mortal ken, but I think of a tale related to me by a gentleman in whom I have the utmost confidence, and which is in my experience unique; although no doubt students of the occult, particularly in Eastern lands, will be able to parallel it directly it sees the light of day, which I think it has not done before. I shall begin to relate it without any further prolixity.

It was on a warm July night that I sat with my friend Cumberland—the Reverend Wilfred Cumberland—in his study. The roar of London traffic had quieted down, the stars winked at us gravely through the pall of soft coal smoke that still overhung the city, and which was added to by the clouds of smoke from our cigars. It was very warm.

Cumberland is by nature one of the untidiest men I know, and as usual his desk was littered all over with this and that, compelling him to pull out a drawer to support his elbow as he sat and smoked. This drawer was also crammed full of heterogeneous papers, some of which appeared to be letters recently received, and some of which were yellow and cracked at the edges.

The untidy seldom censure our neatness, but we always feel we must chide their want of care. "Cumberland," said I, "do you never clear out your desk?"

"About once a year," he replied,

"but it does no good. There is seldom much in it that I can bear to part with. I don't know how others manage, but I am irresolution itself when it comes to destroying old papers! For instance, this is a memorial pamphlet gotten out at the time of the death of Gibbons, the first rector I served under. A fine chap. This is a copy of some verses—worthless I haven't a doubt—written by one of the boys in my Sunday School class on the occasion of my ordination. Of course they are funny;—they would be *merely* funny to anyone else. This is a guide to Winchester Cathedral—I might go there again, you know. So you see how it is. In fact, the place seldom gets weeded out except when I happen—hang it! I've done it again now!"

By a careless gesture with the hand which held his cigar, he had started what was evidently his only method of desk-clearing—an accidental conflagration. The hot ash from the tobacco had fallen into the open drawer and the papers had started blazing merrily. Frantically he began to pull out the bundle of papers which were burning, before the whole contents of the drawer were involved.

He was successful in saving the rest of his cherished trash, but when he had flung the blazing package into the empty grate it was itself a total loss.

He viewed this with dismay. "Now see!" he cried; "there goes a bunch of papers which I valued highly. I had rather burned all the rest of the drawer than that!"

One glance had showed me that the bundle contained no securities nor anything of real value, but I tried to conceal my amusement nevertheless.

He continued: "Those were the notes from which I was about to start constructing what I hoped would be a very interesting monograph for the Society for the Investigation of Psychic Phenomena. I was, indeed."

"And you don't recollect the story without the papers?"

"Quite. But there are certain details which people would expect to find included in such an article, and as I always have been poor on dates and other figures——" He sighed.

"Would the tale suffer so much with those left out?"

"Not as a story, I suppose, but I fear it would be unacceptable to a scientific magazine. It would not sound convincing at all. In fact I don't believe I could ever have made it sound anything but impossible, so perhaps it is no matter."

"There is nothing so interesting as an improbable tale from a truthful person, my dear chap. Won't you let me have it from your lips sometime, if I am never to have the chance to read it in the society's bulletin?"

"Well then," he retorted smiling, "no time like the present. The mist, I see, has turned to quite a heavy rain. I couldn't allow you to go out in it, unless you were extremely determined! So compose yourself, my excellent fellow, to be talked to sleep."

"Instruct, then, your audience of one, since a larger one is denied you, and in doing so crystallize your own memories before they become dimmer."

AFTER carefully closing the drawer, the Reverend Wilfred lit another cigar, crossed his legs and began:

"It was when I was at Oxford that it all happened; that must have been thirty years ago. My failings you know well, of course, but in one subject I never came a cropper, that of English literature. This fact came very near to changing the entire course of my life. I wonder if I should ever have been able to get used to life in an Indian palace, and if I should have made a good raja

when my turn came. Well, no matter. I was not obliged to, after all.''

I stared, and he went on.

''I sat in my study at Magdalen, smoking, one evening, when someone knocked on the door. As my usual companions dispensed with that formality, I concluded it must be a proctor, and rose to open. Instantly I regretted rising, for my caller was not only merely a fellow student, but one for whom I cared very little, although principally for racial reasons. He was an East Indian.

''No one could say that Chundun had anything wrong with him, yet I strongly preferred my own color and race; and, childishly, the fact that I had been so courteous as to rise and open for him, irked me.

'' 'Good evening, Mr. Cumberland,' he said in his almost perfect English, 'May I come in?'

'' 'Certainly,' I growled, resuming my seat and my pipe churlishly, but I motioned him to a chair.

''He entered, and shut the door behind him. With a grace that seemed a little out of place for some reason—it suggested a panther to me—he crossed the room and took the chair I had indicated.

'' 'I have come to ask you a very great favor,' he began immediately.

''I frowned and was silent.

'' 'I am most anxious,' he continued, 'to return to my home. England is no place for me. It is too cold, too cold in every way. My father is old, very old. He can not live long now, we fear. I should be with him; I should also be at hand in case the time comes for me to succeed to the throne. There are other sons, older than I (although I am the only child of the ranee, and there is but one ranee), and if I am not on the spot, my father's throne may be polluted by the son of a nautch girl. Who knows? And in that case what would he do to my mother, who would never acknowledge him? I do not like to think, sir.'

'' 'Well, Chundun, I never realized you were a prince before,' I replied, 'but the government will take care of your rights, I have no doubt.'

'' 'Perhaps,' he said, 'and perhaps not. As long as there was no general massacre, your government might keep its hands off. Ours is but a small principality among the hills. And with the best of intentions, troops do not reach a place instantly they are sent. Much can be done to a woman in a few hours. My mother is but a small woman.'

''This last sentence which he introduced so irrelevantly somehow brought up such a picture of horror that I am still at a loss to account for it except by means of thought transference. I had never inquired into the details of Indian methods of torture.

''I shuddered, and Chundun went on, almost without a pause; 'And I can not return to India without my degree. My father expects it.'

'' 'Naturally,' I remarked dryly.

''I fancied the dark face flushed, but Chundun went on quite calmly, 'I can pass in everything but English literature. It—I ask your pardon—fails to hold my attention, my interest. No doubt the manner of thinking in the two races is too different. This Addison, for example—what is he to me? I can read him, but afterward I can not answer questions about what I have read. What is it to me? Pardon me, it is only nonsense.'

'' 'Then why not elect something else?'

'' 'Ah, but it is too late. I have elected. At the end of this term I should be finished all. I should receive my degree and return to my dear father. And so I am asking your help.'

'' 'If you want a tutor I'll take you on' (I had become interested at

last), 'but it's awfully late to start in with a tutor now!'

"'Too late,' replied Chundun. 'The examination is but a week off, I must use different means. Someone must take the examination for me.'"

Cumberland paused for a few puffs, and then smiled at me ruefully: "Now I know just what I should have done then, as well as you do. I ought to have stood up and showed Chundun the door. But I didn't. I was short of funds as usual. I needed to return home, not to succeed to my father's throne, but to help him with the family exchequer. Where even the expenses of my graduation were coming from I was not certain. So, to my shame it is spoken, I looked at the Indian with a sickly smile and answered, 'Do you think we look enough alike that with some sort of face stain——?'

"'I mean nothing so crude as that, Mr. Cumberland,' he rejoined. 'I mean to suggest that we exchange bodies for the day of the examination in literature.'

"'We what?' I jumped from my seat.

"'Do not be so astonished, sir,' went on Chundun smoothly. 'I am not surprized at your feelings, and am deeply grateful that you have not doubted my sanity, as many of your countrymen would have done. It is true, nevertheless, that I am able to do this thing; in fact I have repeatedly done it. I exchanged forms several times with a servant in India, and I do not doubt that with some degree of concentration it can be done equally well in England. If it does not turn out as we expect, we shall be none the worse off—you in particular.'

"I flushed silently.

"Chundun went on in his clear smooth tones: 'I am not, you see, as densely ignorant of all matters as of English literature. I have studied for some years with the priests and Brahmins of my country.'

He relapsed into silence.

"My curiosity thoroughly aroused by this time, I wished intensely to see what this intended process could be like. I had not the least faith in it, but wanted to see it through, as I should in those days have stayed out a show in a cheap museum. Also I wanted to laugh a little at Chundun when he failed. We agreed to his plans, which included a large fee to me, part of which he insisted upon paying immediately. His knowledge of my finances seemed to me then almost uncanny. Now I think it is the most ordinary reasoning."

Cumberland laughed. He continued:

"The date for the experiment was set the day previous to the examination in which Chundun expected in his own character to fail. I had finished all my own, so was free. He came to my rooms at 8 o'clock that evening, and we talked awhile first, he telling me something of his habits, that the next morning Chundun might not appear to be acting too oddly.

"'And what do you call this process, Chundun?' I asked.

"'It is called in India' (then followed a long Indian word instantly forgotten) 'and sometimes' (another unpronounceable name). 'In English it is termed a metempsychosis, but this strikes me as singularly inaccurate, as to change souls would be manifestly impossible. The body envelope, so readily laid aside universally at the hour of death, can also be laid aside temporarily during life. My soul, however, is indissolubly connected with my consciousness!'

"I agreed with him.

"At a quarter before 9, I remember looking at my clock as I lay on my bed. The process of body exchange, according to Chundun, was now about to commence.

"I had expected a fire in a brazier, incense, smoke, incantations, and I know not what of mystic ceremonies; in this I was disappointed. I can not remember any fear, only a faint sense of amusement and a great curiosity. Had I been a good Christian in those days I should undoubtedly have had nothing to do with the whole matter. Had I been even a poor Romanist, I should have protected myself in some way by prayer. Alas! those were my agnostic days!

"Chundun began proceedings by a brief injunction to me to concentrate on the matter in hand, and then was silent himself. He was reclining on my lounge. The body being wholly at rest, he said, assisted the powers of the mind and soul. We continued in silence a few minutes, and I began to get drowsy. Then I heard Chundun's voice a few moments in some sort of singsong chant in what I knew to be Hindustani, but could not catch a word of. The voice now ceased and I began again to grow sleepy.

"Presently, although the drowsiness continued, it was strangely permeated by a sense, first of strain, then of giddiness similar to the feeling when succumbing to an anesthetic. It was accompanied now, however, by no drumming in the ears. As total unconsciousness supervened, I was conscious of a sense of being lifted in some way. Then I returned to my senses very suddenly, with a feeling of having been 'out' only about a minute.

"You may believe me or not, Griswold, I awoke on the couch. I looked over to the bed in surprize for Chundun, but on it lay a white man of a familiar appearance. I sat up suddenly, and saw that my hands were brown. I ran over to examine the man on the bed. He was living in my own body."

"So the thing really happened!" I interjected.

"Yes," went on Cumberland, "the impossible actually occurred, as one hears of its doing every once in a while. My powers of mind and memory were just what they had always been (when I recovered from the shock of surprize and terror which accompanied my awaking from the trance), and although my friend would not allow me to go in my bewildered state to his rooms to spend the night, but insisted on my occupying my own bed for the nonce while he used the couch, in the morning I was quite myself—in a brown body."

"And you took the examination successfully for the Indian prince?"

"To my shame, yes."

"And then changed back, I suppose? Most astounding!"

"The next night I spent in my own rooms also, as Chundun and I agreed it would be best to stay where one of us knew exactly where everything was. I could see, though, that my striker was more than astonished to find an Indian spending two nights with me. He was plainly disgusted.

"At 5 o'clock the following evening, thoroughly tired of each other's bodies, we agreed to resume our own, and, locking the door as before, prepared for the second change. We lay down, we concentrated, Chundun chanted, I became drowsy, and then —nothing more. I awoke out of the drowsiness (I had not lost my senses completely as at first) to find myself still brown, still a prisoner in a body not my own!

"How can I describe that endless night? The repetition of the process, the strained 'concentrating' which one of us knew nothing about in reality, the varied incantations in Hindustani, all perfectly useless! We faced the dawn in utter despair, which even Chundun's Eastern stoicism could not conceal.

"As we sat there in the gray mist of morning, we could make no plans save for the immediate present. The

next night we would both spend in his rooms until I became accustomed to where he kept his belongings, and then the false life must continue, until—what?

"'Perhaps,' Chundun suggested, 'we are now unduly exhausted. All may go well next time we make the attempt to change. In the meanwhile let us rest, relax, refresh mind and body.'

"Rest? Relax? With this frightful problem eating out our hearts? Should I never again be myself, never again see my family, embrace my mother and sisters? Should I have to go and be a prince in India? Loathsome thought! How I should undoubtedly hate the climate and the surroundings! I had no fear but that I would make an excellent ruler, but this gave me little comfort.

"Chundun being an Indian, I have no way of guessing how much of similar import went through his mind. When I met him in the halls and grounds of the college, his face (my face!) appeared unmoved. But I presume his face which I wore betrayed my grief conspicuously and disgraced its real owner.

"Our deceitful examination in literature had been the last one scheduled for either of us. The day of commencement drew on, arrived. I received Chundun's diploma, and he mine. I carried his continually in a pocket.

"That night I went to my old rooms to see him. We tried once more to regain our own bodies; it was in vain. Under a calm exterior, he looked haggard and worn. He insisted on accompanying me back to his rooms, where he divided equally between us, come what would, the thousand or so pounds which he kept there. He declared that if we finally failed to regain our own physical envelopes, I must go to India and take up his duties, and he would let his father know, lest I be found out and suffer. I was silent. Never could I counsel him to take my place. Could I see my sisters in the arms of one whose body was a brother to them, but whose soul was that of an Indian? No, he must stay away from Deven, I thought.

"Most of the time we were now alone. I suppose Chundun did not act like me, and so was shunned as a changed man by my old cronies. I was too disheartened to care for any company, and no one spoke to me but the instructors and a couple of other Indian students, who, I suspect, knew all, having been confided in by Chundun. It was manifestly impossible for me to do the same with my friends. My troubles would merely have been aggravated by the risk of being committed to a madhouse.

"It was now the day following the graduating exercises. The previous day most of the students had departed. I was glad that none of my people had been up to the commencement; I could not have borne it. Today was the latest day I could with any face start for home. I did not know if Chundun intended to do this for me or not. I could not bear to think of him with my family. It was worse than the thought of going to India (I had not even asked the exact location of the kingdom in which he expected me to take his place) and never seeing my dear ones again myself.

"I wandered about Oxford in a despairing state, unable to make up my mind as to my next move. The only trouble that I did not have (I felt) was lack of funds, and finally I decided to take train for Liverpool, and ship for America. There at least I could lose myself among strangers, and grief might finally dull itself out. No doubt I should be able to get some kind of work in time. And as virtually no one in America was acquainted with any of the tongues

of India, I should not present the anomaly of an East Indian unable to talk a word of Hindustani.

"I repaired to the railroad station, and bought my ticket for Liverpool. I took first class that I might be alone. The train did not start for an hour. I wandered about waiting. I had no luggage. I did not know which set of luggage belonged to me, and was too discouraged to try to find out.

"As I traversed for the last time the well-known streets of the old town, I was drawn by the strains of one of Chopin's nocturnes and found myself entering a small old church, very dark and peaceful, where the organist was giving a most beautiful recital to himself and the doves in the ivy-covered belfry above. I sank into a pew, and seemed to stop thinking.

"I often wonder now how long that blessed musician played, and I sat motionless, scarcely knowing who or what I was, stunned still by my grief, yet comforted by the familiar and beautiful strains of some of the best music ever written by mortals. Finally I think I fell asleep.

"Suddenly I came to myself with a start. The music had ceased; I was wide-awake, with my mind unusually clear, clearer far than it had been since the day I had left my own body. But what astonished me most was that I had also a complete change of mind. Not in regard to my grief at my dreadful predicament, but in regard to my worse than indifference to the religion of my parents. Suddenly I saw myself as I was, and the enormity of my offense against God and Man in agreeing to a cheat, in taking part in a mystic ceremony of whose import I must necessarily be ignorant, in carrying out the deception. Come what would, I thought, I would do what I could to rectify matters. What should I do? The first thing that occurred to me was to find Chundun and return the money. Then a second and stronger impulse forced me to unaccustomed knees, and to a prayer of penitence which was probably the first genuine one I had ever offered. The sweep of utterly new religious feeling (I had always hated church from a child, probably because I was taken to too many services each Sunday) seemed to me far the most wonderful thing in my whole experience. And after praying for forgiveness, I was moved to ask also for a deliverance from my dreadful predicament. Then, exhausted, I flung myself back into the pew.

"I felt drowsy, dreamy; I lost consciousness.

"Then I awoke with a start. I leaped to my feet. The church would be locked up for the night, perhaps. I must find Chundun, I must make restitution. I started for the door.

"Then I staggered back in surprize. Where was I? Not in the little old church near the railway station but in my own room at Magdalen. I fell back into a chair, astounded. I glanced down at my hands.

"They were white!

"I was myself again, thanks be to God! But where was Chundun?

"It took a few moments of reflection to see that he must have been sitting, probably dozing and receptive, in a chair in my sitting room; and I upon my return to my own body had found myself there. So he must have awakened in the church. Thither I hastened.

"It was still unlocked, but the sexton was about to close it. I asked if I might first see if a friend of mine were there, perhaps asleep. 'He has just had a great shock,' I had the forethought to explain. We went in together, the sexton and I. The church was empty.

"I came out perplexed. I wandered about and then sought the station. Had an Indian gentleman

taken the Liverpool train? He had.

"Quick-witted Chundun! No doubt he had found the ticket in my pocket when he came to himself, and fearing perhaps even to look once more on myself or the scenes where his Indian enchantments worked only in their first part, he had fled incontinently for home.

"I never saw him again, nor heard from him. He never even sent for the contents of his rooms at the college, and I believe they were finally sold at auction. I fancied he wished me to have them, but he never left any word to that effect, for which I was very glad. The cheat was now irrevocable, or at least it would have served no purpose to have exposed it. No doubt Chundun knew far more than the average Oxford don. As for the money, in the course of years I have paid it to the church—to missions in India," he added with a smile.

"And how do you account for it, Cumberland?"

"I don't, altogether. Perhaps, as I said, charms don't work so well away from their native heath. Perhaps again, one person had to be dominant at the first change, the other at the second. And I had always left the responsibility to Chundun. Perhaps again, the sweeping changes of conversion in my own soul necessitated in some way its also returning to the body in which it had been created. No, Griswold, I don't explain it. I am only very thankful I am not on an Indian throne at this moment, a place I should be about as fit to occupy as Fido here. That is all there is to the story."

And he arose and strolled to the window. It was late. The rain had ceased. Big Ben was chiming midnight.

"After all," I said as I rose to depart, "Cumberland, I don't think it is a paper for the society. I am inclined to think it is a sermon."

He smiled a little ruefully. "Shoemaker, stick to your last!" said he.

"Anyhow it's a story."

And in that I agreed with him.

A FABLE

By CLARK ASHTON SMITH

O lords and gods that are! The assigning tide, upon
Some prowless beach where a forgotten fisher dwells,
At length will leave the sea-flung jars of Solomon;

And he, the fisher, fumbling 'mid the weeds and shells,
Shall find them, and shall rive the rusted seals, and free
The djinns that shall tread down thy towering iron hells

And turn to homeless rack thy proud Reality;
That shall re-mold thy pyramids and mountains flown,
And lift Atlantis on their shoulders from the sea

To flaunt her kraken-fouled necropoli unknown;
And lift again those vaster peaks, that saw the veil
Of fire from primal suns on plains calescent thrown. . . . .

O lords and gods that are! I tell a future tale.

The ULTIMATE PROBLEM

by VICTOR ROUSSEAU

"Some frenzy must have overcome me next. I tore away the wires and overturned the globe."

DURING the two years that I had acted as secretary to Dr. Brodsky, assisting him in his psychical experiments, I had been enabled to build up an active medical practise of my own. My duties were light; often the doctor did not call upon my services for two or three weeks together. More and more rarely had he done so of recent months, and gradually the conviction, sure, although intuitive, was borne in upon me that the days of our association were numbered.

Although comparatively young in years, Brodsky lived through the existences of three ordinary men. His early revolutionary career in Poland, his struggles in America, at first for the mere necessities of life, afterward for success; finally, the dedication of his career to the solution of psychical problems had satiated him with worldly experiences. He was unmarried; his only ties lay, as he had told me, upon the veiled shore of eternity. I felt that life held nothing further for him.

"Death," he said to me once, "is no result of physical processes. So wonderful a machine is the human body that there exists no reason at all why it should not go on forever. What kills is the satiation with earthly experiences that comes to us; it is the longing of the soul for its resting place, where it stores up and absorbs

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NOTE—This is the eleventh and last of a series of stories, each complete in itself, dealing with Dr. Ivan Brodsky, "The Surgeon of Souls." The series began in WEIRD TALES for September, 1926.

all the results of its earthly achievements until it is ready to renew them in some fresh incarnation."

"And you—are you satisfied?" I ventured to ask.

"Not with the world," he answered. "But with my own personality—yes, I am tired of Ivan Brodsky. These incarnations are the merest halting places in the soul's long pilgrimage. I would like to take up my work afresh, but in a different body, so that I might forget Brodsky, with his hopes and longings and disappointments, and face the world with the fresh anticipations and new faith of a child."

"But that is annihilation!" I cried. "All the dreams of immortality that are the hope of the world, the desire for continued personal existence after death—are these all useless?"

"By no means," the doctor answered. "The personality persists after the change called death. It remains so long as it is needed. Reincarnation is not fulfilled until the soul has grown tired of its remembrances and voluntarily descends, after some thousand years of dreams, to gain new experiences. And then, though it puts off the old personality forever, the results of its acts remain to modify its new life; shadowy remembrances flit through the brain; old friends are encountered; besides, in the end, everything is remembered.

"For those who wish continued personality there is a heaven of rest where every dream and hope come true. But as for myself, I confess, if only I could start life again and take up my work in a new body I should be infinitely content. Nor will this be long, I believe."

I knew that he alluded to his heart, which was somewhat affected; yet the danger was not imminent nor likely to become so for many years to come.

"At any rate, I shall be ready to answer the call, when it comes," said the doctor. He walked over to his desk and unlocked a drawer. "Here is a sealed letter that I have left you," he said. "After my death you will open it."

I wondered even then why he did not lock the drawer.

I remembered this conversation the more vividly in the light of subsequent events. It must have been a little more than a week later when he sent for me.

"I am resolved to undertake an experiment," he said, "more difficult than any that I have ever attempted. It has been done before; yet it is arduous and uncertain. You have heard of the Indian fakirs who actually pass over the borderland of death, allowing themselves to be buried in a grave, on which the grass sprouts, only to be revived after a period of months?"

"You will not attempt such an experiment as that?" I cried.

"No," answered the doctor. "It would be senseless to attempt so foolish an experiment without grave reason. Nevertheless, I am planning one somewhat analogous; I intend to pass through the gates of death for the sake of giving back to one who has been deprived of it his inheritance of the soul."

"You mean the imbecile!" I cried, suddenly understanding.

"Yes," answered the doctor. "I hope that this will succeed; but if my own death be the result, at least the last act of my life will have been to some good purpose." And I could not dissuade him from his intention.

AMONG the dozen or more inmates of Dr. Brodsky's home, whom he maintained out of his own pocket, was an imbecile orphan, some seven years of age. This child had never exhibited the slightest sign of intelligence; he lived a purely vegetative existence, had never learned to crawl,

to utter a word. He did not even possess the common animal faculty of recognizing one person from another. As there existed no apparent cause for this defect, no deformity of the head or body, and the vital functions seemed in perfect condition, many theories had been advanced as to the cause of so singular an anomaly. Dr. Brodsky, after studying the child for many months, had finally formulated his own conclusions.

"It is one of those rare cases," he said, "in which the soul was not born into the body. It remains shut out, as you can imagine yourself shut out of your house. Doubtless it is hovering in close proximity to the mortal form, connected, as it must be, by the ethereal ligatures that bind it to the spinal cord. In this condition, it is virtually deprived of its existence upon either of the planes; it is earth-bound and spirit-bound. And there is only one remedy; some other disembodied soul must assist it. It is my plan to pass out of the body temporarily and to compel it to incarcerate itself."

"And if you can not return?" I cried.

"I shall ask your assistance in this matter," the doctor answered. "I shall give you careful instructions, which you will fulfil to the letter. If, after the lapse of a certain time, you find that these attempts are fruitless, you will break open the letter which I have left for you in the bureau drawer, and read it."

I can hardly tell how this project affected me. In vain I pointed out to the doctor the inexpediency, from a purely utilitarian point of view, of risking his own life for the sake of giving intelligence to the imbecile. But my words were unheeded. I felt that in truth this was to be our last experiment, that it amounted almost to premeditated suicide. I refused to participate in it.

Well, in the end, of course, I consented, though I felt that this would be the last occasion upon which I should look into the doctor's face while he was alive. Looking back now, I think my mind must have been warped; I accuse myself a hundred times of having been the cause of Brodsky's death. Yet the first lesson that he had implanted in my mind, ever since I first heard him lecture to us students at the hospital, was the duty of obedience. He had commanded and it was for me to obey. Especially, however, I base my vindication upon that hypnotic power through the medium of which Brodsky possessed the ability to compel me, or anyone else, to obey him.

Some days elapsed before the experiment was made. Brodsky occupied himself during this interval, as I surmised, in setting his affairs in order. At last, upon the afternoon appointed, I repaired with him to his laboratory, a long chamber in the rear of the house, completely shut off from all communication with the outside. Ordinarily there was no sound within, but now a great electrical engine buzzed and throbbed beside a low, flat table, raised only some six inches above the floor, and surmounted by a large bowl of translucent blue, into which the wires entered. Upon the table the imbecile child sat, propped up against a flexible pillow of rubber, or some similar non-conducting material, searching the room with his large lack-luster eyes. The doctor stooped over his machine and made his adjustments; then he connected a rubber sponge, at the termination of a network of wires, with the child's spine, and bound it there with strips of cloth in such a manner that it could not be removed. He drew another wire, terminating in a similar sponge, from the recesses of the machine, and affixed it to himself in the same way; finally, he united both to the metal base of the

globe with a clamp. Immediately the globe became dark and opaque.

"That is the measure of our vital forces," he said. "And now I will give you your instructions.

"It was my intention to ask you to press the lever which will send the high voltage through our bodies. But in case of any untoward results you would reproach yourself with being my slayer. I shall, therefore, myself press the lever, and lay upon you only the responsibility of recalling me to life again.

"When I press this lever it will send a current of electricity of several thousand volts directly through our bodies. The effect will be the same as that which is produced by an electrocution. Now it has always been my claim—although the authorities of our prisons would never permit me to demonstrate it—that the man who has suffered electrocution can invariably be revived by the proper methods, since the current merely paralyzes the nerve centers and suspends the vital functions, without destroying any of the tissues. The criminal who goes to the electric chair dies, not from the effects of the current, but under the surgeon's knife. I have especially contrived this instrument for the purpose of proving my contention, although I little imagined at the time I set it forth that I was likely to be the first subject. The soul, which is purely electrical, is attached to the body by extremely tenuous, but none the less substantial ligaments, and, when driven out by some violent shock, remains for some days floating above it, until the ligaments give way and set it free. By means of this mechanism I claim that the expelled soul can be conducted along the wire and stored within the globe, which is a perfect vacuum, and where its presence will be indicated by the appearance of a wisp of light.

"To sum up, I shall electrocute myself and the imbecile child. You will wait until you see the two threads of flame appear within the center of the globe. Then you will fling back the lever, and again push it forward to the notch marked E. That will be all your task. The reversal of the current will again force each separate soul along the wire—mine, into my own body; and the imbecile's, I hope, into his."

"But if you do not awake?" I cried.

"You will then wait until some unusual symptom intervenes, either in the child or in myself. And now I confess that I am sufficiently human to feel a certain sense of apprehension. So give me your hand; remember, if this should be our last experiment, we have yet many more parts to play, and lives to play them in; be ready to play your own part sturdily in this."

HE GRIPPED my hand in farewell. My own answered the pressure; then I averted my head and waited. Meanwhile Brodsky, kneeling on the low table, in the position of a Japanese in some old print, about to commit the fatal thrust that should cause instantaneous death, braced himself against the rubber pillow and stretched out his hand. I heard the soft thud of the doctor's body as he collapsed sidewise; and suddenly the opaque globe became a dazzling blue, and blue fire spluttered along the wires. It was almost too bright for my eyes to look into it. Gradually it subsided, the globe became a pearly gray, and therewithin, dimly visible through the glass, were two bright flames. Butterfly-shaped, they seemed to pursue each other as goldfish in a bowl, circling and doubling upon their courses; now approaching each other, now dancing apart, now fused into one, elongating, and again retreating to opposite sides of the globe; yet never for one instant did

they cease to hover, with poised and pendulous wings. I stole a glance at the body of the doctor. He had fallen upon his side and lay motionless, apparently lifeless, his limbs outstretched and stiffened as those of a man in some cataleptic trance, while at his side, in the same state, the imbecile lay, with glassy eyes wide open. Was it indeed possible, I asked myself, that those two souls, one imbecile, the other a compendium of knowledge and fineness, should in reality be those foolish, circling, butterfly-shaped lights that hovered and danced continually? I must have watched them in fascination for fully five minutes before I suddenly recalled the doctor's instructions.

But my hands shook so that I could with difficulty lay them upon the lever. I caught it at last, reversed it, and sent it forward again to the notch E. Instantly the flames divided; there came a hiss and splutter, and the wire was once more aflame with the blue light. Then a convulsive trembling seized upon the limbs of the imbecile. He gasped, drew in a long breath, and sat up. His eyes fixed themselves gravely on mine. But it was no longer a glance of blankness, as though there were no mind behind the vision. He saw me; when I moved, the eyes followed mine, and a current of unintelligible babbling came from between the child's lips. But Brodsky lay as when he had fallen, nor was there any relaxation in the stiffened limbs.

A spasm of fear seemed to turn the muscles of my heart to stone. I stared into the bowl. There was but one light there now, a tiny, fluttering thing, that seemed each moment to become more and more attenuated. It danced more feebly, beating from side to side in inefficiency, now darting back, now dancing forward once again to where the wires entered the vacuum. I bent over the body of the doctor, chafing the hands in vain; I touched the cheeks, now growing cold. More and more slowly moved that butterfly light. It hovered, a pitiful, tiny thing, poised in the midst of the globe, which was itself changing in color and slowly fading in brilliancy. Now it was a deep blue, merging into indigo, and from the edges black shadows seemed to creep forward and envelop that little spark at the heart of it. This became but a pin-point of light; then it glowed no more than the burnt-out end of a match. One instant it flickered up; then it went out abruptly, and the globe was utterly dark and opaque. I placed my hand once more on the doctor's. It was icily cold, and as I bent over him, I saw the stiffness go out of the muscles and the limbs relax.

Some frenzy must have overcome me next. I must have torn away the wires and overturned the globe, for, when I came to my senses, nothing remained of the apparatus except the lifeless bulk of the electrical machine, while all around me was a wreckage of wires. I lifted the doctor's body in my arms and carried him into his study. I laid him upon a lounge and injected strychnin into the veins. There was no response. I placed my ear against his heart; it did not stir. Against his lips I laid a little mirror of silvered glass. It was not clouded. And suddenly I felt a thing pulling at my coat. It was the imbecile child; it had crawled after me. Then I understood. This was the unusual symptom of which Brodsky had spoken. Then I knew that I had exhausted all my resources. I rushed to the telephone and summoned medical aid. Hours afterward, as it appeared to me, though it was in reality only a matter of minutes, a doctor arrived. I tried to stammer out some explanation, but he cut me short.

"Heart disease," he pronounced. "I warned him only last week that he must be prepared. There will be no need of an autopsy."

"But the soul!" I stammered. "The soul in the glass globe!"

The doctor looked at me gravely.

"You must lie down and rest," he answered. "It must have been a great shock to you." So I knew that my words would go for less than nothing.

I WAS ill for weeks after that. Friends took charge of the funeral, friends whom Brodsky had aided, who appeared in countless numbers from unexpected quarters. The funeral partook almost of the character of a public demonstration. Even I had never known the extent of Brodsky's benefactions. Even the physicians of the town, who had regarded him more or less with suspicion, participated in the ceremonies. The newspapers were filled with long accounts of the dead man's works; his psychical researches were dismissed lightly, but not contemptuously, as the vagaries of a great thinker, the relaxations of a scientist. When the will was read I found that I had been left sole executor and chief legatee. The remainder of the doctor's fortune was to go to endow the home which he had established.

Then, one day, while looking through the doctor's papers, I came upon a sealed letter addressed to me. I had forgotten all about it in the strain that I had gone through. Hastily I broke the seal and read:

"You must pardon me, my dear friend," ran the letter, "if for the second time I have wilfully deceived you. The first occasion, as you will remember well, was when you first came to me, when I hypnotized you in my study for the purpose of turning your mind from the gloomy thoughts of suicide that possessed you. On this occasion I felt impelled to say less than the truth for fear that you would attempt to dissuade me from my purpose.

"I told you that I intended to make my most difficult experiment, to go through the gates of death and to search out and bring back with me the soul of the imbecile child. Forgive me for having made this statement. It was an impossibility. The electric current that I sent through my own body with my own hand destroyed once and for all the vital powers. Nothing on earth could have restored them. I tell you this in order that you may not think you were remiss or negligent in your endeavors to resuscitate me. The two flames that you will doubtless have seen within the globe were not the souls, but only those N-rays which are given forth from all living things, whether men, beasts or trees. When the last flame went out the organism was dead beyond possibility of recall.

"The child revived because the current was so graduated that it merely stunned, without destroying, that duller organism. Had it been of a force proportioned to that which passed through my own body, nothing could have revived him. But now, to explain more fully what it was my intent to do, and what I hope and think that I have done.

"As I have told you, I knew that no power on earth could bring the soul into the child's body. It was, in fact, born soulless, nothing more than a vital organism. It was my purpose, then, in dying, to transfer my own identity into that child's body, so that while the Ivan Brodsky whom you knew disintegrated slowly, according to the natural processes of the body, his spirit might gain a new lease of life and grow to manhood, forgetful of the old ills and troubles, eager to fulfil the work that I had laid down for myself.

"I leave him in your care. Doubtless within a few days he will begin to manifest a human intelligence. As he grows older he will have vague memories of my own life. He will repay your care with the truest affec-

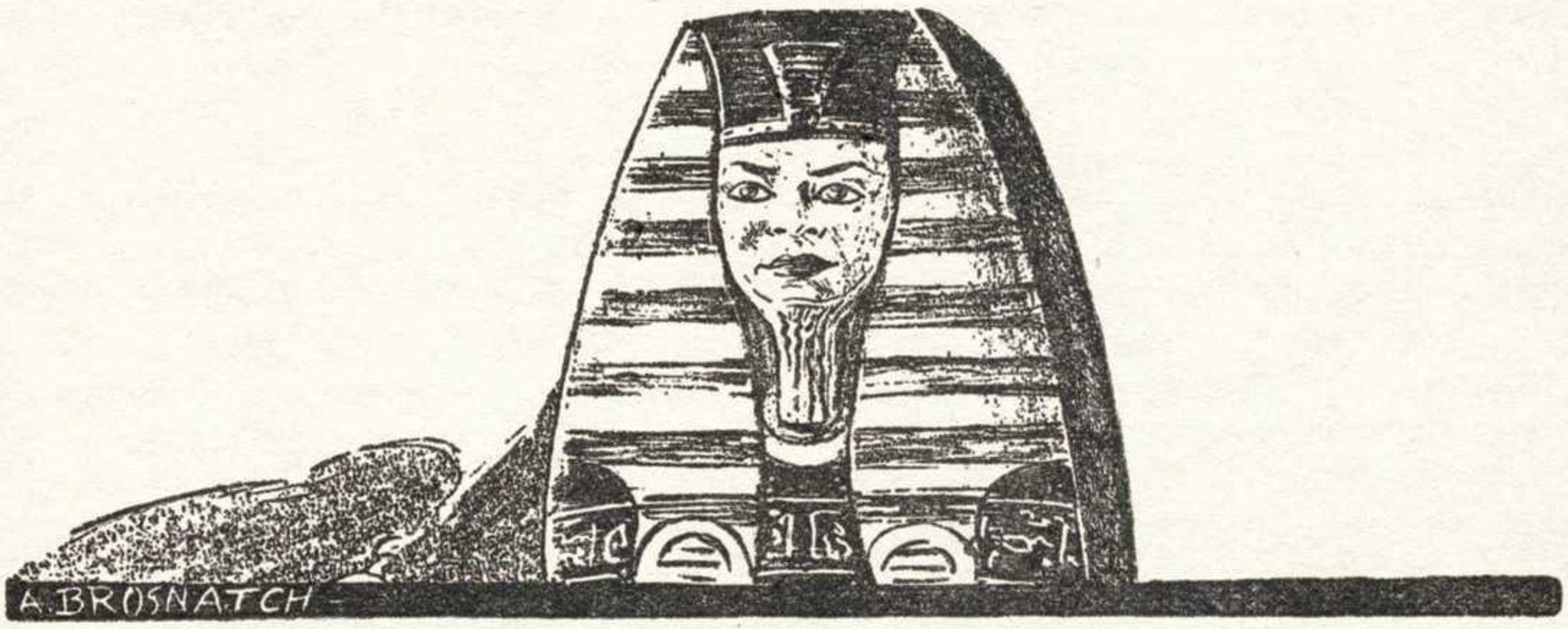
tion, since I myself shall be his inspiring spirit, and this, you know, I feel for you. He will have, also, strange reminiscences, will recall faces of persons strange to him, but known to me. These recollections you will discourage. Remember that he is a new being, whose life is as yet an unwritten page, and that the past must remain sealed to him through all his life.

"Train him, then, in the medical profession, and guide his mind so that when he reaches maturity he will voluntarily take up those studies of mine where I have dropped them. I have embodied these in a typewritten document which you will find in a secret drawer at the back of my bureau." [Here followed instructions for opening it.] "In these instructions you will learn much that I have never told you of, things that in the hands of evil men might plunge the whole world into barbarism and shake down the pillars of civilization." [Here followed some purely personal instructions.] "But above all, remember that I leave everything to your absolute discretion, since all things are appointed to their own end, and if my hopes are vain, nothing can bring them to fruition."

WHEN I had finished reading this letter I sat thinking for a long while. Then I went to the bureau and, after some fumbling, found and pressed the secret spring. A drawer flew back. In it I found a typewritten paper, half covered with dried rose petals. I unfolded it and began slowly to read. . . . I read till the day was gone. . . . Then I committed it to the flames.

For I felt, and still feel that, many as were the evils which Brodsky cured during the brief period of our association, the world is better off without this knowledge of his. The risks were too many. And, after all, as he had always said, this is a world of light; there is a long eternity when we shall be shut off from external activities, when the things of the soul only will be of account. Let us not meddle with them here, but go about our appointed tasks in the manner set for us.

The boy is growing to manhood. Already he is planning to enter the medical school; I find in him odd traces of Brodsky, odd flashes of memory and intuitive appreciation of the things Brodsky cared for. But I discourage all his interest in the realm of psychic things. It may be that his will will prove stronger than mine, that he will succeed in taking up the doctor's work where Brodsky abandoned it. In such event I shall give way; until that happens I shall fulfil my trust in the spirit of my own interpretation.



A Story of the Australian Gold Diggings

THE EL DORADO OF DEATH

By PERCY B. PRIOR

THE brothers Wakeford worked together in a South Australian chemical factory. There was a strong bond of sympathy between them, they were inseparable pals. Both of an adventurous disposition, they chafed at the restrictions of city life, and constantly planned to go prospecting. Like all young men, and not a few elderly ones, they dreamed of earning easy money. Working merely in order to make a bare living did not coincide with their ideas of what life was meant for. We have all of us, at some time or other, experienced this feeling.

One evening, while they were drinking together, they fell into conversation with a bearded man, bronzed and weather-beaten, gaunt and keen-eyed. They thought, at first, that he was merely one of those pests always to be found hanging around hotels, but were not long in discovering their error.

Many of his reminiscences were concerned with prospecting. He had sought for gold along the banks of creeks in lonely bush gullies, and many were the stories he told the two Wakefords of perils and hardships, of occurrences—grim, some of them, others ludicrous—that, by turns, had gladdened and saddened his adventurous wanderings. Warmed by their hospitality, the old bushman told them, among other places, of a valley in the Macdonnell Range, and of a thin wisp of stream that meandered through it, in the dry bed of which, near a certain gnarled and aged tree, gold-dust, plenty of it, glittering in the sand, could be scooped up in handfuls.

In proof that his story was not an hallucination he showed the brothers a small quantity of the precious metal in a tobacco tin, and also gave them a plan of the gully roughly scrawled on a scrap of paper, with full directions for reaching it. They were astonished that he made no endeavor to sell them his secret, instead of divulging it gratuitously. His explanation, however, seemed reasonable enough. He had for years, he said, been a martyr to rheumatism, but, hopeful of shaking it off sufficiently to go gold-hunting again, he had never mentioned the gully and its auriferous creek-bed to a living soul. Alone in the world, and no longer hopeful of recovery, he saw no reason why its whereabouts should continue to remain a secret.

Their meeting with the old prospector inflamed imaginations and roused dormant aspirations. Suddenly deciding to throw off their shackles, they left their chemical factory, and purchasing a tent, blankets, and other equipment, set out in search of their El Dorado.

They could not have selected a more inopportune time to begin their quest. The heat that summer was

phenomenal. Unused to hardships that would have tried the stoicism of hardened bushmen, the brothers Wakeford trudged onward, with their heavy packs, the sun blazing fiercely down upon them. Their feet, which had never previously been called upon to carry them as far in a week as now, tramping from dawn to dark, in heavy blucher boots, they were compelled to travel every day, became blistered and raw. Insects of many kinds, some of them poisonous, bit and stung the two men with persistency.

At last the younger brother, half-crazed by the heat and parched with thirst, became too ill to proceed farther, and a camp was made in a drear and lonely spot, beside a stagnant pool, in a forest of dead and gaunt gum-trees that raised bleached branches as though in supplication to a relentless and white-hot sky.

A more appropriate scene for a tragedy, indeed, could scarcely be imagined. A thunderstorm, at first muffled and far away, crept even closer, and finally crashed above the tent of the two unfortunates, who, weakened by privation and comatose with fatigue and despair, huddled inside it. The storm intensified the desolation, the melancholy, and the loneliness, filling them with a sense of foreboding, as though of some impending calamity.

The younger Wakeford's sufferings, in particular, were intense, much more so than those of his brother, for, besides being weak and light-headed for want of proper nourishment and as a result of exposure to the pitiless sun, he was a nerve-racked and under-vitalized fellow, moody and imaginative.

NIGHT, illuminated by flashes of lightning and made hideous by the cannonading of warring clouds, closed round the desperate wayfarers.

Despite the uproar, aches and pains, and a strained and overwrought state of mind by reason of which he was on the verge of hysteria, the younger Wakeford, controlling himself by an effort of will, determined to await, resolute and alert, the issue of events which he somehow felt, without knowing how or why, were impending.

The elder brother, overcome by weariness, fell into a deep and dreamless slumber.

Wakeford, the younger, was aroused toward midnight from a revery by feeling that someone or something had entered the tent. Raising his eyes, he beheld bending over him a tall figure in white, which signed to him to follow. He rose immediately, and, the white-robed figure leading the way, they began to traverse a succession of damp and dark corridors, seemingly endless, until they reached, at last, an enormous cavern, filled with a moonlike radiance, where dancing was in progress.

Strains of weird music were pierced by a continuous strange and staccato clicking sound, like the turbulence of castanets.

Bewildered and dazed by the sudden transition from darkness and desolation to the glittering and crowded hall of festivities, it was some moments before Wakeford the younger was able to comprehend in its entirety what was going on. When he did so, he was chilled to the bone with horror, for the white-robed figures, gliding hither and thither across the crystal floor, were skeletons, and the curious and continuous staccato sound which resembled castanets was the clicking of their fleshless jaws.

The music ceased, and the couples separated, seating themselves upon benches of iridescent stalagmites ranged round the walls. Then, after a brief interval of awful and unbroken silence, the invisible musi-

cians commenced again, and the skeletons, to a different rhythm this time, began once more to glide about the cavern floor.

Young Wakeford was petrified with terror. The white-robed figure he had followed into the cavern seemed taller than any of the others, and to be in a position of command. It now ordered him, by signs, to select a partner for the next dance from the hideous throng surrounding him.

Horrified, he shrank from it, tried to run, but, held by some strange power, was unable to move from where he stood.

Irritated, the tall figure, turning upon him threateningly, raised its arm to strike. Quick as thought young Wakeford, whose legs alone seemed stricken with paralysis, pulled a revolver from his holster, and, levelling it at the tall and ghostly specter, pulled the trigger.

With the shock of the report, the dreadful dream was shattered. The cavern with its ghostly radiance, its fearsome and ghastly dancers, and the threatening specter, all had vanished. Wakeford, the younger, was back in the tent again, staring, dumfounded, at his elder brother, who lay bleeding from a bullet wound in the chest, and gasping out his life.

Scarcely had the elder Wakeford breathed his last before another shot rang out. The two brothers ended the journey as they had begun it—together.

AS ALWAYS

***By* A. LESLIE**

"Behold, the face that launched a thousand ships!"
Thus sang the ancient bard, of Trojan Helen.
And the young men gathered,
Each to hear, and each to dream his chosen dream
Of Helen, and to give
Her face and form to his own fancy and desire.

For Helen lived in many lands—
And Helen's hair was softly brown,
And black as dream-clouds, and as gold
As summer sunlight of the dawn;
And Helen smiled where'er the night
Strode grandly down the stairway of the stars.

And this was thrice two thousand years agone!
But still the young men gather close to hear
Of Trojan Helen, and to dream their dreams.
For Helen lives, and Troy burns,
And Odysseus sails westward to the setting sun.

The MYSTERY of SYLMARE

by HUGH IRISH

"We could see the bodies of a youth and a girl, lying in the bottom of the boat."

IT WAS accidental, my meeting the Chapmans at Tampa. I had been doing Florida, as most everybody does at least once, had gone down the east coast, and on to Havana in a Key West packet. I was now on my way north up the west side of the peninsula. I found that the real estate sellers of the east side of that incomparable sand-drift haven't anything on those of the west side, if anybody should ask you.

But the trip had all been different enough from selling farm machinery in Saskatchewan, which was my own specialty, and as I went down the hotel steps on the way to the railroad station I carried, besides my traveling bag, an equally heavy regret that my week in Tampa was up.

A hotel taxi was at the curb, and as I crossed the walk toward it, whom should I almost bump into but Estey Chapman and—as I had every reason to suppose—Estelle Morse? They had just come out of a shop, Chapman's arms laden with purchases, and were on the point of climbing into their car, parked in front of the store.

I must have stood in open-mouthed nonplus through a heartbeat or so when I recognized them. Then my amazement was swallowed up in our mutual greetings. Chapman put me right, in a bashful way, when I addressed Estelle as Mrs. Morse.

"Mrs. Chapman—now," he stammered, across his armful of parcels.

They both laughed, easily, at my

momentary funk. One risks a contretemps or two, losing one's self for years, as I had done in the Northwest. I had left Estelle happily married to Professor Morse—an event following close on our university association—and Chapman burning the midnight electricity trying to break into print.

"You'll have to come up to the house and hear the whole story," Chapman said, turning to the car to rid his arms of the parcels.

Estelle nodded sweetly in confirmation. Everything Estelle did was done sweetly.

"But I was on my way to the station, man!" I half objected.

Chapman wouldn't listen to me. He waved me into the tonneau seat with Estelle, while he sat with the driver, his big back squarely in front of me. Chapman was massive. He had played center on the football team in his last two years at college.

Estelle had kept something of her old-time vivacity; but it seemed subdued, as though it might have run the gantlet of no telling what repressive memories. She had, to my taste, more than ever of brunette loveliness, yet she didn't look just fit, somehow, and I noticed that Chapman helped her into the car as though she were an invalid. I couldn't chaff her, as I once would have done. There was some subtle quality in her manner that stopped me. We talked of the old days, but we did so a little pensively.

The car traversed the city's streets and its citrus-screened outskirts, coming to a halt at last beside a sandy plot bordered in the distance with scrub pines. In the midst of the plot stood the Chapman residence, bare and bleak, sans veranda, sans stoop, and even sans shade trees. It was just a great plain unrelieved cube, with no projections of any kind about it save the cornices.

I found everything lovely inside though: large, brightly lighted rooms —the lighting was really extraordinary—and the rich furnishings were of the best, and in taste.

"You'll have a nice place of this, when you've had time to grow some trees," I said to Chapman that evening, as we sat outside at sunset, smoking.

"We have all the trees we are likely to have, soon."

There was abstraction in the manner of his reply, which, I thought, presaged the story I knew he had to tell me. I had sensed his attempts to get a start on it, all afternoon, and had wondered what there could be about it that was so deucedly hard to tell. But if he was at the door of the thing now he was diverted again, for at the approach of the sudden dusk of Florida latitudes, he started up suddenly with a scared look and an exclamation that we must go to join Estelle.

We found her in the music room, just seating herself at the piano. Something told me that if we had not come when we did the instrument beneath her hands would have summoned us. A sense of queerness struck me the instant we entered the room. It was the lights, I think. All the electric bulbs in the room, and there were ten times too many, were beaming garishly. I suspected Chapman or his wife of an odd passion for light, light, and yet more light, as though gloom or shadow were a deadly gas that must be kept off.

One of the maids was with Estelle when we entered. I noticed that. But she withdrew when we came in, as though she had been there merely to keep her mistress from being alone.

Estelle played for us until dinner was announced. After dinner, the three of us recalled old friends, tracing this or that one to his or her suc-

cess or failure. We went over a little of Chapman's work. A good deal of it I had never seen, though it was now being published. I had been out of touch with most prints for years.

ESTELLE left us at 10:30, avowedly to let us smoke without making her cough, but really, I knew quite well, to clear the way for Chapman's disclosures, that seemed so hard for him to disclose. The thing he told me could not have been told with her present. That's certain. We went to Chapman's den. It was already bedtime, and Chapman made no more false starts.

"Had Morse shown any signs of—of overstudy, before you went West?" he asked doubtfully, when we were settled in easy chairs.

"No." My answer was prompt; but, on his remaining silent, I reconsidered: "That is, he always seemed intent on his work, when at work, but he was able apparently to forget it when away from it."

"So he was, once," Chapman agreed. "But later on, his intensity at his work grew on him, while he lost entirely his way of letting go of it when he knocked off. Finally, he developed a tendency to drag his infernal science into everything that came up in everyday life. That got to be devilish unpleasant for Estelle, and, as I seemed the only one who could fetch him out of it even temporarily, they had me about as much as possible. It was Estelle's doings. But Morse wanted me, too. I think he felt that he was going a gait, mentally.

"His hobby eventually ran to botany—that is, to that phase of botany that considers its relation to biology in general. He delved into vegetable sentiency, and vegetable consciousness—can you imagine it? —and even into vegetable mobility! He finally came to more than half believe that plants have not only feeling but a kind of mentality, or at least consciousness, and at the last he became next to noisy on the subject of chlorophyl and its powers."

Chapman stopped and stared at the floor. I shook my head, at what he had told me about Morse, and wondered, meanwhile, how much of the story I was to be cheated out of by his intimate relation to it.

"When Morse's mother died," he resumed, "she left him the old home place in Sylmare, on the northeast coast. He and Estelle used to spend their vacations there. It's a sleepy old town, but something of a summer resort for a few New York and Boston people who like to dodge the expense or the clatter of the more popular places. There's a writers' and artists' summer colony some eight miles up the coast from Sylmare, and I spent my summers there, what time I wasn't with the Morses. I was there—at the writers' roost—when the thing happened.

"It happened in June. The Morses had visited Estelle's people in Atlanta at the end of the school year, Morse going North a week in advance of his wife, to get together a corps of servants and put the old house in order. Estelle never liked mussing around a house. Morse telephoned me, on his arrival, and I went down the next day in my motor-boat. I knew that Estelle would want me to be with him as much as I could, while she was not.

"I found the house topsyturvy in the hands of the cleaners. To get away from the dust and litter, Morse and I went out for a spin in his car.

"The road ran along the foot of a cavelike forest that covered the hill. It used to be a fancy of Morse's that a dweller on some other planet, wholly unacquainted with our forms of life, would, on coming to Sylmare, be sure to think the trees the real life of the place, and that the people go-

ing about beneath them were some sort of rather unimportant parasitic form. At any rate, the gloomy old town on the sea slope was dark and dim with the shade of maples, beeches and elms, and its steep streets running down to the shell road along the beach were very like grottoes in some half-lit cavern with sloping floor.

"Imagine, now, a lot of men and women running down those dim aisles beneath the trees toward the old wharf on the bayshore, and you have a part of that which brought our forty mile an hour clip in Morse's car to a sudden stop.

" 'Something's gone wrong, here, Ed!' I exclaimed, turning to Morse as the car slowed up.

"I don't think he heard me at all. His face was turned to the wharf, and his vibrant, ashen lips were articulating, 'It's another! It's another!'

"He unlatched the car door and jumped out, hurrying toward the wharf. I was at his heels, the chauffeur at mine.

"A fisherman's rowboat was drawn up at the wharf, and it had in tow a small motor-boat. In the last, as we drew nearer, we could see the bodies of a youth and a girl.

" 'My God!' Morse gasped, stopping short and gazing stilly at the two forms in the boat. 'It's Frank Kirby and Alta Cline!'

"I heard the chauffeur whisper an oath as we went on toward the wharf.

"The youth and the girl looked about nineteen or twenty. They were dressed for outing. The boy had on a Naval Reserve uniform, queerly shot with little pricks and rents of the fabric, and the girl's knickers bore the same strange marks. Her bobbed brown hair lay about her sweet set face like a lovely soft frame about a picture. The youth had a powder-smoked bullet-hole in his right temple, and the girl bore a wound quite like it. The queerest thing of all, however, was the great number of scratches and slight wounds on their faces, their hands, and their wrists.

" 'The Ellis boys were like that!' I heard a woman near me whisper to another.

" 'Mrs. Van Scoyk, too!' the other answered, with a straight, wild look. 'And Barry, also, I heard.'

"The coroner came pushing through the crowd about the wharf. His examination disclosed nothing we had not already seen, save a revolver with two empty chambers lying in the bottom of the boat. He gave directions for the removal of the bodies. As they carried the girl out of the boat, one of her dead, drooping hands still grasped and carried a small bag of fir tips, such as are used for stuffing aromatic pillows. Eyes filled, at that sight. Somehow, that was the most pathetic thing about the whole solemn scene.

"I turned to Morse for an explanation, but he shook his head, at my questioning look, and led the way silently to the group about the fisherman who had brought in the boats and was now telling and retelling his story.

" 'I was 'bout seven miles down coast when I see their boat driftin' out to sea, engine dead and nobody rowin'. I could see 'em layin' as you saw 'em, here. They was so still that I rowed up to 'em, tryin' to make out what was wrong. But when I got near enough to see them scratches on their faces, I went weak as a cat; for I saw the Ellis boys, and Barry, too. It was all I could do to nerve myself up to towin' 'em in.' He shook his head and started up the beach.

" 'You had no means of judging how far they had drifted?' Morse

asked, as we walked beside the man toward the road.

"'No; but I saw 'em leave the wharf, this morning. They was gay as two kids, then. Is it so, they was to be married next fall?'

"'Yes, it's true, I believe,' Morse replied gravely, following me to the car.

"'What in the name of heaven do you make of this, Ed?' I asked, as our machine moved away.

"He shook his head, silently.

"'But what did they mean—about the Ellis boys, and Barry?'

"'It's a long story—too long to tell here.' His eyes were on the driver, meaningly. I didn't know, then, as he did, that every servant in the town was already on the verge of pulling up stakes and leaving, because of this strange, deadly thing that was killing people right and left among them. True, these two latest victims had evidently killed themselves; but everyone seemed sure that it was The Thing that had brought it about.

"'Let's go home,' Morse suggested. 'I don't feel in the mood for a drive, now.'

"I nodded assent, and he gave the order to the driver.

"WHEN we got back to the house we found the library, at least, out of the hands of the dusters, and went into it. Morse was moody. It seemed an effort for him to begin the disclosures I felt he had brought me there to make.

"'In the first place,' he began, at last, when he saw that I couldn't or wouldn't talk of anything else, 'the two victims you saw at the wharf just now are merely the latest of a long series, though I'll admit that they have affected me more than has any of the others, because of their carefree youth and their promise of life and love and happiness. But I know of six such cases, directly; and, indirectly, of a number of others. They are all without a parallel—that I can find—in human experience.'

"I shivered and shook my head, moving my chair nearer to his in the great, gloomy library.

"'The first of the more recent cases,' he went on, 'was that of Mrs. Van Scoyk. You didn't know the Van Scoyks?'

"'I never heard the name until today. It was whispered, then.'

"'They summered here, or rather, she did. Van Scoyk ran out from the city usually Friday nights, going back Mondays. She went in for boating; she was, in fact, an expert with the oars.

"'I was away when the Van Scoyk affair happened. It was last summer. Mrs. Van Scoyk had been out on the bay in her rowboat. Toward evening, a passing boatman saw her leap from the shore into the water. This, mind you, was in sight of her splendid summer home on the North Bluff. She had everything to live for. The Van Scoyks were wealthy.

"'It came out at the inquest that several of her acquaintances had passed her as she rowed up the bay on her way home, but she paid not the slightest attention to any of their greetings. She seemed dull and dazed—dead alive, as one witness expressed it.

"'The boatman raced to her to get her out of the water, calling an alarm as he did so; but she could not be revived. She was dead. On the beach near by was her boat, and in the deep sand near the waterside she had molded with her hands a shallow grave, on which she had placed a bouquet of wild flowers.

"'Now comes the strangest part of this strange case: Mrs. Van Scoyk's clothing was all pricked and torn, and her face and hands were covered with mysterious scratches and small wounds, like those of the

two you just now saw at the wharf! I suppose you noticed that detail?'

"'Noticed it! I was so struck with it that I saw little else—save the bag of fir tips.'

"'The fir tips . . . yes. That is . . . something.' Morse had evidently forgotten my presence for the moment, and was staring at the floor in deep thought.

"'I have studied closely three of the five cases that have occurred since that of Mrs. Van Scoyk,' he went on, coming out of his abstraction. 'The Ellis boys—you heard Gibbs mention them?—were two lads of twelve and fourteen. They, too, were drowned. They had been out clamming, but had come in and had tied up their boat in its usual place. Even at that, their death must have been attributed to accident, but for the fact that, when their bodies were recovered, their faces, hands, and clothes bore those same strange marks! Foul play, of some queer, crazy kind, was suspected. I looked for the affair to get into the headlines of the metropolitan press, but it didn't.

"'The Barry case happened shortly afterward. Barry was a bachelor who lived with his unmarried sister, about half a mile up the coast. He was a farmer, a close-fisted one who wanted his own, and a man who apparently hadn't a thought above his meager daily savings. But Barry had one weakness—fishing. He had spent the whole of the day of his death somewhere on the bay, fishing. Plenty of people saw him rowing home at nightfall; but he stared straight ahead in the same half-dead way that Mrs. Van Scoyk had done, answering the hail of no one.

"'Well, Barry never reached home; that is, he reached the premises, but not the house. His sister, hearing a shot, ran out to the barnlot, where she found him dying. He had shot himself with a small rifle which he kept at the barn for killing rats. Now, listen: Barry's face and hands and clothes bore the same queer marks that the others had borne!'

"If Morse meant to impress me, he succeeded. I sat staring from the library window into the gloom beneath the shrubbery without, almost as still and breathless as those forms I had seen lifted from the boat. When I at last looked up, Morse went on speaking.

"'But of all the victims of this mysterious, baffling thing, those of today are the most touching. They were at the brink of life's sweetest period, the mating time. There was no opposition to their love affair. I am as sure as one can be of anything, almost, that there was not a cloud in their sky when Briggs saw them leave the wharf this morning!'

"'In God's name, Ed, what can it be?' I cried out, springing up to pace the floor.

"He shook his head. 'Not one word has anyone ever heard any of them speak, between what happened—if anything happened—and their death.'

"'Their wounds suggest—a fight with some bird or beast,' I hazarded.

"He looked at the floor, in thought. 'I can't think it,' he replied at last, raising his gaze to mine. 'The scratches are superficial, and there seems no sign of the claw or talon about them.'

"'Has no search of the vicinity been made?'

"'No. It's been talked of, but—well, for what would one search, in a case of this kind?'

"That silenced me, for the moment.

"'But that is not the real reason a search has not been made,' he went on. 'There's the danger that a search would result in—more fatalities.'

"'I'm willing to risk it,' I ventured grimly.

"'Not alone!' he objected, startled by my remark.

"'Well, with a party, then.'

"'A party would be hard to handle, hard to control. It would destroy more evidence than it gathered. Besides, a party would look—silly, when you don't know what you're hunting for. A still hunt would be better.'

"I took that as a sort of a challenge. 'I'll go with you, if you like,' I said.

"'When?'

"I considered. I had an unfinished article overdue, and an idle typist up at the colony drawing pay while she flirted with no telling which one of the other scribblers or dabblers.

"'Would the day after tomorrow do?' I asked.

"'Perfectly. I have all the time there is.'

"He had become laconic, but I could see that he was still tense and nervous. To relieve the strain, I asked: 'These other cases you mentioned, outside of those you have looked into, where did you learn of them?'

"'In the files of the local newspaper. I went to the bottom of the entire moldy heap. Fifty-four years! A fire had destroyed everything up to 1867.' He was walking the floor, now, his eyes gleaming like those of an ecstatic.

"'What did you find in the files?' I demanded.

"'I found eleven mysterious deaths in the fifty-four years!' he hurled at me, stopping short in his uneasy prance across the floor. 'Too many for one small town,' he added. 'I found, too, that all but one of them happened in summer, and they all exhibited a strangely identical lack of cause. Four of the eleven are known to have borne the strange wounds we have seen, and I suspect that three of the others did. Their bodies were never recovered from the bay. Four of the eleven went in pairs, and were fishermen, without, I should say, a thought above their daily catch!'

"'There's something deadly abnormal about it, Ed,' I mused aloud, peering at the floor.

"'Yes—if the extremely rare, or possibly the unique, is—abnormal,' he countered.

"He plainly was at his theorizing again, and I thought I might as well go to the bottom of it. 'You have—an idea about it, Ed?' I half asked.

"He hesitated, standing with one foot on a chair to gaze gloomily through a window. 'Nothing credible, Estey,' he replied, at last. 'Nothing that I would care to advance, even to you.'

"There was but one thought in either of our minds, I'm sure, when I left him, a few minutes later, and that was our proposed search for a thing that I, at least, hadn't the least idea of what we were searching for. He intended no publicity, no unnecessary risk, no self-sacrifice, at that time. I'm sure of that."

CHAPMAN took up a cut-glass decanter from the desk beside us and went into a tiny lavatory just off the den for a turn of fresh water. It was a hot night. As he came out of the lavatory he snapped a switch, and I saw the lights in the library go out.

"They're all in bed," he said. "There's no use having the place lit up like a power house."

We drank some of the water, and Chapman lit another cigar. I had had enough of smoking.

"Morse intended to play square," Chapman resumed. "I am positive of that. But when my telephone bell rang at an unearthly hour of the morning we were to go on our search,

I knew that something had gone awry. I got up and went to the instrument. Its metallic whine, as aloof and impersonal as though it was giving out the weather forecast, let me know that a milkman, early astir, had found Morse sitting at a raised window of his study, dead!

"I threw on my clothes and ran out to the boathouse. I had a key. There was a line of daylight low in the northeast, but no one was up. It was supposed to be a fifteen minute run to Sylmare, but I must have jerked the painter through a stay-ring in the old wharf at the foot of the town in ten minutes at the most.

"Early as it was, a crowd of townsfolk had gathered outside the window of Morse's study when I arrived. They fell back in whispering groups beneath the trees as I entered the gate. Naturally, Morse's death, following so close on that of Frank Kirby and Alta Cline, had fallen on them with cumulative effect. They were awed. In the dim light under the trees they looked as might a group of primitive men, huddled in the face of some unknown, mysterious danger.

"I approached the window slowly and in extreme dread, stopping short when I reached it, to stare fixedly into Ed's face as at the Medusa! It bore the baffling marks I was now familiar with, the marks I had seen on the youth and the girl in the boat!

"It was a moment between—him and me. Not pleasant, those rare moments alone with the dead. I don't know whether death really adds weight to what one has said, or believed, or advocated, before dying, but I do know that my mind brushed nearer Morse's queer theory, while I was standing there before his stark body, than ever before.

"Under the spell of his dead presence, I watched a green worm measure its laborious way along the sill of the open window between us, watched it rear its forward length in air, pause an instant, then bring up its trailing rear, as though it were a dragged burden.

"The worm brought to my mind one of Morse's favorite arguments: that its kind are a significant connecting link between the two great divisions of life, animals and plants, its imperfect mobility relating it to the one and its green color pointing plainly to the other. He believed that its alternate movement of first one part of its body and then the other was due to its scant dole of mobile energy, sufficient only to animate half its body at a time.

"I turned from the window and went into the house. Everything was just as it had been the last time I saw him—everything but Ed himself. The familiar appointments of the study, the books on their shelves, the writing machine on its stand, the pens gleaming dully in their wire holder, seemed only to accentuate the dead man's inability to move. He was now like them—inert. Somehow, they brought out the fact, subtly, that he was still all there except that mysterious quality called consciousness, with its accompanying parallel, the power to move.

"There were two doctors in the town and they were both there, in the room. I knew Knowles, and he introduced me to Eberslee—in a whisper. Imagine a doctor, whispering over the dead! It shows what the thing had done to us—to all of us. The coroner hadn't yet been called.

" 'We can make nothing of it,' Dr. Knowles whispered, meaning, clearly, the cause of Morse's act. There was no mystery about the cause of his death, or rather, of the means of it. His lips were burned, and an empty glass on the writing desk smelled of acid.

" 'He seems much like the others,' Knowles went on; 'but——' He hesitated, looked at Eberslee, then back

at me. 'You probably wouldn't know of——'

"'Yes, I know,' I interrupted. 'Morse told me, himself. He—we were—interested in the other cases.'

"'We guessed that,' Eberslee interposed. 'That's why we telephoned you. That, and these. He left these written sheets for you.' He crossed the room to the writing machine stand and lifted a paperweight from a few pages of manuscript.

"I took up the sheets of paper, gingerly. There wasn't a reason under the blue sky why I should take these two doctors into my confidence in the matter of Morse's last words to me, but such was my immeasurable interest and theirs, no thought of any other course ever entered any of our heads, I think. We tiptoed from the study into the old parlor as cautiously as though we feared the contents of the precious sheets might be jeopardized by a heavy footfall. Grouped at a window for light, we read the dimly penned pages, handing them from one to another as we read."

CHAPMAN left off speaking and leaned over the writing desk before him. He unlocked a drawer and took out of it a Size 11 white envelope. I felt goofy—felt definitely on the verge of an ordeal. The taboo of the cerements was about the thing Chapman held in his hand. It was getting an ugly time of night, and the house was still as a crypt. From off somewhere, a pensive chorus of frogs reached us faintly, while nearer at hand, without the screened windows, the whine of baffled mosquitos haunted the night.

"Estelle doesn't know I kept this," Chapman said, slipping the rubber band off the envelope. "She thinks I burned it. She has a horror of it, and with reason. It very nearly sent her after Morse."

I took the thing, when he held it out. I had steeled myself to take it, while he was fussing with it. I suspect that he noticed my reluctance—my nervousness. At any rate, he took up a book, as I unfolded the manuscript and read:

"My dear Estey:

"I hope you will forgive my going alone on the search we had planned, when I tell you it resulted wholly from an accident, the turning up of an old, old book by the house-cleaners in their work. I came across it soon after you left, yesterday. It gave me a lead that was irresistible. I simply could not wait. You will believe that I deeply regret grieving Estelle and you; but the riddle drew me, as a magnet draws metal. I guess you know why.

"At the outset, I want to warn you against the tendency of the human mind to dismiss as incredible and unworthy of serious consideration the exceedingly strange or the unique. It is a grave fault, or limitation, rather, of our mentality. Since the mind itself is no more than a set of comparisons of known forms, it is at ease and satisfied only among the known and comparable. The unlike and the unfamiliar confuse and offend it. The series of mysterious cases which will—I have made sure of that—culminate with my own death, may be merely the result of prenomena as definite and, once we know them, as commonplace, as gravity or the electric current, once the laughing stock of incredulous minds.

"I have long had more than an inkling of the nature of the fell entity I set myself the task of bringing to light. When I left Sylmare this morning, I knew fairly well what I was looking for. My problem was chiefly one of where to look for it, and in that, I had one governing clue: that is, all the victims of this deadly enemy of our kind which I

was seeking had apparently reached it by means of boats. One of the victims, too, had also brought away, probably from the place I sought, a bag of fir tips. This fact seemed to me of some significance, since fir is not a universal growth hereabouts.

"Then, as if arranged by fate, came the finding of the old book. It was an odd volume of the Colonial period, containing a legend which assigned a haunted island to our bay, an island that the redmen who had lived here for centuries could in no wise be induced to visit. I assumed that the tradition had something to do with the present mystery.

"With these premises, I set out in a rowboat, before daybreak, reaching the island directly east of Sylmare soon after daylight. On it I found no fir; in fact, this island is very sparsely wooded, and I gave little time to it. Rowing southward, I came to the second island at 9:30 in the morning. It is more densely wooded, with a sprinkling of fir among its pines. But, though I spent upwards of an hour exploring it, I found nothing unusual about it.

"Leaving this island, I continued my course southward. The morning was now far spent, and I began to feel that perhaps I had embarked on a fool's errand, when suddenly I felt a strong presentiment come over me, and I immediately fell under the guidance of that ancient monitor of the race, intuition. As I approached the third island to the southward, I felt strangely assured that somewhere within its wooded depths I would find the lair of the unnamable object of my search.

"This island is not greatly different from the others I had visited, except that it is heavily wooded throughout its extent. It is not large, and has the general contour of an ellipse. At its southern extremity there is a rocky headland, the extreme point of the promontory being occupied by a strangely sharp and slender pinnacle of rock, undermined by the beating sea until it seems to point to the sun at noonday. This singular formation, and the deep gloom beneath the woods of the island, lent it a distinctly weird and eery aspect.

"When I entered the dark wood after beaching the boat, I had to stoop and creep to avoid the thickets of dead branches that clothed the lower portions of all the trees. As I penetrated deeper and ever deeper into the deathlike stillness of the forest, the darkness became as dense as that of a dimly lit cave. A great loneliness depressed me as I stopped from time to time and stood in the vast dim silence, tensely listening to the beating of my own heart.

"The sense of guidance that had taken possession of me in the boat still had me in its keeping. My course through the wood was in no sense a search; rather, it was a toilsome passage to a definite point, which a strange assurance told me I would neither fail to find nor fail to know, when I came to it.

"I at last ran onto a small, circular rift in the forest, and stopped on its verge as suddenly as though it had been a precipice. The weird gloom that hung above the carpet of dead pine needles in the wood, here broke into a half-light that was like a thick mist in color and opaqueness. Though it was high noon, not a ray of sunlight penetrated either the forest or the rift by which I stood. Strangely moved, as if at some hellish shrine, I sank to the ground with my back against a tree.

"I glanced down at my hands. They were scratched and bleeding from tiny wounds made by the sharp points of dead branches with which they had come in contact. I could feel similar abrasions on my face. Already, I bore the uncanny sign with which the evil genius of this

baleful death spot marked its victims!

"My eyes fell on two slight indentations in the thick bed of pine needles under a double tree at my feet. Between the two depressions in the litter lay a little heap of fir boughs from which the tips had been removed. It was the discard from Alta Cline's pillow! I knew from that, if from nothing else, that I had found the thing I sought.

"The trees about the rift were very old, with knotted, gnarled, and misshapen trunks. Their dead lower branches, gleaming like whitened bones through the gray light of the place, and surmounted by their green tops, suggested life superimposed on death, ever growing, ever dying.

"While I was musing on this thought, I became conscious of a sound. It was like the self-made murmur one hears in the silence of a cavern, but seemed to come from the upper part of the rift, as though the sound of the sea, by some freak of acoustics, was caught and repeated by the mystic cleft in the forest. The soft, mill-like murmur had come creeping on my senses unawares; but, once I had taken note of it, I was never afterward able to disregard it.

"The sense of isolation was appalling. The gloom of the wood and the gray of the rift cast a deep depression on me, and in the pulseless monotone that filled the place there was all the haunting sadness of the night wind's moan.

"The voice of the forest, man's earliest lullaby, has ever affected him deeply, imbuing him with religious fervor, abasing him in awe and fear. The Druid's oak with its prayers and sacrifice, the African's hallowed fetish-wold, the sylvan shrine of the South Sea savage—all are remnants of an ancient kinship between man and tree that still appeals through the subtle and desuete avenues of the soul.

"But I attribute the unique power this strange spot on the island possessed to a much older kinship, a brotherhood dating clear back to life's dim beginnings, when the animal and vegetable forms were identical in their common ancestry. To me this vengeful death-trap seems nothing less than the ruing, on the part of the trees that constitute it, of an old, old bargain, an ancient covenant tacitly made by first life, when the materials it found here required a division of method for their utilization, and the primitive forms drew apart into two classes, the plants remaining fixed and insentient, securing their sustenance in one spot, the animal forms developing mobility in their search for food, along with its parallel, consciousness.

"It is a sure thing that each of these divisions of life still retains, in suppressed form, the characteristics of the other—rather, of its own disused half: plants retain the sex character, while many animals are sexless; the fungus remains in one spot, yet feeds by alimentation; some animals have lost their power of movement, have vegetated, while others possess the leaf's power of direct fixation of carbon; man, highest of all animals, loses both sentiency and volition in catalepsy and kindred states, while insectivorous plants have clearly developed both mobility and consciousness.

"Thus I could go on at great length to convince you that the attributes of animal life merely slumber in the plant, and that they often are reawakened. No rational explanation of the wood's spell presents itself save that the old trees on the verge of the rift, during the centuries of arrested growth forced on them by a sterile soil, had devoted their idle eons to developing their sleeping consciousness; that they, though defeated in their efforts to attain mobility itself, had yet

achieved, preternaturally, some measure of mobility's parallel, mentality, or at least, a weird power of suggestion which they were able to employ in a strange, telepathic way, on such as fell into their gray and terrible web.

"As a pitcher-plant lies in wait for its prey, these misshapen monsters of the vegetable world awaited their victims. The chief accessory by which they conveyed their deadly virus of depression to the minds of their prey was the gray rift in the forest. This was like a seer's crystal, in which floated dimly the entire flux of being, from incandescent world birth to dead orb whirling in darkness, the vast whole appearing in a condensed brevity that was like the fall of a yellowed leaf. It was a cinematograph of eternity itself, staggering—yes, fatal—to any mere mote of humanity whose eyes fell on the screen.

"The infinite perspective one got on gazing into the mistlike void was paralyzing, and its endless parade of living forms made consciousness and movement appear an unending punishment, an unfinishable task, like the doom of Sisyphus. The inert and somnolent vegetable, at rest and incapable of suffering, seemed to have fallen on a better lot than had its cousin, the animal. The latter, ever prodded with the impulse to do, to keep going, appeared to be playing the clown's part in the pageant of being.

"Such was the sophistry with which the enormity of the island poisoned the minds of its victims, the while it sapped them of their will and wish to live. And I am convinced that this gloom-girt Upas of the wood had learned through the centuries a cunning that guided it in the adaptation of its subtle propaganda to the mind of every being, savage or civilized, learned or illiterate, child or adult, who came within its deadly spell!

"How long I sat peering into the mistlike void of the rift I do not know. I was aroused from the torpor that lay on me by the fall of a dead branch from a tree at my side. I started up, shaking as with a palsy. The place had grown almost pitch-dark. The returning tide of animation and love of life flushed through me and sent me fleeing wildly from the spot.

"I ran through the wood, scarcely checking my half-mad course to feel my way among the dead branches that wounded me in the darkness. I crashed out of the tangle at some distance from the boat, and, as I walked along the beach toward it, I felt the spell of the rift, which I had momentarily thrown off, settle back on me. I heard again its inescapable monotone of sound. I then recognized the activity that had carried me away from the spot as the mere reaction of a wounded spirit, the reflex shrinking of sentiency from a blow.

"Deeply depressed, I approached the boat and stood beside it in thought. The lapping sea crooned a low accompaniment to the ceaseless sound that was in my ears. It was nightfall. An early star twinkled in the east, and as I gazed at it absently I found my imagination peopling its unseen satellites with the appalling infinity of living forms I had reviewed at the rift.

"I grew cold. A tremor like that of a chill shook me, and I reached for my coat, which I had left in the boat. As I was about to put it on, an idea was suggested to me by the sight of a match-case that fell from one of its pockets. Catching up the little silver box, I ran back to the wood and crept a little way into the underbrush.

"I struck a match and touched it

to the layer of pine needles on the ground. I was startled as the flames leaped up in the dark thicket, and plunging out of the wood and across the beach, I leaped into the boat as though pursued by an embodied spirit of the island, and pushed hastily away from the shore.

"The litter on the ground and the dry lower branches of the trees fed the fire like an inflammable oil, and soon the entire wood was a mass of flames beneath, above which the green treetops writhed like a tortured multitude. The upflare of the flames, lighting the level sea, fell on me with a glare like that of the blazing eyes of a monster dying in rage, as I rowed swiftly away from the accursed island.

"Two hours later, I landed at the old abandoned wharf south of town, made my way home unseen, and at once set about this task—which is to be my last.

"I apprehend that my theory in this matter will encounter unlimited skepticism, and I grant that certain of my predilections may have made me overcredulous. With such as take this view of it I will have no quarrel, but I suggest that they explore the fields of natural suggestion and impression. There is a much broader and more potent force in this quarter, I am sure, than has yet been uncovered. That definite and effective impression, whether elating or depressive, is a faculty of certain aspects of nature is well known, and I am quite sure that, whether or not the deadly spot on the island was conscious, was capable of volition, the element of suggestion was a potent factor in its fell spell."

SO THE amazing message ended. There were no farewell clauses, not even a signature, as though the burden of mere existence had suddenly become more than the writer could bear, and he had simply quit—quit writing and quit living. Indeed, the last lines of the script had grown weak and indistinct, as though the writer's power to think had outlasted his power to move the pen across the page. The last of the writing trailed off into an illegible scrawl, a mere meaningless trail across the paper—like the track of a crawling worm!

Chapman looked up from his book, when I laid the sheets on the desk; but he remained silent, forcing me to speak first.

"Of all the——!" I stopped, for want of a fitting word with which to express my opinion.

"You think so?"

There was a tentativeness in his inflection, that might mask either defense or derision of Morse's madness.

"And I thought you stupidly sane, Estey!" I exclaimed.

He smiled. "Well, I'm not going to do anything about it, whether Morse was right or wrong. In fact, there's nothing to do about it. But there's more to his theory than you think. I've put the thing up to men who ought to know, and they all concede that Morse's premises have weight. But none of them, of course, would follow him to his conclusions. Even the great Sundberg was interested, though he finally labeled it a case of a man finding what he started out to find, whether it was there or not: that is, he felt that Morse's bias had led him to his conclusions. Oddly enough, Considine was the kindest one among them. You knew—or did you know?—Considine. He must have joined the staff about the time you went West."

"I knew him. I thought there was a sort of a feud—professional jealousy or the like—between him and Morse?"

"There was. But Considine's ill will stopped at the grave. He met Morse's theory more than half-way, went into Bergson farther than I

could follow him, and finished with that old saw about the poorhouse or the asylum being the only place for the man in advance of his times."

"But the other victims!" I exploded. "How do you—how does anyone—account for them? They hadn't Morse's predilections!"

"Oh, there's no mystery about them, except their number. Even their number is nearly or quite equaled by a few other famous death spots in this queer world. Why, man, one of the most ill-famed of them all is no more than blocks, I should say, from the headquarters of your own beloved Harvester Trust, in the rotunda of a skyscraper. What are its wire nettings, but a tangible acknowledgment of its deadly spell? And how many victims had it claimed before the wire was put up?

"Morse was right enough in his second guess. It is a form of suggestion that does it—depressive suggestion. It is exactly as though melancholia were a communicable disease, and this spot on the island a carrier of it; and a carrier able to give the malady to everyone who came near! There are a number of places in the world that are known to be fatal to certain people. The one at Sylmare differed from the others only in that it was fatal to all. It was one hundred per cent efficient.

"Great waterfalls, high cliffs, and even desert wastes, possess this depressing power, as do high bridges and lofty domes. It's the perspective that does it, as Morse suspected. It puts you under a reversed microscope—makes you little. You may be sure that I've gone to the bottom of this thing, and you can take it from me that any view which gives us that crushing realization of our infinite unimportance to the whole, is not good for us. We must remain unconscious of the whole, and especially must we be able to disregard duration. No man can live, merely waiting for the next instant. And that was the peculiar doom of the island. It set its victims counting the spokes in eternity's wheel!"

"How did—Estelle take it all?" I asked, to break the uneasy silence that fell on us. My question sounded crass enough, but I wasn't quick enough to stop it, once I had set it going.

Chapman hesitated. "She hasn't got over it yet, entirely. But she will. The mistake was in letting her see this, at all." He tapped the folded message in his hand. "But what was I to do? Her father and her married sister had come on from Atlanta with her, and I put it up to them. They wanted she should see it. We none of us felt that we could withhold such a thing from her. What we failed to take into account was her knowledge of the other cases, and of Morse's work on them."

Chapman sat staring at the desktop. "Estelle came nearer believing Morse's theory than has anyone else. She was a nervous wreck, for awhile: afraid of her own shadow—and of all other shadows. Strangely or not, she clung to me. I had been through much of it with her. She had been away from her own people, except for brief visits, so long that I was really nearer to her than they were. The upshot of it all was that I married her, after a decent time. Her folks wanted that, too. They are a sensible lot.

"We spent a long time getting her out of it. Travel wouldn't do. We tried that. It led us into too many suggestive surroundings, too many gloom spots. You wouldn't think that just a flowing stream—or any steady movement or sound—would so upset anyone! The sea, too, is taboo. She can't bear the sight nor sound of it, nor the shade of trees, nor even the shade of a porch. That is why we have neither trees, nor

porch here. The steady roar of wind in a grove would drive her to madness in twenty-four hours.

"So we at last found this spot and settled down. We are so far from the bay that you wouldn't know it was there, yet near enough to the city to avoid isolation . . . But if I have given you, in all this, an impression of being burdened——"

I stopped him short, with a reassuring gesture. I could honestly do that. Estelle, in any state of nerves, could never be a burden to any man. I recalled the thrill I had got from the pressure of her soft cool hand at our greetings, saw again her superb figure at the piano, its loveliness suggested, where it was not revealed, by the tight and loose set of the becoming house dress she wore. She was so eminently desirable, so full of warm, pulsing life, that I could not ward off the thought that, whatever Professor Morse might have done for Sylmare or for science, he had done Estey Chapman an immeasurably good turn.

I sat in silence, thinking, the deep stillness of the great dark rooms that opened upon the den pressing in on me like a physical presence. To get away from the eery feeling, I asked: "What kind of a stir did this thing kick up in Sylmare?"

"It kicked up none, if you mean this," Chapman replied, reaching for the envelope and putting the folded sheets back into it. "They know nothing of this, up there. The coroner didn't get within rods of it. I saw to that. The whole affair would be almost forgotten, in the course of time, in Sylmare, if it hadn't left a reminder—a monument. The island is there yet. I rowed out and took a look at it, naturally. Eberslee went with me. We went at night, to avoid talk, and perhaps a following of the curious.

"The island lies black and desolate on the horizon of passing boatmen, its stony surface thick set with the blackened boles of the burned pines, still standing. There isn't a living beast, bird, or bush on it—the most deserted spot on earth! I wouldn't want to—it isn't a nice place to be, on a moonless night, with the dull faces of the rocks staring dimly at the stars, and the night breeze from off the lapping surf strumming the low, haunting voices of the standing dead."

Chapman seldom was eloquent, and I sat abashed at this peroration of his. In the deep silence that followed it, we heard again the lonely cry of frogs in the distance, the weird wail of mosquitos in the darkness without.

A Tale of Dire Occult Evil

THE EDGE OF THE SHADOW

By R. ERNEST DUPUY

THAT you should believe this would be remarkable. I have no explanation. Limited knowledge I have, and hearsay for the rest. The hearsay at first I did not believe. But when the man who lifted the curtain had gone West—and he was a hard-headed soldier man—I wondered. For his going, when one takes everything into consideration, fitted in. And to that, at least, I can bear witness.

We were lying in our dugout at Romagne, waiting for zero hour. Outside, Fritz's counter preparation was messing things up considerably. Through an instant's lull came the long-drawn howl of a dog—if it was a dog. And something scratched and slithered against the sturdy logs of our shelter. A spray of shrapnel, perhaps.

"It's calling me," was all that he said.

I can still see his face and the quizzical lift of his eyebrows in the glare of our gasoline lantern—we were motorized artillery and did things in style. And as I returned his stare, his yarn, forgotten for two years, came back.

He had to go out a few minutes later to check up data at the guns, and when we found him in the dawning a splinter—or something—had ripped away his throat. Nothing else. But even now, when a dog gives dismal tongue in the quiet of the night, I feel my hackles rise and the ice creep up my backbone, and I wonder.

It was a book that had made him open up to me in the first place—a book called *Dracula*. Ever read it? No? Well, sometime when you want a good crawly chill, look it over. He noticed it on the shelf one night when he had dropped in at my quarters for a chat, some time before we went into the war. And he asked me what I thought of it. He didn't pay much attention to my opinion, I guess, but sat there sucking his pipe and nodding while I talked. And then he said:

"I've scraped against the edge of that stuff. Just the edge. It's not so good."

Now, he wasn't at all the type of man that one would link up with that sort of yarn. And for that reason it made all the more impression on me. He didn't attempt any explanation either; just told it as it struck him. And do not get the idea that he was boasting of his conquest. I didn't know the girl, never would know her. And we had been friends too long for him to fear that I might blab. His thoughts had just come to a boil, I imagine, looking at the book and bringing back the thing, so he had to get it out of his system.

It seems that he had met her in a casual way, but first glance had been like fire to tow. Headlong they went into it, with open eyes, a well-matched

pair. She must have been a wonder. A Russian, with all the Slavic grasp of the *ars amandi*, one moment all fire and passion, the next an iceberg. A thoroughbred, too. "Gone wrong," if you will, but always a thoroughbred. And he—was my friend. Not that he elaborated on their adventure. I simply filled in, in my mind's eye, the brief, bold outline he blocked out.

THE climax came one night when they were riding. They had had several nocturnal prowls on horseback, I gathered; brief intervals of dalliance. This night they took a trail that was new to both. Imagine them jogging side by side, the August moon rising over the treetops, throwing the masses of foliage into deep relief; great blocks of velvet blackness against the cloudless sky. About them fields shining silver in the moonlight.

The shadows swallowed them up as the trail twisted into the woods, the man leading, his white-shirted back gleaming vaguely to the woman following close, the horses picking their way up hill and down. Through brush and trees the trail ran, now sloping upward on hillsides whose inky depths defied the faint moonlight; now plunged in woodland pockets. I could feel the gloom that closed them in, as he talked; a tangible thing seemingly, ever surrounding, yet ever giving way before their advance until at last they broke through to a moonlit plateau and cantered together over the swelling ridges to draw rein on the very crest of the cliff.

Below them the lowlands spread in tawny languor till they touched the silver-flashing edge of the moon-swept sea on the horizon; behind them the swale of plateau ran clear to the curtain of the woods.

And then, he said, they decided to explore farther. Again they entered the woods—this time a clump of trees guarded by a fringe of stunted, desolate-looking deadwood. And somehow the air felt different. There was a chill and dankness about it he had not noticed in the other woods. The girl shivered. Up a slight incline and then into the open again and on their right a dark mass—the gloomy pile of a deserted house, its empty windows black leering dead eyes, the moonlight heaping fantastic shadows about its front and through the ruins of what had once been a noble porte-cochère. A bit of broken pane in one of the lower windows flickered eerily in the moon-rays. The girl brought her animal close to his, her eyes shielded with one hand as she passed the house with averted head.

"What's the matter, dear?" he joked. "Afraid that you will see the goblins holding carnival inside?"

But she only cowered closer in the saddle. And that was so odd, so different from her usual bold demeanor that it chilled him. And then something, vague, unformed, brushed between them. He felt it touch his boot, he said.

The girl screamed, the horses plunged, and she wheeled her beast, crowding the man into the brush as she spurred past him. He followed, only to see her throw her horse once more upon its haunches as she turned again, squarely in front of the house. And the thought passed through his mind of the house as a finite being, an unclean object squatting there inside its circle of blasted trees.

He rode up beside her as she sat, with staring eyes and heaving breasts. And to his question she answered simply.

"It is the end," she said.

And then her mood changed and her lips sought his and covered them with voluptuous kisses.

"Dismount," she whispered. I could see the perspiration gather on his forehead as he told this part, although his voice never changed.

"Dismount," she coaxed again, and her lips caressed his throat. Her arms were about him now as they pressed closely, the horses jammed against one another.

"We are going in there together, dear boy," and the white teeth touched his flesh. And through him passed a wave of pure terror.

"I'm damned if we are!" he snapped, and tearing himself loose, snatched at her bridle and urged the horses into a gallop. He didn't remember how they got out, he said. The horses must have found the way. All he remembered was a rush through the restraining underbrush, the girl sobbing as they went, until at last they broke through to the high road and sanity.

That night she told him her story. Told him, with his arms about her; and he quivered now and then at the telling, and once, as a dog howled somewhere in the distance, he pushed her from him for a moment. She understood and laughed, though the tears were close beneath.

She was twelve, she said, when the Terror first came to her. In her home on the Dniester, almost in the shadow of the Carpathians—a feudal hold whose foundations went back to time immemorial, one wing was forbidden territory. Blocked off from the rest of the old castle it was, with its own tiny court, the only entrance a door giving from the east tower to the courtyard. The gatekeeper, old Portal, was the only human she had ever seen go through its entrance.

Playing with her jacks one afternoon she found the courtyard door open, and with the curiosity of a child overcoming the strict injunction, had slipped in.

It was late and the rays of the setting sun were striking the massive tower door. Sitting on the lintel she idly threw the jackstones against the oak. Deeper the shadows grew except for one bright spot, at the height of a man's head, where the sunlight struck. Once again she carelessly tossed the jacks against the door. There was a rattle and stir inside, and with a creaking groan the door swung inward and the child found herself staring at something that lurked and mewed in the opaque shadow. Startled, she rose to her feet, and It rose too, and stood with head and shoulders framed in the light of the dying sun, gazing down on her.

Terror froze the girl, for through the dusk she could see the body—the body of the Thing That Should Not Have Been. And she cowered there. It bent toward her and she felt herself picked up in arms that were not human, crushed against a form not human, while the face that was human but should not have been blew its fetid breath upon her. In a voice rasping and metallic, like no human voice, it spoke, in a horrid, unforgettable monotone that thrilled and bit deep into her brain.

"You have come to me of your own free will; you have called me. Again will I come to you and yet again. And you shall belong to me, body and soul, to do my bidding, for the ages and ages to come."

One arm forced the girl's head back, passing over her neck in a dreadful caress. The Face bent over her throat, the slavering lips touched her skin, the pointed teeth pressed against her flesh. Came one shriek of terror from her and then oblivion.

She was sixteen when she met the Terror again. Riding through the woods near Garenstein with her cousin Ivan, the pair of them madly in love, she had felt the icy blast of a wave of horror and sensed the shadowy Thing that loped on all fours by her stirrup, its hot breath on her boot and the touch of fearsome lips on its leather. All that evening she had cowered in her room, gazing

at the boot that lay where she had flung it, a broad white mark blasted on its shining surface. For she was certain then, she told him, that what they had said was a terrible dream, four years ago, had been no dream at all.

Ivan, called to the colors the next day by the mobilization, lay, a few months later, a sprawling corpse in the blood-soaked morasses of the Mazurian lakes, she told him.

Whether or not my friend ever saw the girl after that I don't know. At any rate he never mentioned the thing to me from that day until the night he died. So there the matter lies. I can not give any explanation. Perhaps you can. But the howl of a dog at night annoys me.

The Old Crow of Cairo

By T. LOVELL BEDDOES (1803-1849)

(Reprint)

Old Adam, the carrion crow,
The old crow of Cairo;
He sat in the shower, and let it flow
Under his tail and over his crest;
And through every feather
Leak'd the wet weather;
And the bough swung under his nest;
For his beak it was heavy with marrow.
Is that the wind dying? O no;
It's only two devils, that blow
Through a murderer's bones, to and fro,
In the ghosts' moonshine.

Ho! Eve, my gray carrion wife,
When we have supped on kings' marrow,
Where shall we drink and make merry our life?
Our nest it is Queen Cleopatra's skull,
'Tis cloven and crack'd,
And batter'd and hack'd,
But with tears of blue eyes it is full:
Let us drink then, my raven of Cairo!
Is that the wind dying? O no;
It's only two devils, that blow
Through a murderer's bones, to and fro,
In the ghosts' moonshine.

A Tale of Reincarnation

The Algerian Cave

By DICK HEINE

AT FIRST it was strange, this tragic thing, hard to understand. But now it is so clear, so logical. I thought Louis Fanon insane. Perhaps I, myself, might have perished if the bullet had come two feet nearer. Who knows? But I will tell all—all.

At 2 o'clock in the afternoon of that unforgettable day I was lounging in the sitting room of my second-story apartment in Paris and waiting for my friend, Paul Mitrande, who was to drive me to the art reception at 3. I am an American artist, Arden Dexter, finishing my studies abroad. Paul had been my friend since the great war, for we had served in the same regiment when I was brigaded with the French. I was thinking of the picture he was going to exhibit. He had never told me its name, and I hadn't the least idea what kind it was; but he had assured me that it was certain to win the prize of fifteen thousand francs. There are many reasons why I am not going to mention the name and exact locality of the place where the reception was held and where occurred the strange event that led to stranger things.

Just before 3 Paul came in, smiling as usual. He was about five feet six inches, solid and strong. He was dressed in his usual good taste, this time in gray. His face was a healthy tan, a fresh, beaming, open face, upon which rested an expression of satisfaction. His hair was sleek and black, and beneath his small, dark mustache showed a set of ivory-white teeth. His brown eyes were almost Oriental in their depth of feeling. In spite of his French vivacity, Paul was, at the same time, the soul of calmness.

He placed both hands upon my shoulders when I rose to greet him.

"And how are you, Arden?" he asked. "The judges have told me the decision will be reached by tomorrow night. Just think—on the next morning I shall be given the award."

"You are always too sure, my friend," I said. "Your picture, no doubt, is wonderful. I wish you would tell me the name of it."

"The name—it is 'The Algerian Cave', and I have created it from sheer inspiration. It is a picture from the well of my soul. I have drawn upon the treasure house of the subconscious. That, you know, bears the writing of the Infinite; it is ever revealing something new in the history of the individual and the race. I am sure of the prize—my work is a part of me. And I believe, of course, that I am eternal."

"You have your chance, Paul, but don't forget there are dozens of good rivals. When shall we go—now?"

His roadster was soon speeding down an avenue lined with trees that were just beginning to drop the colored leaves of autumn. I settled back comfortably, smoking and thinking how pleasant it was to have a friend I dearly loved and not a care in all the world. At length we entered the Rue de la Convention, and then the

Avenue de Breteuil. We did not drive long in this, but left it for a less well-known street not so very far from the Place Vauban. Paul headed for the parking space beyond a tall building on the edge of a square, where dozens of machines were placed in line.

A number of well-dressed gentlemen were standing about in the vestibule of the building when we entered, and a few students were pacing the hall by twos and threes discussing learned subjects in clouds of tobacco smoke. We greeted the friends we saw and went to a little open space among the flowers and plants at the end of the exhibition room, where we sat down and waited for the reception to begin. It was only a few minutes of the set hour, and people were arriving in considerable numbers. From my position I had a good view of the whole room.

It was about fifty feet wide and seventy long; the floor was of polished hardwood, and the ceiling ornately decorated. Electric globes in suitable places aided the skylight. A fountain of water and a statue stood in the middle of the floor. On the walls were hung the pictures to be exhibited, each one covered with its veiling cloth.

In groups stood immaculate men and handsomely gowned women and girls. It was a crowd typical of such affairs. I could see Sir Marden Ford, who pulled always at his little mustache; there was a lady, gray and stout but finely finished, holding his arm. The students, with their attempt at correct dress and ease of manner, moved leisurely and indifferently about.

But all these people did not hold my attention long. Apart from anyone stood a man who interested me in several ways. He was somewhat taller than Paul and dressed in shiny black. He had a black look hanging about him, as if he might be a man of shady thoughts and unknown deeds. I sensed this personal atmosphere, or whatever it was, in a way I could not understand. His beardless face was dark and sharp, and his hair jet-black. A glance into his eyes, quick, vengeful, shrewd, made me nervous; his prominent nose reminded me of an eagle's beak when he looked keenly about at everything and everybody. It was difficult to take my gaze from him. I was attempting to form some estimate of his character and wondering who he might be, when the reception formally began.

Forty-five minutes later the gathering was before the picture painted by Paul Mitrande. The artist himself stood near the wall directly by one end of his canvas, and I was at his elbow. Ford and his lady were at the other end of the picture. The circling crowd, with interested faces, awaited the lifting of the veil. When a spectacled member of some big society performed that act, I saw "The Algerian Cave" for the first time.

The painting represented the interior of a cave, lighted by the sun's rays streaming in through the mouth, which, from the view selected, could be observed opening upon the shining stretches of a barren wasteland. In one corner of the cave was a niche in the wall; in this niche rested the golden bust of a beautiful goddess. She shone in the sunlight. On the ground beneath her was an open treasure chest filled with precious stones. On each side of the chest were stacks of bars of gold. Kneeling by the treasure was a Roman soldier, lightly armored but wearing a helmet. His hands were filled with the stones, and he was looking into the face of the goddess. Back of this soldier stood another similarly clad. They were both fine examples of their race and breed; doubtless, no better men had ever thrust the short-sword. The picture was marvelously colored, and I felt that Paul Mitrande had in-

deed created something from the well of his soul. The eternal Rome is forever in the hearts of men; this picture called from the canvas the glory and adventure of the legions, fighting their way of conquest over the world. In the hinterland of northern Africa, two brave men had stumbled upon the workings of some unknown race. As Paul explained, perhaps the treasure and statue had been placed there by thieves, who had looted a far city ages before the birth of Rome. He would leave that to the fancy of the individual.

Many were the sighs of wonder and admiration. I could scarcely realize myself the triumph of my friend. Only one other picture had a chance against his.

The moment after the first wave of enthusiasm, it happened.

The people gave way to the dark man in the shiny black suit. He forced himself rudely to the front and gazed with wild interest at the picture. On his face was the keenness of the hawk after its prey. Suddenly he pointed his finger at smiling Paul and cried: "You!" A revolver flashed in the hand of the man, and a sharp report followed.

Paul fell into my arms with the blood spurting from his neck. The stranger would have fired again, but Sir Marden Ford sprang at him, tore the weapon from his hand, and choked him to the floor. I dragged Paul out of the crowd and hastened with him to a bench. With the assistance of some other gentlemen, Sir Marden secured his prisoner.

I SHALL relate briefly the events preceding my visit on the following afternoon to the Dépôt of Prefecture of Police in the Palais de Justice. The officers came in from the street when summoned and relieved the gallant Englishman of his charge. The madman proved to be Louis Fanon, and he was rushed away to the local commissaire de police and then taken to the Dépôt and put in solitary confinement. An ambulance was called. Poor Paul was carried to a hospital. The examining surgeon performed an emergency operation, but he would give out no word about my friend's condition; I did not know at 7 o'clock in the evening whether Paul would live.

The people had been horrified at the attempted murder, no one being able to understand why such a sudden and brutal attack should have been made. Sir Marden sent me a personal note at my rooms, expressing his sympathy and asking to be remembered to Paul's mother; he was sorry that he had not foreseen the villain's intention.

All night I waited in anxiety. I made no attempt to sleep, but paced the sitting room, smoking and trying to understand the thing that had happened, in which I was so much concerned. The thought of Paul's possible death almost felled me. A few years before, I had been hardened against death and destruction, having seen them in all forms; but now, relaxed into the ease of peace, I felt the deep grief of a normal man. Paul was the dearest friend I had in Paris. Life would be sad without him. I felt as if I could no longer continue my studies. But the thing that hung about me was the mystery of the attack. Why should the man have attempted Paul's life? Other pictures had been exhibited. Where was the relation between "The Algerian Cave" and the brain of this insane criminal? For the life of me I could make no progress. If Paul were to die, I should have a thing unsolved that would haunt me down the years. I wanted to see my friend, to clear up this mystery, to know that in the life of Paul Mitrande there was no justification for this deed. I decided to go as soon as possible and see him;

then I should endeavor to discover the motive of the criminal.

At 10 o'clock I called on Paul's mother. She was so overcome that she could hardly speak. While it was true that so far I had heard nothing of her son's condition, I tried to console her, saying that I had indeed heard and that all was sure to be well. She begged me to go and learn more. I left her and went directly to the hospital.

The attendants were reluctant to let me see the patient, but upon hearing that I was the man's best friend and came at the request of his mother, they admitted me to the sickroom. Before I entered, the nurse told me the bullet had missed the jugular vein, but that some of the smaller blood-vessels had been damaged. Paul, having stood the anesthetic well, was resting quite comfortably amid his white surroundings, but he was not permitted to speak. His face indicated that he knew of my anxiety, and when he heard that I had reassured his mother, his teeth showed in a game grin. Yet there was a ghastly look to his face, and I knew that if chance there was, it was small indeed. Only the next few hours could tell.

"I am going to find out if possible, Paul," I said to him, "why the attack was committed. I suppose you think, as I do, that the man is a maniac. I shall ask permission this afternoon to see him. If he will talk, I shall no doubt have something to tell you when I see you again."

With a grasp of the hand he thanked me for coming, and I left him. But still I did not know whether he would live. I should have to lie again to his mother. If death came, she would overlook the lie; if life prevailed, there would be no harm done.

At 4 o'clock I made my way to the proper officials. They said the prisoner was not dangerous unarmed and that I might have a short interview. Soon, surrounded by things of steel, I was face to face with Louis Fanon. The conducting gentleman of arms, chin in air, respectfully walked away down the corridor, holding his keys behind his back and digging his heels into the floor with an air of absolute indifference.

FANON sat on a bench in his cell and received me with perfect calm. He was clad in his black suit and looked quite comfortable. I was surprized to see that the mean expression had vanished. He did not look the same man at all; some sort of relaxation had come over him. The extraordinary keenness of his eyes was absent, and they were now of a softer light. I sat down opposite him, and he spoke to me in French.

"So you are Monsieur Dexter, the friend of Paul Mitrande?"

"I am," I said, "and I have come, Monsieur Fanon, to ask you to tell me why you committed this assault. The man is unknown to you. You doubtless had never seen him before."

"There are many things to be explained," he said suavely. "But I will tell them all. You assume, *Monsieur*, that I am insane. I assure you that nothing could be more untrue. A saner man never walked; a man more devout in his worship of right never lived. I have achieved my purpose, and my heart is calm."

"Calm! You are indeed cold-blooded to speak so when at the hospital this man lies near to death!"

"Your feelings will be different when you hear my story. There are things—many things—beyond the comprehension of materialistic Americans like you. No doubt this criminal Mitrande will have a few apologies to make to me!"

I could not tolerate these caustic comments; I was almost in a rage when Fanon bade me keep my temper.

"You shall have no interview unless you let me say what I must say. You may leave this prison with a hand-clasp of affection for me instead of with the hatred that you bring."

"Proceed with your story," I said.

He placed the tips of his fingers together, leaned back, and looked at me with an air of complete ease.

"I presume, Monsieur Dexter, that you have some imagination. We artists must have, or we could never become artists. Imagine, then, if you can, a shining stretch of desert wasteland. Picture the sand, the far distances, and reflections, and colors. Make some blue mountains rising into the sky a long way off. Imagine that you saw two Roman soldiers walking across the wasteland. They were lightly armored and wore helmets. They were a legion's finest. You can imagine those things, can you?"

"Easily," I said, looking into his eyes for some brightness or dilation that would reveal his evident lunacy.

"Then I shall proceed to tell you the story of the two soldiers. One was the soldier Quintian, and the other the soldier Severus. And devoted friends they were. They would have died for each other. They had obtained leave from their company in order to make a four-day trip into the mountains in search of adventure. The blue mountains you created in the distance were not so very far from them when their first day's march was over. The morning of the second day found them high in the hills, scanning the gorges, peering into dark holes, and looking everywhere for anything of interest.

"At length they came to the mouth of a cave. When they went inside, they looked behind them and saw the shining stretches of the desert framed by the mouth of the cave. In one corner of the cavern, lighted by the rays of the sun, was a little projecting ledge or table, upon which rested the bust of a golden goddess. Down on the ground was a small treasure chest, and near each end some stacks of gold bars.

"With a sharp cry Severus dropped on his knees before the chest and lifted the lid. Quintian remained standing behind him. They saw, gleaming with the colors of Paradise, a thousand precious stones —jewels that would make them rich beyond the dream of mortals. The sticks of gold were nothing beside the gems. Severus feasted his eyes and scooped up a handful.

"Now Severus could not have known what went on in the mind of Quintian nor what he did. But I can easily imagine that. Quintian stood looking down at what was before him. Slowly his face hardened. His right hand went to his short-sword. His left hand snatched the unbuckled helmet from the head of Severus. Then in a flash the butt of the sword descended upon the bared head. Severus fell limp and unconscious with the blood pouring from his scalp. Then what did Quintian do? Oh, yes. He kicked the body of Severus to one side and stooped to examine the chest. He filled it with the gold bars and strained to lift it to his shoulder. It was almost too much for one man to carry, but he carried it anyway. A last satisfied look at the motionless Severus, and Quintian left the cave.

"Severus lay for a day and a half. When he came to his senses, he slowly turned over on his side and tried to sit up. He succeeded feebly. His hand went to his head, which seemed bursting with pain. He crawled to the mouth of the cave and looked out. Nothing was to be seen of Quintian. And Severus then re-

flected how fortunate he was to be alive. He slept. Upon awakening, his head was clearer, and he left the cave and made his way down among the rocks to a little stream. Here he bathed and refreshed himself. Then he ate some berries and descended to the plain. A few days later he was captured by a wandering tribe and carried away to slavery."

"And what became of him after that?" I asked impatiently.

"He escaped on the borders of Egypt and fled into the interior of that country. A few years' labor found him still poor, and finally sickness overtook him. He fell in the streets with running sores, and he had to beg for his bread. On his deathbed he cursed the trusted friend who had wrecked his life.

"And now, Monsieur Dexter, you doubtless want to know what became of the soldier Quintian. Severus, before his death, had learned a good deal about him by carefully questioning travelers from Rome. In fact, he had learned nearly all I shall tell you. Quintian escaped from the mountains with his treasure, hired a substitute to serve in the army, and went to Rome. There he disposed of his jewels and gold. He moved to Sicily and established himself in a fine estate. He built a great house and made a vast garden surrounded by marble walls. Now what think you of the fate of Severus compared with that of Quintian?"

"Quintian was a knave and a scoundrel, and Severus an unfortunate man betrayed by his friend," I said. "Monsieur Fanon, you have but imaginatively constructed a tale around the picture painted by Paul Mitrande, who lies now almost certain to die. You are indeed insane!" I waxed angry and rose to my feet. "Unless you can establish your sanity, you will be sent to a prison worse than death, where are many like you. If you can prove that you are in your right senses, you will fare little better. You will be convicted and put to death or given a life sentence at hard labor. I shall rejoice if the blade falls upon your neck! You have no resource. I believe that by this fabrication you hope somehow to escape."

Fanon smiled.

"You are inclined to doubt me, *Monsieur*. There are many things you may doubt. But do you not see any relation between what I have told you and my attack on Paul Mitrande?"

"Not the slightest," I answered.

"*Paul Mitrande was the soldier Quintian, and I, Louis Fanon, was the soldier Severus!*"

I gasped with staggering comprehension.

"I refuse to believe you!" I shouted. "How do you know? How do you know?"

"I was a queer child, *Monsieur*, born in the south of France. At an early age I used to stand upon the seashore and point toward Africa, begging my nurse to take me there—just there, over there, where I used to live. She would ignore my childish fancies and drag me back to the house, sometimes punishing me. I had flashes of some past existence—visions of sands, of rivers, of black slaves toiling in the sun. At five years of age I fashioned a sword from a board, though I had never seen a sword, and drove my playmates from the nursery. At six I lay supposedly dying of a fever. Delirious, I was crying in an unknown tongue. The priest they brought in rose from the bedside and rushed from the room. Later he returned with the most learned father in the district. They both listened and agreed that I was talking in Latin; they would not translate, but said I was calling for someone. The elder placed his hand upon my head and answered me in Latin. Immediately

I became calm, the fever subsided, and the old family doctor clapped his hands for joy that life was mine. But I was delicate for some time after that. I still wanted to go across the sea. The doctor advised my father to take me to Africa to satisfy the craving. We went. On the desert I was at home. They said I seemed to recognize places, to be joyous at times. They observed a great emotion when we approached the Nile. After six months in Egypt, I grew stronger in every way. I was brought home to begin my schooling.

"I learned rapidly. I seemed to know some of the Latin stories, when we came to that study, before I read them. The teachers, astounded, hinted at precocious idiocy. My father feared I should die before maturity. But my passion for outdoor play developed me into a running, tearing, shouting youth, who would fearlessly charge upon his comrades in the games.

"I know that I was Severus. There is no other explanation."

Fanon paused. His face was tense and wet with sweat.

I felt as if I wanted to flee from that cell, to hide myself somewhere, to wipe the memory of this day from my brain. Paul Mitrande——!

I rose and stepped toward the door. The hand of Fanon held me back. His face had changed to peacefulness again, and he spoke less vehemently.

"In my life, *Monsieur*, I have been cursed with a passion for revenge—a thing I could not understand. I have hated my fellowmen since becoming a man. I have gone armed of late years. Yesterday, when I saw that picture, the things of my other life flashed back to me. I knew that Paul Mitrande could not have painted that picture unless he had been Quintian in that cave of Africa two thousand years ago! Hardly knowing what I did, I shot him. You know the rest. Here I am, perhaps to be adjudged insane, perhaps to be convicted and imprisoned or put to death, and never to finish my studies and become an artist known to the world. But it may be well after all. I have not the means to complete my courses. I shall have to wait upon the doing of the law."

Tears came into his eyes, and he sank back upon his bench.

I left the prison hurriedly. In the taxicab that hurled me along the boulevards I tried to collect my reason. I could do nothing but believe the things Fanon had told me. The dangerous condition of Paul Mitrande finally brought me in touch with reality again, and when I entered the hospital, I was almost myself again.

PAUL MITRANDE lived. He is calmly sitting on my sofa now while I finish the story I have set myself to write. Every day he has driven over to sit by the fire, to gaze into its flames, and to muse over the things that may be and that may not be. Sometimes he is sad, sometimes joyous; and often in his deep, brown eyes, I see the welling of man's impenetrable soul. "The Algerian Cave" was awarded the prize. Paul recommended that lenity be shown Louis Fanon, and the court gave it. The prisoner was released after a very short term. The day he was freed, Paul met him at the prison gates and handed him a deposit-book and a check-book; then Fanon learned that Paul had deposited to his credit ten thousand francs of the prize money.

The Epic of the Microbe-hunters

The Dark Chrysalis

By ELI COLTER

The Story So Far

SAUL BLAUVETTE, working in his laboratory with John Cloud and Henry Arn, discovers the microbe of cancer—a germ shaped like a devil-fish, that is visible only when stained with a combination of red and blue dye. He finds that his mother is tainted with the cancer-microbe, and feverishly works to find a cure for the dread disease. He is spurred on by Helene Kinkaid's faith in him.

THE scientist's first succeeding step was further experimentation on the animals. From every rat, mouse, guinea-pig and rabbit and monkey in the laboratory he with the aid of Cloud and Arn examined a piece of flesh, while he waited the doctor's gruesome bottles of samples. It took the three men two days to make the final round, and their findings were precisely the same as they had been with human flesh. In several rats, guinea-pigs, mice and one monkey they found the devil-fish microbes swarming like bees in a hive. The other animals were free from the bacterium. All these in the animals on which they had as yet made no attempt to produce a cancer. In all the animals developing cancer the microbe multiplied and throve. Having satisfied himself so far, Saul began a series of ghastly experiments.

Into each of the animals untouched by the microbe he injected live, groping bacteria from the flesh of the dead man's tongue, saving out only a few of each species immune. On each of the animals receiving the germ he began the process of irritation with his tar and oils and gums. One monkey free of the cancer germ he saved for a third test. He began the process of irritation to determine whether an animal not having the microbe in its flesh could develop the cancer growth. All this done, Saul thought of the doctor's bottles, and hurried away to Whittly's office.

Whittly had the bottles ready, and the little scientist stared at the packet with its grisly contents, wheeled abruptly and began pacing aimlessly about the room. Then he paused suddenly and faced the old doctor.

"Where's Helene?"

"Gone out for lunch, Saul. She'll regret having missed you."

"Not so much as I. But I'll see her soon. Doc"—Saul's eyes centered on Whittly's face, harassed and probing—"Arn and Mother are swarming with those damned microbes. Arn's healthy as a bear, apparently. But Mother hasn't been well for a long time. She's never said a word to me about herself. I never dared ask. She keeps such a grim silence. I've been brought up to respect it. But sometimes—I've seen her eyes. Do you know anything about it?"

"I don't *know*," Whittly answered slowly, turning his eyes out the window to escape Saul's penetrating gaze. "Her brother and her father died of cancer of the liver. Didn't you know that? Well, they did. I fancy she's afraid. Her color's bad. But she stays in her shell. She'll never come to me till she's driven

This story began in WEIRD TALES for June

sick by fear, and then it'll be too late."

"By God, it'll never be too late!" Saul interrupted swiftly. "Give me those bottles." He snatched the packet from the table and ran from the room, leaving Whittly staring after him with strange eyes.

He raced into the laboratory where Cloud and Arn awaited him impatiently. All that day three excited men hung over the microscopes. In none of the flesh did they discover any microbes. In Saul there was born a frenzy that turned the laboratory into a shambles, littered with blood and fur and stench, noisy with the squeals and whimpers of suffering and dying animals. The scientists worked over the squealing brutes, brewed soups of seeds and broths from meat and set to work to obtain a pure culture microbe for further experimentation. The ghastly little devil-fish grew with appalling speed.

"If they can grow at that rate, how in blazes does it take a cancer so long to develop?" Arn demanded, frowning at the microscope and shaking his head.

"Amount of demoralization in the tissue," Saul returned. "The more broken down the tissue the faster the bugs can get in their work. We've got to find something that will kill them when injected into the body, and yet not injure the human being. I know there's no use in trying any vaccine process with them. We've got to make a totally foreign serum—God knows from what we'll make it. But we'll find it. And then all the broken-down tissue in the world can't become housing space for a cancer. But—proof! Proof! We haven't any proof! We've got to waste time doing all these things to prove what I already know—or even I won't be satisfied."

"Yes, we've got to get busy proving something, all right. We don't even know yet that those microbes aren't in a dozen other diseases. They may not have a thing to do with the real causation of cancer."

"You're ratty!" Saul snapped. "Rats—pure rats! Of course they're the cause of cancer! Haven't I just got through explaining to you what I *know?* But we don't dare make a move toward our goal till we've gone through the maddening process of proving—proving! I'm going to see Doc Whittly!"

So again the old doctor was called into the ring, a willing and eager participant in the cause of materializing Saul's great dream. Again Whittly turned over to Saul several bottles with ghastly contents, shivering involuntarily to think of the dangers faced night and day by those three tireless men. And Saul Blauvette and his faithful coworkers bent unwearying over blisters from measles patients, blood from a tuberculous man, pus from the one smallpox patient in town, and even the terrible discharge from the flesh of a syphilis-eaten baby. At the end of the long hideous day Saul raised to his meager height and looked at his two assistants triumphantly. In not one of the other diseases did a single devil-fish microbe appear. It belonged to that malignant thing called cancer, and that alone.

Cloud gave back Saul's slight smile, nodding, "You win, old man. I'm beginning to think you'll win all the way."

"Of course I'll win!" Saul retorted vehemently. "That's so much proof. Now we've got to get back to the rabbits and rats and guinea-pigs. These three things we've got to prove with them: that only in the animals having cancer germs will a cancer appear; that in an animal not infested with the germ you can't start a cancer to save your soul; and that the cancer germ itself will never give us a serum to do the trick of annihilating cancer. And the world waits—and we've so

much to do! Let's go!" But he was thinking of his gaunt and silent mother. She knew that he had lied.

AGAIN long days of experimenting, and as they worked, weeks and months began to fly. They searched diligently through pieces of animal flesh and examined sore and irritated bellies. On none of the animals not inoculated by the cancer germ did any sign of cancer appear. Cracks and small lumps grew, and the moment the irritation was suspended they healed quickly and passed away. On the belly of one guinea-pig they had inoculated with the germ a crack appeared. A crack that did not heal. Saul took a minute piece of the irritated edge of the crack and put it under the microscope. The membrane was broken and angry. They redoubled their efforts at applying irritation.

In a few months another piece of tissue from the small growing sore was put under the microscope. The delicate epithelial cells had grown more numerous, thickened, and all around the edge a congregation of blood cells was gathered, trying to assist the sore to heal. But the little devil-fish microbes were hard at work on the weakened tissue, and it showed no indication of healing. In a few months more the sore had grown hard, bled easily and had a look of going deep. The cells which before were merely thickened and angry, now apparently had begun to grow. Saul pointed it out to Arn and looked at him with triumphant enthusiasm in his enormous slate-colored eyes.

"See that? And they tell you cancer is a nucleus of seemingly normal cells that suddenly begin to spread and eat up all the surrounding tissues! Rats! Look at those bugs! The cells aren't really growing! The dirty little devil-fish have settled in them and started housekeeping, multiplying, breaking down new tissue, eating it as fast as it breaks enough to become susceptible! Then they branch out, the cancer grows deeper, the epithelial cells penetrate to the lymphatics and follow to the nearest glands. We've proved the causation and explanation of that thing called cancer, Henry!"

"Yes." Arn nodded somberly, as Cloud bent over the lens and squinted his red-rimmed eyes at the squirming bacteria.

"That wasn't so difficult," Saul went on wearily. "What is to come is the almost impossible task."

"Conquering the microbe?" Cloud half stated, half questioned.

"And thereby, cancer," Saul supplemented. "We've got our real work ahead of us. We've proved conclusively that the microbe itself can't aid us in making a serum—I knew it all before we started. We've got to find *some* serum that'll do the trick, though. Local application is of course out of the question, since the microbes go all over the body. And when we do find the serum that will knock the devil-fish——"

"The world will go wild!" Cloud cut in. "Think of it! All anyone has to do is be tested to see whether or not he has it in his system, and if he has it, take the serum, and he couldn't get cancer on a bet."

"But we've got to start somewhere," Arn frowned, watching Saul. "And if you know that—*where* to start—we're on the last lap."

"We're on the last lap, all right!" Saul strode over to the microscope and stared into it. "But God knows when we'll reach the post! No—I don't know where to start, but we'll experiment with mercury for a beginning."

THERE were, then, three years. Three years in which Saul's mother moved ever more slowly, ever more gaunt, the faded sallowness of

her face deepening to a sinister shade. Three years in which fear and despair came to brood over the great barn of a laboratory and the adjoining living-house, while Whittly looked on with bitter silence and grim eyes. Three years that whirled crazily by while three men grew old in their youth, turned gray at the temples, worked frantically with devil-fish microbes and did weird horrible things in their tireless search for the serum that would conquer the cancer microbe.

They injected aged and devitalized germs into rats and guinea-pigs half eaten by cancer, only to see the germs grow live and active the moment they joined their kind, sending the small animals to swift and hideous death. They dried spinal cords and brains, blood and body-juices, made serums and injected them into animals doomed with the malignant tumors only to see the cancers increase with appalling speed and send other small beasts to horror and extermination.

Three men grew thin of body, lean of hope and sick of heart. But they never relaxed their efforts. Whenever despair descended to sit on the shoulders of Saul Blauvette, he looked into his mother's eyes and drove himself harder than ever. And when he was too weary to go another step without relief, he sought rest and surcease in the arms of Helene Kinkaid. A strange situation obtained between Helene and Saul's mother. Never yet had the girl come near the laboratory. Never yet had Saul's mother left it. Saul knew that the gaunt, fear-ridden woman held off from her harshly the idea of that other woman in Saul's life. He told Helene, delicately as he could, and queerly enough Helene understood.

"It's jealousy, Saul," she said gently. "A strange kind of jealousy all mothers know when their children come to love and another person enters the scene. I think she must believe that marriage with me will take you from her. How can I convince her that I long to take her to my arms, in place of the mother that died in my infancy? What can I do?"

"Nothing." Saul shook his head somberly. "It's a situation that must resolve itself somehow. I feel sure that it will, by some twist of circumstance."

Helene nodded slowly, believing in him with utter faith, and in all that he said. But if either of them could have looked ahead and seen the "twist of circumstance" that was to bring those two women together their cheeks would have paled and their hearts gone sick. Saul's mind was too occupied with his life-work to give it much thought.

Never once did he lose sight of his great vision, forever holding an inner mind-picture of the dark chrysalis broken open at last, bringing light to a fear-bound world. Here and there a man sprang into prominence with a new "cure for cancer." Saul held his breath, ready to cheer on a man more successful than he, only to find the cure as crazily erratic, as without basis or virtue as all the old cures. And he turned to delve anew into his own research with John Cloud at one elbow and Henry Arn at the other.

Then Henry Arn began to suffer continuously with an ugly indigestion. It had been bothering him persistently through the last year, growing steadily worse. He had paid little heed to it, dismissing it as nothing, believing its cause to be mainly straining overwork, hastily snatched meals and too little sleep. But when it became so bad that he could keep nothing on his stomach, when he found himself with sharp pain and continual nausea for constant companions, he went to Doc Whittly and asked for some prescription for a "slight stomach disorder." He had, strange as it may seem, quite forgotten that in his

flesh the little devil-fish microbes swarmed and throve and grew.

Whittly examined him quickly, almost perfunctorily, and Helene paled, listening, at the old doctor's words.

"I—Arn, you want the truth?"

"Certainly!" Arn started at the doctor's tone, and his own sallow cheek grew a shade paler.

"You've a well-developed cancer of the stomach," Whittly responded, turning his eyes from the shock in Arn's face. "For God's sake, man, why didn't you come to me before? I've been watching you, I was disturbed at your color. But none of you ever said anything about your having any symptoms."

"I didn't think it amounted to anything," Arn answered, shuddering involuntarily. "Cancer! I've got it! My God, Doc, can't you do anything for me?"

"It's too late." Whittly shook his head, and his eyes were stricken. "I could put you on the operating table and cut you up, but it would be utterly useless. Nobody can save you now but Saul Blauvette."

Henry looked for a moment into the pitying eyes of Whittly and Helene Kinkaid, and turned to walk slowly from the office, like a very old man, too weary to lift his head and mark which way he was going.

So he came to the laboratory, white-faced and weary-eyed, and Saul, looking into his face, sprang toward him with a startled cry: "Henry! What's the matter? Are you sick?"

"Sick to death," Arn answered, and Cloud paled as he heard. "Whittly says I have cancer of the stomach, and it's too late even to operate. He says nobody can save me but you."

"Oh, my God! Henry! You?" Saul's enormous eyes went wide, then blinked shut as though to close from his sight some hideous picture.

"And I." A harsh, fear-chilled voice came from the doorway.

The three men wheeled to see Saul's mother, standing facing them, her head high, her face grim, and in her eyes the agony of all hell.

"Mother! What are you saying!" Saul's voice rose to a half-hysterical shout.

"Doctor Whittly was here yesterday, at my request. You did not know. I demanded his secrecy. He told me what he told Henry. I have cancer of the liver. Nothing can be done. No one can save me but you, my son." She spoke with the grim control of her stern nature, but Saul read the hopeless horror underneath.

The little scientist threw his hands over his head in a gesture of wild despair.

"And I am powerless! For three years we have worked and slaved, and nothing has rewarded us. Mother! You—and Henry! My God, I'm going mad! I've got to get out of here!"

He whirled and raced from the room, out into the gathering dusk, leaving behind him horror and pain and sick despair. Straight as a homing pigeon flies he went to Helene.

"Come to the hill," he begged of her, frigid in his terror of the thing ahead. "Come out to our little hill. I've got to talk to you or I'll go mad!"

Without a word of question she followed him to the little birch-clad hill between the laboratory and the little town. And there he turned to her, took her in his arms and hid his face on her shoulder.

"Helene," he choked, shivering as he put his horror into words, "Mother and Henry Arn——"

"I know," the girl interrupted him, gripping him with arms that would drive from him his soul-breaking desperation. "I know. Doctor told me. Their salvation lies in you. Saul, listen—listen, dear. You can't break now!"

"I can't go on!" Saul's voice rose, and he lifted his head to stare into her face through the deepening shadows. "I don't know which way to turn. We've been working like mad for three years to discover the element that will kill that germ, and we've failed. Failed miserably. We may search on for three years more. Helene, how long have Mother and Arn to live?"

"Arn can have but a few months, your mother at best a year," Helene answered, her voice bitter with regret.

"A few months—a few months—a year! Good God!" Saul's arms held her convulsively, and his words were harsh with his emotion. "And we may work a dozen years, a lifetime—and then not find it! There is something that will conquer that cancer microbe! Somewhere in the world it waits the man who can find it! But only God knows what it is!"

"Ah—there, you said it! Only God knows! Haven't you been forgetting a bit about God?" Something in her tone struck deep, and the frenzy that swirled in Saul's racked brain hushed to hear. "God knows. And only God can help you now. I tell you God guards his own, but God does not will that they shall forget Him. I told you once before that man does all things through God, Saul. And when men think they are supreme, and that they can work the world to their will without him, he brings them to their knees. As he has brought you. You can't go one step farther without the aid of God. Saul, listen to me! You've got to turn to God."

"I—yes, my own, yes." The scientist nodded his head, his frenzy gone, looking into her eyes with a strange mixture of bewilderment and trust. "I'm ready. Tell me what to do. I guess I was forgetting about God."

"Most men forget about God"—Helene's lips quivered, then went still—"till they are driven to the wall. Down on your knees, beloved, here in the grass. Lift your head, and pray."

She released herself from his arms and dropped lithely to her knees, pulling him down beside her, her face uplifted. Saul gripped her hand with both of his, raising his face to the now dark and star-flecked sky, praying aloud a queer little stumbling prayer.

"God—are You there? Help me. Can You hear? I—I don't know how to pray. A man drifts. I guess I've drifted—away from You. Help me! Send me some answer by which I may know—give me the light. Help me to save Henry—Mother—help me to save the world! God—are You there?"

Silence, on the little hill. Silence, singing, and a cool breeze blowing down over two on their knees in the grass, faces lifted to the eternal stars. Helene's voice, like a muted silver bell.

"He heard. I know—He heard."

In a solemn hush they went down the little hill and parted.

ALONE Saul walked and waited till the lights went out in the great building where he worked and in the adjoining house. And that night, in the welter of writhing wo that shrouded the laboratory, carrying his faith and the memory of Helene's calm face, Saul Blauvette had a dream.

He dreamed that he stood on the top of their little hill, with the birch trees rising slimly around him and the cool breeze blowing into his face. Then suddenly ahead of him a great devil-fish appeared, creeping down from the sky, reaching and groping with its long hideous arms. Stunned with fear, sick to death of a weakening nausea, he could neither breathe nor move a muscle to fight the thing, but only stare at it and wait for the horrible death that crawled upon him. As it drew nearer he saw that it was

a mass of putrid stinking flesh, and as the sinuous arms groped and writhed, his mother and Henry Arn abruptly appeared in its path. The ghastly arms gripped and began to crush them, and Saul, suddenly crazed into action, began struggling and screaming and beating at the terrible mass.

His frantic efforts were of less effect than the puff of wind swirling around his head, the horrible mass choked him and his nostrils smothered in the stench and fumes of its putrefaction.

Then a small snake, hardly a foot long, came creeping over his feet, through the wash of dew that covered the grass, rattling its small tail menacingly. It reared its tiny head and struck at the gigantic devil-fish. It struck but once. Yet instantly the monster quivered, loosed its hold on its victims, shriveled up like a leaf in flame and faded away.

Saul Blauvette staggered back in his dream, throwing up his arms with a great cry, breathing gratefully the clean air rid of the nauseous fumes. And just ahead of him on a limb of one of the slim birches he saw a dark gray chrysalis. It burst open as he gazed. A gorgeous butterfly crawled out into the sunlight, tested its wings and drank in the glow of a new day, as the sun flamed in the sky and the world was bathed with light. Then the dream faded, and Saul woke with a great start, sat up in his bed and cried aloud to John Cloud.

"John! John! Get up! Quick! We have to get hold of some rattlesnakes!"

Cloud leaped out of his bed where he had been lying wide-eyed, came running into the room and turned on the light to stand staring at Saul with startled eyes. Had the wonder-seeker gone mad? Saul saw the question in his face, and answered it.

"No, I've not gone mad. I've had a dream! Listen." And he went on to explain rapidly the vision of the devil-fish and the snake and the butterfly bursting out of the dark chrysalis into the light.

"I wonder!" Cloud said, dazedly. "I wonder!"

"Don't wonder!" Saul shouted, leaping out of bed and catching at his shoulders. "Mother and Henry are dying. Don't you realize that? Don't wonder! Get me some rattlesnakes!"

"But where will I get them?" Cloud demanded, shaking himself into coherent thought.

"My God, I don't know! Out in Arizona, Wyoming—anywhere that it's hot, I guess. Hurry, man! Hurry!"

Cloud whirled and ran into his own room, got into his clothes and rushed into the garage where stood Saul's little-used powerful car. A half-hour later he was racing down the highway toward the desert country three hundred miles distant, where rattlesnakes lived and multiplied. The great car roared through the little town and shot on, leaving waking wondering people behind it.

In the town people looked at each other and frowned. Some rose and went to their windows, to get a glimpse of the big maroon car tearing by in the moonlight. That crazy scientist's car! What was he up to now? For many months sentiment had been rising in the town concerning the laboratory. It was known only as the isolated experimental laboratory of the weird, erratic, queer-looking little Saul Blauvette. Speculation began to rise concerning what grisly things might be going on in that guarded, mysterious and silent place. Sentiment in the town began to frown at the great barnlike building, wholeheartedly wishing it away from there, watching askance for some tangible evidence of dark and ugly deeds.

The next day there passed secretly from tongue to tongue the knowledge

of the passage of the great car roaring through in the night. Where had Blauvette gone? On what sudden and imperative errand? Then some saw Blauvette walking toward the birch-clad hill with Helene Kinkaid, and speculation rose higher. If it were not Blauvette himself who had raced away so summarily, then who? And why?

Saul had gone to seek Helene and tell her of his dream. There on the top of the hill they pieced it together, and sought the answer to its riddle.

"But there is no riddle, really," Helene said when Saul had finished giving her the details of his vision. "It is very clear. The rattlesnake poison is the element you seek."

"Of course. I sent Cloud after some snakes in the middle of the night." Saul laid his hand over hers where it pressed the deep grass. "And the diminutive proportionate size of the snake is significant that I shall use the poison sparingly in my solution. The only other element clear in the dream was the dew—water. The world was wet with dew—and dew is traditionally supposed to be pure. I must distill the water. Distilled water and rattlesnake poison. It sounds wild, insane. But I know we've got the answer. I even feel a sort of calmness inside. All I've got to do is wait till Cloud comes back, and we're on the home stretch."

"And here, in the morning of new hope, must we thank God who sent you the dream." Helene's face raised to the light-washed sky—but Saul bowed his head.

THEN for a week Saul paced the laboratory restlessly, belying that calmness he had felt for a moment in his soul. Every waking hour lengthened into an eternity as he waited the return of John Cloud. Every few moments he hurried into the house on one pretext or another, to glance at his mother's face. He followed the weakening, stricken Henry Arn with terrible eyes. Henry Arn could now with difficulty stay from his bed but a few hours at a time. His nausea and his gnawing pain had made of him but a shell. And by the end of the week of suspense Saul was a mad ghost of himself, turning desperately to Helene for strength when he felt that he must know her steady poise or break.

Then John Cloud came back; came with a box in the tonneau of the car that held seven huge rattlesnakes. He rushed into the house, stared into Henry Arn's sallow pain-drawn face and turned choking from Mrs. Blauvette's awful eyes to set down the box before Saul. Inside of ten minutes Saul had killed the seven snakes and was cutting out their poison sacs.

There ensued one terrible frantic month, in which Henry Arn and Mrs. Blauvette went steadily marching toward the yawning doors of death, while John Cloud and Saul worked strange and fearful havoc with rattlesnake poison and distilled water. They took the hideous virulent stuff and diluted it four-fifths. They put a squirming mass of the devil-fish microbes under the lens, while Henry Arn crept in and stood looking on with staring, haggard eyes. Onto the microbes they dropped the diluted poison, and the microbes shriveled up and died. They injected the solution into a guinea-pig with three cancers. Every microbe in the animal's body died, but the guinea-pig died also.

And through that month, down in the little adjoining town, rumor, speculation and ugly suspicion, once roused, grew and intensified against the laboratory out in the trees.

There was no one to tell of the heroic nights and days through which two tireless men worked frantically on, eating little, sleeping less, madly experimenting with ghoulish bugs and deadly poison while two pain-

racked doomed watched with staring eyes. Helene and Whittly, hearing breath of the rumor of dissatisfaction and resentment against the laboratory, spoke of it with anxious hearts, and held their tongues, knowing the utter futility of anything they could say.

The laboratory became the housing space for dozens of rattling, hissing snakes. John Cloud had left orders with an old prospector on the desert to catch and ship him all the rattlesnakes that he could ferret out of rocks and holes. Those mysterious boxes, arriving regularly, to spew their deadly contents into the laboratory, did their silent share in increasing the sentiment daily rising in the little town. The laboratory became an abattoir, a madhouse. Henry Arn and Mrs. Blauvette looked on sick to the soul, afraid to hope, while Helene and Whittly waited apart in a numb, silent suspense. Guinea-pigs died. Rats, mice and rabbits died. Monkeys died—even as the microbes died. Till the half-crazed scientists had left but one monkey, two rats, one tiny brown and white guinea-pig and a few mice. All the remaining animals bore rotting hideous cancers on their bellies. And the soul-weary men were no nearer an effective solution than they had been before.

Then again the frantic little scientist sought Helene Kinkaid, and again they walked upon the hilltop and discussed the dream.

"I'm almost at the end of my tether." Saul's blue-ringed eyes and haggard face were turned to the girl as he spoke, and his body drooped against her wearily as though it were taking all his strength to keep his feet. "I tell you, I'm about done. What way is there to turn? And every hour Mother and Henry Arn are dying."

"Sit down a moment and rest." Helene slipped to the grass and pulled him down beside her. He threw himself full-length in the grass and laid his tired head in her lap. She looked out across the trees into the sky. "Was there *no* other element in that dream? Dew—dew and poison. And—Saul! The devil-fish came crawling out of the sky, didn't he? Out of the air—ether!"

"Ether!" Saul leaped to his feet with a wild shout, cursing his own lack of divination, staring at her with startled eyes. "Ether! My God, what a blind man I am! Of course. We need ether!"

He wheeled and raced down the hill toward the laboratory, with only a backward look, a shout, and a wave of his arm, before he disappeared running from her sight. Helene, understanding, smiled after him with quivering lips, and her eyes were wet as she turned to go down the other side of the hill to tell Whittly of the new idea and the rebirth of hope.

SAUL burst into the laboratory with a shout that brought Cloud running. "Ether! We need ether, John. Bring me the ether!"

Cloud whirled to a shelf across the cluttered, stinking room, snatched down an ether can and rushed across the laboratory to place the can in Saul's shaking fingers. Then madly they set to work again, while Arn and Mrs. Blauvette, hearing the loud cries, came stealing to the door to look on like ghosts, and wonder.

The last serum made, their five hundred and tenth solution, had been little short of seeming success. The rat with cancer upon which they had tried it had lived two days. In three hours they had tested his flesh to find the microbes dead and absorbed. The cancerous growth had begun to shrivel and dry up. The day he died the flesh had begun to assume a healthy tone around the edges of the thick dry scab, and had started healing.

To that solution Saul Blauvette added his ether. He studied it out minutely. The dew had covered the earth, in his dream. The ether had covered the earth. He must use equal proportions of ether and distilled water. The two scientists, with Arn and the gaunt-eyed Mrs. Blauvette looking on, held their breath and prayed when the five hundred and eleventh serum was injected into the leg of a guinea-pig dying of cancer, whimpering in his cage.

But that guinea-pag did not die. In two hours microscopic examination of his flesh showed that every microbe was dead and absorbed. In three hours more the cancerous growths began to shrivel and dry. Swiftly they degenerated into nothing but a scab over the tender flesh. Then Saul plucked the scab away to find healthy firm tissue growing underneath. The guinea-pig scampered about his cage, ate piggishly and began to grow fat. And when Saul knew what he had done he stared at his mother wildly, glanced once into Henry Arn's pain-racked eyes, and fainted on the floor. John Cloud picked him up, carried him into his own room and went for old Doc Whittly.

His mother stood over him with a ghastly face, her eyes glaring with the insane light of fanatical hope, like a woman in a dream, while Arn exclaimed over what Saul had done. Together those two doomed ones waited like senseless statues by their wonder-worker till Whittly and Cloud came rushing in the door. Whittly bent over him, felt his pulse and raised to smile at Mrs. Blauvette.

"It is merely utter exhaustion. Let him sleep. We'll wait." But he thought of Helene. Helene, long since asleep fitfully in her own room, her mind following Saul every foot of the way. And Whittly felt a grim anger that she could not be here now in this hour of triumph.

They waited in an aching hush, the four of them, while the hours passed and the little scientist slept on. Whittly ordered Cloud to lie down and get some rest, but Cloud fought his drooping lids and waited with them. Henry Arn, unable to keep his feet, had dropped into a chair, sleeping fitfully, waking often to stare at Saul with mad eyes. Saul slept for eighteen hours, and when he woke it was night again. His mother stood by Whittly at the foot of his bed. Cloud stood at his right hand, and Henry Arn dozed in a chair. Saul sat up, stared at them and leaped out upon the floor.

"We've got it, Doc!" he shouted. "We've got it. We've discovered the formula that kills the microbe, withers the cancer and lets the being live!"

"John told me." Whittly held Saul's eyes with a steady gaze. "I want you to give it immediately to Henry Arn."

"Saul!" Henry shook himself awake and staggered to his feet, beseeching the wonder-worker with naked appeal. "Saul—I'm next!"

"*No!*" Saul hurled the word at him and took a step backward. "I don't dare try it on a human being yet. Not till I've tested it on a few more animals. That might have been only a happy accident. Don't ask again! No, I tell you! No!"

Arn drooped, glanced hopelessly at Whittly, turned and dragged out of the room. He knew too well the strength of Saul Blauvette's word. If Saul said no, Saul meant no. The others watched Arn go in stark silence. It was like seeing a man walk into the void of eternity. Then Whittly turned to Saul with a harsh reprimand.

"Saul, don't be a fool. He's doomed beyond all hope, anyway. He hasn't but a few days or weeks to live.

What better man for your last test than the man who has worked with you side by side?''

''No! I tell you, *no!*'' Saul shouted at him violently and started for the door, to be met by the returning figure of Henry Arn. Saul stopped short at the look on Arn's face.

The doomed man stood before them as a soldier going into battle, his head high, his eyes flaring with an exalted light. Something about him sent a hush over the room, and though his voice was little above a whisper it rang through the room like a temple gong.

''I have taken it myself. You wouldn't give it to me; I know you too well, Saul. So I have taken it myself. It may be imagination, but I think that already my deathly nausea is lessening. Time will tell. Time alone. I gave my life to this cause, remember, not in the letter, but in the deed.''

Saul sank back on the edge of his bed and buried his head in his hands. No one moved, till Arn spoke again: ''Now I am going to bed, and sleep. If I wake—in the morning——''

''We'll all be there,'' Whittly answered, and Cloud added a hoarse and vehement amen to the promise, as Arn went again from their sight.

They heard him go into his own room. Then silence fell. Saul did not move. None of them moved. They knew Arn had thrown himself upon his blankets fully dressed. They waited tensely for what seemed an eternity, till Whittly stepped softly across to Arn's room to find him peacefully asleep. One by one the others filed in and grouped themselves around his bed, Saul coming last like a man drawn toward some horror beyond his will. They waited, asleep in their chairs, till dawn came in the window to waken them. Whittly moved, rose and stretched his tired muscles, walked across to the bed and felt Arn's pulse. Arn stirred, opened his eyes, smiled up at Whittly and glanced around at the others sitting suspense-racked in the cool dawn.

''Yes—you're all here, eh? I feel like a new man, Doc. Nausea gone, pain gone. A little weak. How's my pulse? Lord, it's good to be free of pain! Saul—you—you miracle-worker! Do you know what it means to be free of pain? And Doc—I'm hungry. Can't I have something to eat?''

''Why, yes—yes, I guess so.'' Whittly's voice was husky, and he turned to Mrs. Blauvette, reading the flaming hope in her eyes as he spoke. ''You might get him a soft poached egg and a little milk, if you will?''

Mrs. Blauvette moved out of the room with more haste than Saul had ever seen her show, and Arn closed his eyes again, his drawn face relaxed into the calm of rest and release from pain. Silence fell once more. Silences seemed a part of the great barnlike laboratory and the adjoining house—tense silences, and shouting frantic cries.

As Mrs. Blauvette came in again noiselessly to give the food to Arn, Whittly turned to Saul and spoke: ''We'd better go out now and let the man sleep. He needs a lot of rest after all the pain and exhaustion he has endured. He'll have to come back slowly. But before I go I want you to give 511 to—your mother.''

''Mother!'' Saul's cry was wrenched out of his throat, and his cheek blanched as his gaze leaped to her face. Involuntarily she straightened, staring deep into his enormous eyes, and in the tone of his cry and the pallor of his features the gaunt and silent woman read the love of her son. ''Mother! I can't! I'm afraid!''

Whittly looked steadily into the little scientist's face, and read accurately that fear. Rats and mice and rabbits were one thing. And a guinea-pig was only a guinea-pig.

Henry Arn had worked with him side by side, had taken the matter of his own life in his hands to prove or disprove the efficacy of formula 511. But this woman was his mother. The woman who had given him of her flesh and blood that he might walk through the world and become a man. The woman who had fed and clothed him and believed in him when others laughed and sneered. The woman who would never fail him in the valley of death nor the pits of hell, in heaven or on earth. His mother. Her blood in his veins, her substance in his bones, her gift in his flesh. He knew then how her mighty love had grown in her grim silence and enveloped him and claimed him and made him what he was. His mother.

"I can't. I can't, I tell you!" Saul sprang to his feet and backed away, his hand held out as if to ward off a blow. "I'm afraid!"

"So is she!" Whittly's harsh voice cut in swiftly. "She has been afraid for twenty years. The whole world is afraid. What of your dark chrysalis? She can't live another month if you don't do something for her. You've got to work quickly. You've proved your formula! Look at Arn!"

Saul's eyes leaped to Arn's face, and Arn looked back at him, sanely, steadily, smiling his reassurance.

"I know." Saul's gaze turned to his mother, and his face was white as chalk. "The solution works the same on rat, monkey or mouse. It should work the same on a human being. But I'm afraid!" He shook his head, setting his teeth, and his enormous eyes burned black in his face. "I tell you I can't do it! Not yet! Wait a week to be sure that Henry——"

"And in a week your mother may die!" Whittly's voice was sharp; he knew he was arguing against the pale angel with the scythe, and he heard the thud of clods on a grave.

"She'll not die by my hand!" Saul's voice rose, and he winced visibly. "Mother! I'm afraid!"

He swayed on his feet and his mother walked up to him and placed her hands on his shoulders, looking down into his colorless face with her terrible eyes. He quivered at her touch. He stood like a man turned to stone, as her voice broke upon his ears in wild words. Strange words, from her, the grim and silent woman.

"Saul, you are too exhausted to use that magnificent brain. Reason, my son! Reason! What if I should die under the serum treatment? It would be a shorter, more merciful death. I suffer! You can save me that, at least. I ask you what Henry asked you. Do you know what it means to be free of pain? But I shall not die. I feel it—I know! You have life in your two hands—life for me and for the world. Are you going to let an unreasonable, groundless fear condemn me to death before your eyes? Saul—you have life. Give it to me!"

Saul stared at her, dumb, and neither Whittly nor Arn moved. It was as though in that gripping tenseness no one breathed. No one noticed John Cloud as he swiftly and silently passed from the room. He returned almost instantly with a bottle of 511 and a needle in his hands, to find them as he had left them, transfixed, a frozen tableau. Suddenly Mrs. Blauvette moved in a quick flash of frantic abandon to her own driving fear, threw herself on her knees before her son and held up imploring hands.

"Saul! I gave *you* life! You must give life to me. Now—now while there is time."

Saul continued to stare into her face like a man hypnotized, and Whittly ached for want of breath as Cloud stepped silently across the room to lay bottle and needle in Saul's hand. Slowly Saul opened the bottle, her eyes on him, holding him, compelling him, begging, command-

ing, all the horror and fear of her life plainly written on her face for him to see.

Then with one swift motion he filled the needle, caught her upraised arm and injected the serum into the tissues. She winced slightly, bit her lip, and threw her arms about his knees. The first sob he had ever heard from her throat shook her body as he bent to raise her to her feet. Then behind him he heard Whittly's voice in a startled, incredulously horror-shaken tone. He wheeled, still gripping his mother's arm, to see Cloud and Whittly staring fascinatedly at Arn.

Arn lay on his pillows, the food half-eaten on the plate beside him. His face was calm and smiling, and his eyes gazed at them with a look of infinite peace. But the look was fixed and unmistakable, as was the pallor of his face.

Henry Arn was dead.

This story rises to a dramatic and thrilling culmination in the concluding chapters in next month's issue of WEIRD TALES.

WEIRD STORY REPRINT

The Dragon Fang

By FITZ-JAMES O'BRIEN

CHAPTER 1

THE MIRACULOUS DRAGON FANG

"COME, men and women, and little people of Tching-tou, come and listen. The small and ignoble person who annoys you by his presence is the miserable conjurer known as Piou-lu. Everything that can possibly be desired he can give you;—charms to heal dissensions in your noble and illustrious families;—spells by which beautiful little people without style may become learned Bachelors, and reign high in the palaces of literary composition;—supernatural red pills, with which you can cure your elegant and renowned diseases;—wonderful incantations, by which the assassins of any member of your shining and virtuous families can be discovered and made to yield compensation, or be brought under the just eye of the Brother of the Sun. What is it that you want? This mean little conjurer, who now addresses you, can supply all your charming and refreshing desires; for he is known everywhere as Piou-lu, the possessor of the ever-renowned and miraculous Dragon Fang!"

There was a little, dry laugh, and a murmur among the crowd of idlers that surrounded the stage erected by Piou-lu in front of the Hotel of the Thirty-two Virtues. Fifth-class mandarins looked at fourth-class mandarins and smiled, as much as to say, "We who are educated men know what to think of this fellow." But the fourth-class mandarins looked haughtily at the fifth-class, as if they had no business to smile at their

superiors. The crowd, however, composed as it was principally of small traders, barbers, porcelain-tinkers, and country people, gazed with open mouths upon the conjurer, who, clad in a radiant garment of many colors, strutted proudly up and down upon his temporary stage.

"What is a Dragon Fang, ingenious and well-educated conjurer?" at last inquired Wei-chang-tze, a solemn-looking mandarin of the third class, who was adorned with a sapphire button and a one-eyed peacock's feather. "What is a Dragon Fang?"

"Is it possible," asked Piou-lu, "that the wise and illustrious son of virtue, the Mandarin Wei-chang-tze, does not know what a Dragon Fang is?" and the conjurer pricked up his ears at the mandarin, as a hare at a barking dog.

"Of course, of course," said the Mandarin Wei-chang-tze, looking rather ashamed of his having betrayed such ignorance, "one does not pass his examinations for nothing. I merely wished that you should explain to those ignorant people here what a Dragon Fang is; that was why I asked."

"I thought that the Soul of Wisdom must have known," said Piou-lu, triumphantly, looking as if he believed firmly in the knowledge of Wei-chang-tze. "The noble commands of Wei-chang-tze shall be obeyed. You all know," said he, looking round upon the people, "that there are three great and powerful Dragons inhabiting the universe. Lung, or the Dragon of the Sky; Li, or the Dragon of the Sea; and Kiau, or the Dragon of the Marshes. All these Dragons are wise, strong and terrible. They are wondrously formed, and can take any shape that pleases them. Well, good people, a great many moons ago, in the season of spiked grain, I was following the profession of a barber in the mean and unmentionable town of Siho, when one morning, as I was sitting in my shop waiting for customers, I heard a great noise of tam-tams, and a princely palanquin stopped before my door. I hastened, of course, to observe the honorable rites toward this newcomer, but before I could reach the street a mandarin, splendidly attired, descended from the palanquin. The ball on his cap was of a stone and color that I had never seen before, and three feathers of some unknown bird hung down behind his headdress. He held his hand to his jaw, and walked into my house with a lordly step. I was greatly confused, for I knew not what rank he was of, and felt puzzled how to address him. He put an end to my embarrassment.

"'I am in the house of Piou-lu, the barber,' he said, in a haughty voice that sounded like the roll of a copper drum amidst the hills.

"'That disgraceful and ill-conditioned person stands before you,' I replied, bowing as low as I could.

"'It is well,' said he, seating himself in my operating-chair, while two of his attendants fanned him. 'Piou-lu, I have the toothache!'

"'Does your lordship,' said I, 'wish that I should remove your noble and illustrious pain?'

"'You must draw my tooth,' said he. 'Wo to you if you draw the wrong one!'

"'It is too much honor,' I replied; 'but I will make my abominable and ill-conducted instruments entice your lordship's beautiful tooth out of your high-born jaw with much rapidity.'

"So I got my big pincers, and my opium-bottle, and opened the strange mandarin's mouth. Ah! it was then that my low-born and despicable heart descended into my bowels. I should have dropped my pincers from sheer fright if they had not caught by their hooked ends in my wide sleeve. The mandarin's mouth

was all on fire inside. As he breathed, the flames rolled up and down his throat, like the flames that gather on the Yellow Grass Plains in the season of Much Heat. His palate glowed like red-hot copper, and his tongue was like a brass stewpan that had been on the salt-fire for thirty days. But it was his teeth that affrighted me most. They were a serpent's teeth. They were long, and curved inward, and seemed to be made of transparent crystal, in the center of which small tongues of orange-colored fire leaped up and down out of some cavity in the gums.

"'Well, dilatory barber,' said the mandarin, in a horrible tone, while I stood pale and trembling before him, 'why don't you draw my tooth? Hasten, or I will have you sliced lengthwise and fried in the sun.'

"'O, my lord!' said I, terrified at this threat, 'I fear that my vicious and unendurable pincers are not sufficiently strong.'

"'Slave!' answered he in a voice of thunder, 'if you do not fulfil my desires, you will not see another moon rise.'

"I saw that I should be killed anyway, so I might as well make the attempt. I made a dart with my pincers at the first tooth that came, closed them firmly on the crystal fang, and began to pull with all my strength. The mandarin bellowed like an ox of Tibet. The flames rolled from his throat in such volume that I thought they would singe my eyebrows. His two attendants and his four palanquin-bearers put their arms round my waist to help me to pull, and there we tugged for three or four minutes, until at last I heard a report as loud as nine thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine firecrackers. The attendants, the palanquin-bearers, and myself all fell flat on the floor, and the crystal fang glittered between the jaws of the pincers.

"The mandarin was smiling pleasantly as I got up from the floor. 'Piou-lu,' said he, 'you had a narrow escape. You have removed my toothache, but had you failed, you would have perished miserably; for I am the Dragon Lung, who rules the sky and the heavenly bodies, and I am as powerful as I am wise. Take as a reward the Dragon Fang which you drew from my jaw. You will find it a magical charm with which you can work miracles. Honor your parents, observe the rites, and live in peace.'

"So saying, he breathed a whole cloud of fire and smoke from his throat, that filled my poor and despicable mansion. The light dazzled and the smoke suffocated me, and when I recovered my sight and breath the Dragon Lung, the attendants, the palanquin, and the four bearers had all departed, how and whither I knew not. Thus was it, elegant and refined people of Tching-tou, that this small and evil-minded person who stands before you became possessed of the wonderful Dragon Fang, with which he can work miracles."

THIS story, delivered as it was with much graceful and dramatic gesticulation, and a volubility that seemed almost supernatural, had its effect upon the crowd, and a poor little tailor, named Hang-pou, who was known to be always in debt, was heard to say that he wished he had the Dragon Fang, wherewith to work miracles with his creditors. But the mandarins, blue, crystal, and gilt, smiled contemptuously, and said to themselves, "We who are learned men know how to esteem these things."

The Mandarin Wei-chang-tze, however, seemed to be of an inquiring disposition, and evinced a desire to continue his investigations.

"Supremely visited conjurer," said he to Piou-lu, "your story is indeed wonderful. To have been visited

by the Dragon Lung must have been truly refreshing and enchanting. Though not in the least doubting your marvelous relation, I am sure this virtuous assemblage would like to see some proof of the miraculous power of your Dragon Fang.''

The crowd gave an immediate assent to his sentiment by pressing closer to the platform on which Piou-lu strutted, and exclaiming with one voice, ''The lofty mandarin says wisely. We would like to behold.''

Piou-lu did not seem in the slightest degree disconcerted. His narrow black eyes glistened like the dark edges of the seeds of the water-melon, and he looked haughtily around him.

''Is there any one of you who would like to have a miracle performed, and of what nature?'' he asked, with a triumphant wave of his arms.

''I would like to see my debts paid,'' murmured the little tailor, Hang-pou.

''O Hang-pou,'' replied the conjurer, ''this unworthy personage is not going to pay your debts. Go home and sit in your shop, and drink no more rice-wine, and your debts will be paid; for labor is the Dragon Fang that works miracles for idle tailors!''

There was a laugh through the crowd at this sally, because Hang-pou was well known to be fond of intoxicating drinks, and spent more of his time in the street than on his shop-board.

''Would either of you like to be changed into a camel?'' continued Piou-lu. ''Say the word, and there shall not be a finer beast in all Tibet!''

No one, however, seemed to be particularly anxious to experience this transformation. Perhaps it was because it was warm weather, and camels bear heavy burdens.

''I will change the whole honorable assemblage into turkey-buzzards, if it only agrees,'' continued the conjurer; ''or I will make the Lake Tung come up into the town in the shape of a water-melon, and then burst and overflow everything.''

''But we should all be drowned!'' exclaimed Hang-pou, who was cowardly as well as intemperate.

''That's true,'' said Piou-lu, ''but then you need not fear your creditors,''—and he gave such a dart of his long arm at the poor little tailor, that the wretched man thought he was going to claw him up and change him into some frightful animal.

''Well, since this illustrious assembly will not have turkey-buzzards or camels, this weak-minded, ill-shapen personage must work a miracle on himself,'' said Piou-lu, descending from his platform into the street, and bringing with him a little three-legged stool made of bamboo rods.

The crowd retreated as he approached, and even the solemn Wei-chang-tze seemed rather afraid of this miraculous conjurer. Piou-lu placed the bamboo stool firmly on the ground, and then mounted upon it.

''Elegant and symmetrical bamboo stool,'' he said, lifting his arms, and exhibiting something in his hand that seemed like a piece of polished jade-stone,—''elegant and symmetrical bamboo stool, the justly despised conjurer, named Piou-lu, entreats that you will immediately grow tall, in the name of the Dragon Lung!''

Truly the stool began to grow, in the presence of the astonished crowd. The three legs of bamboo lengthened and lengthened with great rapidity, bearing Piou-lu high up into the air. As he ascended he bowed gracefully to the open-mouthed assembly.

''It is delightful!'' he cried; ''the air up here is so fresh! I smell the tea winds from Fuh-kien. I can see the spot where the heavens and the earth cease to run parallel. I hear the gongs of Pekin, and listen to the

lowing of the herds of Tibet. Who would not have an elegant bamboo stool that knew how to grow?''

By this time Piou-lu had risen to an enormous height. The legs of the slender tripod on which he was mounted seemed like silkworms' threads, so thin were they compared with their length. The crowd began to tremble for Piou-lu.

''Will he never stop?'' said a mandarin with a gilt ball, named Lin.

''O, yes!'' shouted Piou-lu from the dizzy height of his bamboo stool. ''O, yes! this ugly little person will immediately stop. Elegant stool, the poor conjurer entreats you to stop growing; but he also begs that you will afford some satisfaction to this beautifying assemblage down below, who have honored you with their inspection.''

The bamboo stool, with the utmost complaisance, ceased to lengthen out its attenuated limbs, but on the moment experienced another change as terrifying to the crowd. The three legs began to approach each other rapidly, and before the eye could very well follow their motions had blended mysteriously and inexplicably into one, the stool still retaining a miraculous equilibrium. Immediately this single stem began to thicken most marvelously, and instead of the dark shining skin of a bamboo stick, it seemed gradually to be incased in overlapping rings of a rough bark. Meanwhile a faint rustling noise continued overhead, and when the crowd, attracted by the sound, looked up, instead of the flat disk of canework on which Piou-lu had so wondrously ascended, they beheld a cabbage-shaped mass of green, which shot forth every moment long pointed satiny leaves of the tenderest green, and the most graceful shape imaginable. But where was Piou-lu? Some fancied that in the yellow crown that topped the cabbage-shaped bud of this strange tree they could see the tip of his cap, and distinguish his black, roguish eyes, but that may have been all fancy; and they were quickly diverted from their search for the conjurer by a shower of red, pulpy fruits, that began to fall with great rapidity from the miraculous tree. Of course there was a scramble, in which the mandarins themselves did not disdain to join; and the crimson fruits—the like of which no one in Tching-tou had ever seen before—proved delightfully sweet and palatable to the taste.

''That's right! that's right! perfectly bred and very polite people,'' cried a shrill voice while they were all scrambling for the crimson fruits; ''pick fruit while it is fresh, and tea while it is tender. For the sun wilts, and the chills toughen, and the bluest plum blooms only for a day.''

Everybody looked up, and lo! there was Piou-lu, as large as life, strutting upon the stage, waving a large green fan in his hand. While the crowd was yet considering this wonderful reappearance of the conjurer, there was heard a very great outcry at the end of the street, and a tall thin man in a coarse blue gown came running up at full speed.

''Where are my plums, sons of thieves?'' he cried, almost breathless with haste. ''Alas! alas! I am completely ruined. My wife will perish miserably for want of food, and my sons will inherit nothing but empty baskets at my death! Where are my plums?''

''Who is it that dares to address the virtuous and well-disposed people of Tching-tou after this fashion?'' demanded the Mandarin Lin, in a haughty voice, as he confronted the newcomer.

The poor man, seeing the gilt ball, became immediately very humble, and bowed several times to the mandarin.

''O, my lord!'' said he; ''I am an incapable and undeserving plum-

seller, named Liho. I was just now sitting at my stall in a neighboring street selling five cash worth of plums to a customer, when suddenly all the plums rose out of my baskets as if they had the wings of hawks, and flew through the air over the tops of the houses in this direction. Thinking myself the sport of demons, I ran after them, hoping to catch them, and—— Ah! there are my plums," he cried, suddenly interrupting himself and making a dart at some of the crimson fruits that the tailor Hang held in his hand, intending to carry them home to his wife.

"These your plums!" screamed Hang, defending his treasure vigorously. "Mole that you are, did you ever see scarlet plums?"

"This man is stricken by heaven," said Piou-lu, gravely. "He is a fool who hides his plums and then thinks that they fly away. Let someone shake his gown."

A porcelain-cobbler who stood near the fruiterer immediately seized the long blue robe and gave it a lusty pull, when, to the wonder of everybody, thousands of the most beautiful plums fell out, as from a tree shaken by the winds of autumn. At this moment a great gust of wind arose in the street, and a pillar of dust mounted up to the very top of the strange tree, that still stood waving its long satiny leaves languidly above the house-tops. For an instant everyone was blinded, and when the dust had subsided so as to permit the people to use their eyes again the wonderful tree had completely vanished, and all that could be seen was a little bamboo stool flying along the road, where it was blown by the storm. The poor fruiterer, Liho, stood aghast, looking at the plums, in which he stood knee-deep.

The mandarin, addressing him, said sternly, "Let us hear no more such folly from Liho, otherwise he will get twenty strokes of the stick."

"Gather your plums, Liho," said Piou-lu kindly, "and think this one of your fortunate days; for he who runs after his losses with open mouth does not always overtake them."

And as the conjurer descended from his platform it did not escape the sharp eyes of the little tailor Hang that Piou-lu exchanged a mysterious signal with the Mandarin Wei-chang-tze.

CHAPTER 2

THE SHADOW OF THE DUCK

It was close on nightfall when Piou-lu stopped before Wei-chang-tze's house. The lanterns were already lit, and the porter dozed in a bamboo chair so soundly that Piou-lu entered the porch and passed the screen without awaking him. The inner room was dimly lighted by some horn lanterns elegantly painted with hunting scenes; but despite the obscurity the conjurer could discover Wei-chang-tze seated at the farther end of the apartment on an inclined couch covered with blue and yellow satin. Along the corridor that led to the women's apartments the shadows lay thick; but Piou-lu fancied he could hear the pattering of little feet upon the matted floor, and see the twinkle of curious eyes illuminating the solemn darkness. Yet, after all, he may have been mistaken, for the corridor opened on a garden wealthy in the rarest flowers, and he may have conceived the silver dripping of the fountain to be pattering of dainty feet, and have mistaken the moonlight shining on the moist leaves of the lotus for the sparkle of women's eyes.

"Has Piou-lu arrived in my dwelling?" asked Wei-chang-tze from the dim corner in which he lay.

"That ignoble and wrath-deserving personage bows his head before you," answered Piou-lu, advancing and sa-

luting the mandarin in accordance with the laws of the Book of Rites.

"I hope that you performed your journey hither in great safety and peace of mind," said Wei-chang-tze, gracefully motioning to the conjurer to seat himself on a small blue sofa that stood at a little distance.

"When so mean an individual as Piou-lu is honored by the request of the noble Wei-chang-tze, good fortune must attend him. How could it be otherwise?" replied Piou-lu, seating himself not on the small blue sofa, but on the satin one which was partly occupied by the mandarin himself.

"Piou-lu did not send in his name, as the rites direct," said Wei-chang-tze, looking rather disgusted by this impertinent freedom on the part of the conjurer.

"The elegant porter that adorns the noble porch of Wei-chang-tze was fast asleep," answered Piou-lu, "and Piou-lu knew that the great mandarin expected him with impatience."

"Yes," said Wei-chang-tze; "I am oppressed by a thousand demons; devils sleep in my hair, and my ears are overflowing with evil spirits; I can not rest at night, and feel no pleasure in the day. Therefore was it that I wished to see you, in hopes that you would, by amusing the demon that inhabits my stomach, induce him to depart."

"I will endeavor to delight the respectable demon who lodges in your stomach with my unworthy conjurations," replied Piou-lu. "But first I must go into the garden to gather flowers."

"Go," said Wei-chang-tze. "The moon shines, and you will see there very many rare and beautiful plants that are beloved by my daughter Wu."

"The moonlight itself can not shine brighter on the lilies than the glances of your lordship's daughter," said the conjurer, bowing and proceeding to the garden.

Ah! what a garden it was that Piou-lu now entered! The walls that surrounded it were lofty, and built of a rosy stone brought from the mountains of Manchuria. This wall, on whose inner face flowery designs and triumphal processions were sculptured at regular intervals, sustained the long and richly laden shoots of the white magnolia, which spread its large snowy chalices in myriads over the surface. Tamarisks and palms sprang up in various parts of the grounds, like dark columns supporting the silvery sky; while the tender and mournful willow drooped its delicate limbs over numberless fish-ponds, whose waters seemed to repose peacefully in the bosom of the emerald turf. The air was distracted with innumerable perfumes, each more fragrant than the other. The blue convolvulus, the crimson ipomea, the prodigal azaleas, the spotted tiger-lilies, the timid and half-hidden jasmine, all poured forth, during the day and night, streams of perfume from the inexhaustible fountains of their chalices. The heavy odors of the tube-rose floated languidly through the leaves, as a richly plumaged bird would float through summer air, borne down by his own splendor. The blue lotus slept on the smooth waves of the fish-ponds in sublime repose. There seemed an odor of enchantment over the entire place. The flowers whispered their secrets in the perfumed silence; the inmost heart of every blossom was unclosed at that mystic hour; all the magic and mystery of plants floated abroad, and the garden seemed filled with the breath of a thousand spells. But amidst the lilies and lotuses, amidst the scented roses and the drooping convolvuli, there moved a flower fairer than all.

"I am here," whispered a low voice, and a dusky figure came glid-

ing toward Piou-lu, as he stood by the fountain.

"Ah!" said the conjurer, in a tender tone, far different from the shrill one in which he addressed the crowd opposite the Hotel of the Thirty-two Virtues. "The garden is now complete. Wu, the Rose of Completed Beauty, has blossomed on the night."

"Let Piou-lu shelter her under his mantle from the cold winds of evening, and bear her company for a little while, for she has grown up under a lonely wall," said Wu, laying her little hand gently on the conjurer's arm, and nestling up to his side as a bird nestles into the fallen leaves warmed by the sun.

"She can lie there but a little while," answered Piou-lu, folding the mandarin's daughter in a passionate embrace, "for Wei-chang-tze awaits the coming of Piou-lu impatiently, in order to have a conjuration with a devil that inhabits his stomach."

"Alas!" said Wu, sadly; "why do you not seek some other and more distinguished employment than that of a conjurer? Why do you not seek distinction in the Palace of Literary Composition, and obtain a style? Then we need not meet in secret, and you might without fear demand my hand from my father."

Piou-lu smiled, almost scornfully. He seemed to gain an inch in stature, and looked around him with an air of command.

"The marble from which the statue is to be carved must lie in the quarry until the workman finds it," he answered, "and the hour of my destiny has not yet arrived."

"Well, we must wait, I suppose," said Wu, with a sigh. "Meantime, Piou-lu, I love you."

"The hour will come sooner than you think," said Piou-lu, returning her caress; "and now go, for the mandarin waits."

Wu glided away through the gloom to her own apartment, while the conjurer passed rapidly through the garden and gathered the blossoms of certain flowers as he went. He seemed to linger with a strange delight over the buds bathed in the moonlight and the dew; their perfume ascended into his nostrils like incense, and he breathed it with a voluptuous pleasure.

"Now let the demon tremble in the noble stomach of Wei-chang-tze," said Piou-lu, as he re-entered the hall of reception laden with flowers. "This ill-favored personage will make such conjurations as shall delight the soul of the elegant and well-born mandarin, and cause his illustrious persecutor to fly terrified."

Piou-lu then stripped off the petals from many of the flowers, and gathered them in a heap on the floor. The mass of leaves were indeed variegated. The red of the quamoclit, the blue of the convolvulus, the tender pink of the camellia, the waxen white of the magnolia, were all mingled together like the thousand hues in the Scarfs of Felicity. Having built this confused mass of petals in the shape of a pyramid, Piou-lu unwound a scarf from his waist and flung it over the heap. He then drew the piece of jade-stone from his pocket, and said,—

"This personage of outrageous presence desires that what will be may be shown to the lofty mandarin, Wei-chang-tze."

As he pronounced these words, he twitched the scarf away with a rapid jerk, and lo! the flower-leaves were gone, and in their place stood a beautiful mandarin duck, in whose gorgeous plumage one might trace the brilliant hues of the flowers. Piou-lu now approached the duck, caught it up with one hand, while with the other he drew a sharp knife from his girdle and severed the bird's head from its body at a single stroke. To

the great astonishment of Wei-chang-tze, the body and dismembered head of the bird vanished the moment the knife had passed through the neck; but at the same instant a duck, resembling it in every respect, escaped from the conjurer's hands and flew across the room. When I say that this duck resembled the other in every respect, I mean only in shape, size and colors. For the rest, it was no bodily duck. It was impalpable and transparent, and even when it flew it made no noise with its wings.

"This is indeed wonderful!" said Wei-chang-tze. "Let the marvelous conjurer explain."

"The duck formed out of flowers was a duck pure in body and in spirit, most lofty mandarin," said Piou-lu, "and when it died under the knife, I ordered its soul to pass into its shadow, which can never be killed. Hence the shadow of the duck has all the colors as well as the intelligence of the real duck that gave it birth."

"And to what end has the very wise Piou-lu created this beautiful duck-shadow?" asked the mandarin.

"The cultivated Wei-chang-tze shall immediately behold," answered the conjurer, drawing from his wide sleeve a piece of rock-salt and flinging it to the farther end of the room. He had hardly done this when a terrific sound, between a bark and a howl, issued from the dim corner into which he had cast the rock-salt, and immediately a large gray wolf issued wonderfully from out of the twilight, and rushed with savage fangs upon the shadow of the beautiful duck.

"Why, it is a wolf from the forest of Manchuria!" exclaimed Wei-chang-tze, rather alarmed at this frightful apparition. "This is no shadow, but a living and bloodthirsty beast."

"Let my lord observe and have no fear," said Piou-lu, tranquilly.

The wolf seemed rather confounded when, on making a snap at the beautiful duck, his sharp fangs met no resistance, while the bird flew with wonderful venom straight at his fiery eyes. He growled, and snapped, and tore with his claws at the agile shadow that fluttered around and over him, but all to no purpose. As well might the hound leap at the reflection of the deer in the pool where he drinks. The shadow of the beautiful duck seemed all the while to possess some strange, deadly influence over the savage wolf. His growls grew fainter and fainter, and his red and flaming eyes seemed to drop blood. His limbs quivered all over, and the rough hairs of his coat stood on end with terror and pain—the shadow of the beautiful duck never ceasing all the time to fly straight at his eyes.

"The wolf is dying!" exclaimed Wei-chang-tze.

"He will die,—die like a dog," said Piou-lu, in a tone of savage triumph.

And presently, as he predicted, the wolf gave two or three faint howls, turned himself round in a circle as if making a bed to sleep on, and then lay down and died. The shadow of the beautiful duck seemed now to be radiant with glory. It shook its bright wings, that were lovely and transparent as a rainbow, and, mounting on the dead body of the wolf, sat in majesty upon his grim and shaggy throne.

"And what means this strange exhibition, learned and wise conjurer?" asked Wei-chang-tze, with a sorely troubled air.

"I will tell you," said Piou-lu, suddenly dropping his respectful and ceremonious language, and lifting his hand with an air of supreme power. "The mandarin duck, elegant, faithful, and courageous, is an emblem of the dynasty of Ming, the true Chinese race that ruled so splendidly in this land before the invaders usurped the throne. The cowardly and savage

wolf is a symbol of the Manchu Tartar robbers who slew our liberties, shaved our heads, and enchained our people. The time has now arrived when the duck has recovered its splendor and its courage, and is going to kill the wolf; for the wolf can not bite it, as it works like a shadow in the twilight and mystery of secret association. This you know, Wei-chang-tze, as well as I."

"I have indeed heard of a rebel Chinese named Tién-té who has raised a flame in our peaceful land, and who, proclaiming himself a lineal descendant of the dynasty of Ming, seeks to dethrone our wise and heavenly sovereign, Hién-foung."

"Lie not to me, Wei-chang-tze, for I know your inmost thoughts. Chinese as you are, I know that you hate the Tartar in your heart, but you are afraid to say so for fear of losing your head."

The mandarin was so stupefied at this audacious address that he could not reply, while the conjurer continued: "I come to make you an offer. Join the forces of the heaven-descended Emperor Tién-té. Join with him in expelling this tyrannical Tartar race from the Central Kingdom, and driving them back again to their cold hills and barren deserts. Fly with me to the Imperial camp, and bring with you your daughter Wu, the Golden Heart of the Lily, and I promise you the command of one third of the Imperial forces, and the Presidency of the College of Ceremonies."

"And who are you, who dare to ask of Wei-chang-tze to bestow on you his nobly-born daughter?" said Wei-chang-tze, starting in a rage from his couch.

"I!" replied Piou-lu, shaking his conjurer's gown from his shoulders and displaying a splendid garment of yellow satin, on the breast of which was emblazoned the Imperial Dragon, —"I am your Emperor, Tién-té!"

"Ha!" screamed a shrill voice behind him at this moment, "here he is. The elegant and noble rebel for whose head our worthy Emperor has offered a reward of ten thousand silver taels. Here he is. Catch! beautiful and noble mandarins, catch him! and I will pay my creditors with the head money."

Piou-lu turned, and beheld the little tailor Hang-pou, at whose back were a whole file of soldiers and a number of mandarins. Wei-chang-tze shuddered, for in this compromise of his character he knew that his death was written if he fell into the Imperial hands.

CHAPTER 3

"ALL IS OVER"

"STATELY and temperate tailor," said Piou-lu, calmly, "why do you wish to arrest me?"

"Ho! because I will get a reward, and I want to pay my debts," said Hang-pou, grinning spitefully.

"A reward for me, the miserable and marrowless conjurer Piou-lu! O, elegant cutter of summer gowns, your well-educated brains are not at home!"

"O, we know you well enough, mighty conjurer. You are none other than the contumacious rebel, Tién-té, who dares to claim the throne held by the wise and merciful Hién-foung; and we will bear you to the court of Pekin in chains, so that you may wither in the light of his terrible eyes."

"You think you will get a reward of ten thousand silver taels for my head?" said Piou-lu.

"Certainly," replied the little tailor, rubbing his hands with glee,—"certainly. His Unmatched and Isolated Majesty has promised it, and the Brother of the Sun never lies."

"Listen, inventive closer of symmetrical seams! Listen, and I will tell you what will become of your ten

thousand silver taels. There is a long avenue leading to the imperial treasury, and at every second step is an open hand. When the ten thousand taels are poured out, the first hand grasps a half, the second hand an eighth of the remaining half, the third hand grasps a fourth of the rest, and when the money-bags get down a little lower, all the hands grasp together; so that when the bags reach the little tailor Hang-pou, who stands stamping his feet very far down indeed, they are entirely empty; for Tartar robbers surround the throne, and a Tartar usurper sits upon it, and the great Chinese nation toils in its rice-fields to gild their palaces, and fill their seraglios, and for all they give get neither justice nor mercy. But I, Tién-té, the Heavenly Emperor of this Central Land, will ordain it otherwise, and hurl the false Dragon from his throne; for it is written in the Book of Prognostics, a copy of which was brought to me on the wings of a yellow serpent, that the dynasty of Han shall rule once more, and the Tartar wolves perish miserably out of the Land of Flowers."

"This is treason against the Light of the Universe, our most gracious Emperor," said the Mandarin Lin. "You shall have seventy times seven pounds of cold iron put upon your neck for these blasphemies, and I will promise you that many bamboo splinters shall be driven up under your rebellious nails."

"Let our ears be no longer filled with these atrocious utterances!" cried Hang-pou. "O brave and splendid mandarins, order your terrifying tigers to arrest this depraved rebel, in order that we may hasten with him to Pekin."

"Before you throw the chains of sorrow around my neck, O tailor of celestial inspirations," said Piou-lu, with calm mockery,—"before the terrible weight of your just hand falls upon me, I pray you, if you would oblige me, to look at that duck." So saying, Piou-lu pointed to where the shadow of the duck was sitting on the body of the wolf.

"Oh, what a beautiful duck!" cried Hang-pou, with glistening eyes, and clapping his hands. "Let us try and catch him!"

"It is indeed a majestic duck," said Mandarin Lin, gravely stroking his mustache. "I am favorable to his capture."

"You will wait until we catch the duck, illustrious rebel!" said Hang-pou to Piou-lu, very innocently, never turning his eyes from the duck, to which they seemed to be glued by some singular spell of attraction.

"I will talk with the Mandarin Wei-chang-tze while you put your noble maneuvers into motion," answered Piou-lu.

"Now, let us steal upon the duck," said Hang-pou. "O handsomely-formed duck, we entreat of you to remain as quiet as possible, in order that we may grasp you in our hands."

Then, as if actuated by a single impulse, the entire crowd, with the exception of Wei-chang-tze and Piou-lu, moved toward the duck. The mandarins stepped on tiptoe, with bent bodies, and little black eyes glistening with eagerness; Hang-pou crawled on his belly like a serpent; and the soldiers, casting aside their bows and shields, crept, with their hands upon their sides, toward the beautiful bird. The duck remained perfectly quiet, its variegated wings shining like painted talc, and its neck lustrous as the court robe of a first-class mandarin. The crowd scarcely breathed, so intense was their eagerness to capture the duck; and they moved slowly forward, gradually surrounding it.

Hang-pou was the first to make a clutch at the bird, but he was very much astonished to find his hand

closing on empty air, while the duck remained seated on the wolf, as still as a picture.

"Miserable tailor!" cried Mandarin Lin; "your hand is a sieve, with meshes wide enough to strain elephants. How can you catch the beautiful duck? Behold me!" and Mandarin Lin made a rapid and well-calculated dive at the duck. To the wonderment of everyone except Piou-lu and Wei-chang-tze, the duck seemed to ooze through his fingers, and, escaping, flew away to the other end of the room.

"If my hand is a sieve," said Hang-pou, "it is evident that the noble mandarin's hand is not a wall of beaten copper, for it lets ducks fly through with wonderful ease."

"It is a depraved and abominable duck, of criminal parentage," said Mandarin Lin, in a terrible rage; "and I vow, by the whiskers of the Dragon, that I will catch it and burn it on a spit."

"O, yes!" cried the entire crowd, —mandarins, soldiers, and the little tailor,—all now attracted to the chase of the duck by a power that they could no longer resist. "O, yes! we will most assuredly capture this little duck, and, depriving him of his feathers, punish him on a spit that is exceedingly hot."

So the chase commenced. Here and there, from one corner to the other, up the walls, on the altar of the household gods,—in short, in every portion of the large room, did the mandarins, the little tailor, and the soldiers pursue the shadow of the beautiful duck. Never was seen such a duck. It seemed to be in twenty places at a time. One moment Mandarin Lin would throw himself bodily on the bird, in hopes of crushing it, and would call out triumphantly that now indeed he had the duck; but the words would be hardly out of his mouth when a loud shout from the rest of the party would disabuse his mind, and, turning, he would behold the duck marching proudly down the center of the floor. Another time a soldier would declare that he had the duck in his breeches pocket; but while his neighbors were carefully probing that recess the duck would be seen calmly emerging from his right-hand sleeve. One time Hang-pou sat down suddenly on the mouth of a large china jar, and resolutely refused to stir, declaring that he had seen the duck enter the jar, and that he was determined to sit upon the mouth until the demon of a duck was starved to death. But even while uttering his heroic determination, his mouth was seen to open very wide, and, to the astonishment of all, the duck flew out. In an instant the whole crowd was after him again; Mandarin Hy-le tumbled over Mandarin Ching-tze, and Mandarin Lin nearly drove his head through Hang-pou's stomach.

The unhappy wretches began now to perspire and grow faint with fatigue, but the longer the chase went on the hotter it grew. There was no rest for any of them. From corner to corner, from side to side,—now in one direction, now in another,—no matter whither the duck flew, they were compelled to follow. Their faces streamed, and their legs seemed ready to sink upon them. Their eyeballs were ready to start out of their heads, and they had the air of government couriers who had traveled five hundred *li* in eleven days. They were nearly dead.

"Those men will surely perish, illustrious claimant of the throne," said Wei-chang-tze, gazing with astonishment at this mad chase.

"Let them perish!" said the conjurer; "so will perish all the enemies of the Celestial sovereign, Tién-té. Wei-chang-tze, once more, do you accept my offer? If you remain here,

you will be sent to Pekin in chains; if you come with me, I will gird your waist with the scarf of Perpetual Delight. We want wise men like you to guide our armies, and——''

"And the illustrious Tién-té loves the mandarin's daughter,'' said Wei-chang-tze, roguishly finishing the sentence. "Light of the Universe and Son of Heaven, Wei-chang-tze is your slave!''

Piou-lu—for I still call him by his conjurer's name—gave a low whistle, and, obedient to the summons, Wu's delicate shape came gliding from the corridor toward her lover, with the dainty step of a young fawn going to the fountain.

"Wu,'' said Piou-lu, "the marble is carved, and the hour is come.''

"My father, then, has consented?'' said Wu, looking timidly at her father.

"When the Emperor of the Central Land condescends to woo, what father dare refuse?'' said Wei-chang-tze.

"Emperor!'' said Wu, opening her black eyes with wonder. "My Piou-lu an Emperor!''

"I am indeed the son of the Dragon,'' said Piou-lu, folding her to his breast, "and you shall sit upon a throne of ivory and gold.''

"And I thought you were only a conjurer!'' murmured Wu, hiding her head in his yellow gown.

"But how are we to leave this place?'' asked Wei-chang-tze, looking alarmed. "The guard will seize us if they get knowledge of your presence.''

"We shall be at my castle in the mountains of Tse-Hing, near the Kouéï-Lin, in less than a minute,'' answered Piou-lu; "for to the possessor of the Dragon Fang all things are possible.''

Even as he spoke the ground began to slide from under their feet with wonderful rapidity, leaving them motionless and upright. Houses, walls, gardens, fields, all passed by them with the swiftness of a dream until, in a few seconds, they found themselves in the mountain castle of Tién-té, where they were welcomed with a splendid hospitality. Wu became the favorite wife of the adventurous Emperor, and Wei-chang-tze one of his most famous generals.

The day after these events some Tartar soldiers entered Wei-chang-tze's house to search for the mandarin, when, in the reception-hall, they were confounded at finding a number of men lying dead upon the floor, while in the midst sat a beautiful duck, that immediately on their entrance flew out through a window, and was seen no more. The dead men were soon recognized, and it was the opinion of the people of Tching-tou that Wei-chang-tze had poisoned all the soldiers and mandarins, and then fled. The tailor, Hang-pou, being among the corpses, was found to have given his creditors the slip forever.

Victory still sits on the banner of Tién-té, and he will, without doubt, by the time that the tea is again fit to gather, sit upon the ancient throne of his ancestors.

Everything is now gracefully concluded.

IF ONE were asked to name the author whose genius made the weird tale popular, the instant answer would be Edgar Allan Poe. We owe not only the weird tale to Poe, but we are also indebted to him for the word itself. Poe was not the creator of the word "weird," but he rescued it from oblivion and made it popular, so that now the word is understood and used by everyone.

Lafcadio Hearn, in his chapter on Poe's verse, thus describes how Poe picked up this almost forgotten word and restored it to the language: "When you read in *Idyls of the King* such phrases as 'the weirdly sculptured gate,' perhaps you have never suspected that the use of the adverb 'weirdly' was derived from the study of the American poet. There were two words used by the Saxons of a very powerful kind, one referring to destiny or fate, the other to supernatural terror. 'Weird' is another form of the Anglo-Saxon word meaning fate. The northern mythology, like the Greek, had its fates who devised the life histories of men. Later the word came also to be used in relation to the future of the man himself; the ancient writers spoke of 'his weird,' 'her weird.' Still later the term came to mean simply supernatural influence of a mysterious kind. Poe found it so used and made it into a living adjective after it had become almost forgotten by using it very cleverly in his poems and stories. As he used it, it means ghostly or ghostly-looking, or suggesting the supernatural and occult. Hundreds of writers imitated Poe in this respect and now it is so much the rule that the word must be used very sparingly. It is the mark of a very young writer to use it often."

"WEIRD TALES is getting better all the time," writes A. Leslie, whose verse has been a feature of this magazine. "I am particularly interested in Ray Cummings' new story; he is an old favorite of mine, and he appears to be surpassing himself this time."

Ralph Raeburn Phillips, of the Order of the Star in the East, writes to the Eyrie from Portland, Oregon: "Up till now I have been a silent but appreciative reader of WEIRD TALES, but now I must let you know that here is another constant reader and strong supporter of your incomparable magazine. You are doing a good work; keep it up. We of the great brotherhood who love the mystical, occult, etc., could not get along without our WEIRD TALES. Give us more good old ghost-stories. Your contributors are splendid. I especially like Greye La Spina and H. P. Lovecraft."

Writes S. V. Toomey, of East Orange, New Jersey: "I have been reading WEIRD TALES for three years and as yet have no fault to find. I thought

your magazine the most interesting of any until you put in the reprint stories; now I *know* it is the most interesting. Cummings' latest, *Explorers Into Infinity,* has proved a masterpiece so far, but don't you think the installments too short?"

"I am a new reader of WEIRD TALES, and want to congratulate you on the publication of such a splendid magazine," writes E. E. M., of Birmingham, Alabama, in a letter to the Eyrie. "I don't like tales of supernatural horror but I do like those of imaginative science and pseudo-science, such as *Explorers Into Infinity.* WEIRD TALES is the best magazine of its kind in print."

"The 'snowbird' story by Carr in the May issue, i. e., *Phantom Fingers,* is a real corncracker and gets my vote by a jugful," writes the Rev. Henry S. Whitehead from Oswego, New York.

"Each month WEIRD TALES is improved in some distinct manner," writes Jack Snow, of Dayton, Ohio. "Perhaps it contains some mighty story or it may be composed of a group of excellent tales, but it never fails to bear the mark of progress. Please do not even consider discontinuing your reprints. WEIRD TALES can find sufficient worthy material from the great library of the past for one reprint story a month. I am taking this opportunity to thank you for the March issue of WEIRD TALES which contained Lovecraft's *The White Ship.* It was a beautiful, exquisite little story, as remotely unreal and Lovecraftean in character as his terror-striking masterpiece, *The Outsider.* I wonder how many of your readers truly appreciate beauty of this sort. Certainly your publishing material like this raises the magazine many points as an artistic and worthwhile journal. *Windows of Destiny,* by James B. M. Clark, Jr., in the April issue, is a really remarkable story. It is the first story of its kind I have found in WEIRD TALES, and it is delightful. At times this tale approaches the fairy-story and it is always an allegory, but the author tells it with prosaic naturalness."

Sanford Aronow, of Toms River, New Jersey, writes to the Eyrie: "I have been a constant reader of your magazine for three years, and I like it better than any other magazine. There were many excellent stories in the May issue. It seems that every time you print the magazine it gets better. I picked *Explorers Into Infinity* first, *The Master of Doom* for second, and *The Veiled Prophetess* third. I like Ray Cummings' story tremendously."

Private Howard A. McElroy writes from the Presidio in San Francisco: "Here is how I became a member of the great order of WEIRD TALES readers: I was cleaning up the office one night and as I was about to empty the wastebasket I saw a copy of the August, 1926, WEIRD TALES and took it and thought: 'Here is something new.' Well, I read that copy from back to back. It is entirely different from anything I ever read, and I have read thousands of magazines. My two favorite stories in the May issue are *The Master of Doom* by Donald Edward Keyhoe and *In Kashla's Garden* by Oscar Schisgall. They are weirdly beautiful."

Here is a real knock, from Mrs. R. Snyder of Reading, Pennsylvania: "Dear Sirs: I have been reading weird tales for years I have a habit of saying what I think right out so dont get cross at what I write to you. But you want to snap out of it. you are loseing your trade you print some stories that is not interesting you have so many abut destroying the earth and killing all the peopel that's not interesting at all beside's your stories

are nearly alike only here and there a littel diffrent. Did you ever read ghost stories? well you want to them's the spooky creepy stories like the weird tales useto have lots of my friends dropet your magazine. If you could gave us more ghost stories you would be o. k. what is better than to read a creepy ghost storie at night give us more of Seabury Quinn and Greye la Spina allso Maria Moravsky espesly Seabury Quinn."

C. T. Byrd, of Des Moines, Iowa, writes: "I suggest that you print from old books of magic a chapter or two in each issue in place of the reprint stories. It would also be a good plan, I think, to have a department in which the readers can write their own experiences in the land of the occult and weird."

"I can not say enough for WEIRD TALES," writes Miss Laura Johnson, of Cincinnati. "I have just recently begun to read the magazine, and I have never, in all my reading of books and magazines, come upon one that I admired so immensely."

"The three best stories ever published which I have read," writes Fred W. Fischer, Jr., of Knoxville, Tennessee, "were these ever-to-be-remembered-with-pleasure stories from WEIRD TALES: 1, *When the Green Star Waned,* by Nictzin Dyalhis; 2, *Invaders from Outside,* by J. Schlossel; 3, *A Runaway World,* by Clare Winger Harris. By the way—about a year ago you forecast a tale entitled *Other Worlds,* by Will Smith. Why has it never been mentioned since? Will it ever be published?" [Editor's note: Yes, it will.]

The Master of Doom, by Donald Edward Keyhoe, is about tied with the second installment of Ray Cummings' serial, *Explorers Into Infinity,* for favorite story in the May WEIRD TALES, as shown by your votes. What is your favorite story in this issue? Send in the ballot below, or write a letter to the Eyrie telling us what you want to see in the magazine. We welcome advice from you, the readers, as this is your magazine and we want to keep it in accord with your wishes.

MY FAVORITE STORIES IN THE JULY WEIRD TALES ARE:

Story	Remarks
(1)_____	_____
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I do not like the following stories:

(1)_____ Why? _____

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It will help us to know what kind of stories you want in Weird Tales if you will fill out this coupon and mail it to The Eyrie, Weird Tales, 450 E. Ohio St., Chicago, Ill.

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The Return of the Master

(Continued from page 20)

while he slunk toward the door. "Revenge!" I cried, and the Hell-hound sprang.

Straight for the Master's throat he leapt, but seized instead the arm that was flung across it. I heard a dull crack, and I knew the bone was broken. He staggered with the blow, groaned, and sank to his knees.

The beast shifted his hold and grappled for the throat again. This time he succeeded, but I could see that the fangs did not penetrate the skin. He toyed with the Vampire as a cat with a mouse. With one great paw on the Master's chest he held him flat, and snarled in his face.

Tasting to the full a revenge that had burned hot for many years, he delayed the death-stroke too long. A new factor was introduced into the struggle.

Pierre, the hulking mass of brainless muscle, lunged forward, clutching the beast by the loins, although the creature snapped fiercely at his arms. With blood pouring down his sides from his wounds he began to raise the Hungarian above his head, slowly as moves a ponderous machine.

Under the will of the Master the corpse was energized with movement, and was operating as directed by the Vampire.

Into my brain poured commands, and I knew they issued from the invisible company. Many voices, but all urged, "Hurl the lamp! They can not pass the flame!"

"But Brenryk?" I thought.

"He will not be harmed," they answered. "He lives in this shape only by our wish."

"And Pierre?" I queried silently.

"He is dead," was the reply,

What Made His Hair Grow?

Read His Letter for the Answer

"Two years ago I was bald all over the top of my head.

"I felt ashamed for people to see my head. I tried different preparations, but they did no good. I remained bald, until I used Kotalko.

"New hair came almost immediately and kept on growing. In a short time I had a splendid head of hair, which has been perfect ever since—and no return of the baldness."

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Gray Ghouls

(Continued from page 34)

disabled launch to port, and during that time Tom Mansey recovered from a siege of sub-consciousness and fever in which he raved and fought a nightmare jungle peopled with gray ghouls. And when some time later he made a report to the authorities, it contained prophecy and prediction.

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They rewarded Mansey rather well for that investigation, although i the launch bottom the Tonga boys gathered a king's ransom in pearls from strands which broke as Mullet struggled to escape death. They were rather honest Tonga boys and only thieved half of the pearls to divide among themselves, but Mansey is e barrassed. Pearls belong to throats of pretty women, but those pearls held memories too horrid to give to a nice girl, so he is waiting to trade them to curio-hunters disappointed at lack of mummied human heads.

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"dead, but bound to earth while the Master lives. If you fail we can never strike again, and you will be one of us. Do you fear for yourself? Fire is a clean death. Strike!"

The Undead prepared to throw the writhing monster. The Master began to rise.

"Now!" they shrieked, and I threw the lamp.

Partly filled with oil and warm gas it exploded when it struck the floor. Flaming liquid spurted over the three and across the door. Escape was blocked.

The fire spread in the dry leaves. Staggering away from the wavering flames they were penned in a corner, and the fiery tongues licked in.

I broke out the remains of a window, and supporting the girl we escaped.

My last sight of the three was through a sheet of flame. Pierre stood dumbly stolid, watching the light. The Master lay on the floor manifestly dying, not struggling against the wolf that lay across him.

While I watched, a pale glow began to show within the beast's body. He became hazy and disappeared, his

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mission finished. His last look was one of gratitude to me.

Then the walls began to crumble. Pierre went down, struck by a falling beam, and the scene was blotted out in a whirling veil of sparks.

As I dragged myself and Regina to safety I saw that it was gray dawn, and people were running from the village to stare open-mouthed at the sudden flames. And I knew no more.

I SIT in my chair and read the words I have just written. It seems a dream that I shudder out of, but all is well now.

We explained to the people that, passing by the haunted inn, I saw the girl in the grasp of a tramp, that I fought to rescue her, and in the scuffle upset a lamp. Some, I think, believed the story, but I saw others furtively cross themselves, and all were glad to see us go.

Part of the story I revealed to the village priest, under pledge of secrecy. He pronounced anathema upon the ruins, but I doubt that it was of much value. I place more faith in the whining wind that rose and scattered those ashes far and wide. It will be a powerful magic that brings together that dread world-wanderer again.

Regina I brought with me to America. From this time my life is hers, as my wealth shall be when I am gone.

Here I shall dwell in this pleasant New England town, and I rove no more.

Happier times are in prospect for the unhappy girl. Even on board ship I noticed that the haggard face was losing its wrinkles and careworn look. Good food and rest are bringing back the roses to her cheeks. She is young and youth is elastic.

The future? Who can tell? But there is a lad across the way, with a most engaging smile!

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